

## **Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights 2015 Legislative Agenda**

### **Minimum Wage –**

Increase the minimum wage to \$11 per hour to keep hardworking Illinois families out of poverty.

Sponsor: Sen. Kimberly Lightford

There are 400,000 minimum wage workers in Illinois who earn only \$17,000 a year, working full-time – well below the annual cost of housing, health care, utilities, groceries, transportation and child care. If the minimum wage had kept pace with inflation the minimum wage would be \$10.90 today. Illinois workers deserve a meaningful raise. The General Assembly should increase Illinois's minimum wage to \$11, phased in over the next several years.

### **Domestic Workers Bill of Rights –**

Ensure basic labor protections and improve working conditions and wages for domestic workers.

Sponsor: Rep. Elizabeth Hernandez

Domestic workers have historically been exempt from laws governing the rights afforded to other workers - decent wages, a safe and healthy workplace, and other basic labor protections. The bill provides a set of workplace and benefit standards and removes the domestic worker exclusion from the Minimum Wage Act, the Human Rights Act, and the Wages of Women and Minors Act.

### **SNAP Participation –**

Ensures that all individuals in families in Illinois that are struggling with hunger have access to SNAP.

This bill would increase the eligibility for SNAP to 167% of the federal poverty line, providing access to food assistance for individuals and families struggling to make ends meet.

### **Wage & Asset Protection-**

Ensures adequate protection of wages, assets, and the right to due process for workers in the debt collection process.

Sponsors: Sen. Daniel Biss & Rep. Chris Welch

More and more Illinois workers are finding their wages garnished or their savings eliminated due to outstanding credit card, medical, or student debt. Without strong enough consumer protections, already financially vulnerable workers find themselves unable to meet the basic needs of their families. This bill increases wage and asset protections and prohibits debt collection practices that circumvent a worker's right to due process. With greater consumer protections, Illinois workers will be able to pay off their debts while gaining some much needed financial stability.

**Health Navigator Program -**

Continues funding for the Navigator/In-Person Counselor programs through an assessment on health insurance plans.

Sponsor: Sen. Jacqueline Collins

Federal funding provided through the ACA for the Navigator program and the related In-Person Counselor (IPC) program will run out this year. Navigating redeterminations, changing coverage as life circumstances change, and conducting outreach to the uninsured continues to be critical for Illinois residents. State funding is needed to continue to provide impartial enrollment assistance. This bill will raise \$35 million through an assessment on health insurers to be used to keep navigators and IPCs employed, and allow the state to reap the full benefit of the considerable resources already used for training and certification.

**Expand Job Opportunity – Health Care**

Removes barriers to employment in the health care field for people with a criminal record.

Sponsor: Representative Camille Lilly

This bill amends Illinois's Health Care Worker Background Check Act to ensure that individuals have greater opportunities to find jobs by removing certain crimes from the list of offenses that disqualify workers from employment without a waiver from the Illinois Department of Public Health. The bill will eliminate lifetime waiver requirements and instead create sensible time frames when applicants are required to get a waiver in order to work in a health care facility, and providing a table to evaluate the effectiveness of state health care waiver procedures.

**Expand Job Opportunity – Parks and Schools.**

Removes barriers to employment in parks and schools for people with a criminal record.

Sponsor: Representative Kelly Cassidy

These bills reduce the legal barriers for individuals applying for positions in schools and park districts by eliminating lifetime barriers for drug offenses and instead instituting reasonable time frames during which individuals with certain offenses cannot be employed by schools after conviction. These bills also eliminate statutory barriers to work in these areas for people with cannabis, prostitution, and public indecency convictions.

**Affirmative Defense to Prostitution for Trafficking Victims.**

Helps stop criminalizing victims of human trafficking.

Sponsor: Senator John Mulroe

Many individuals engaged in prostitution do so as the result of force, fraud and coercion, making them victims of human trafficking under state and federal law. Illinois continues to criminalize victims with prostitution convictions at an alarming rate. This bill allows victims of trafficking to raise an affirmative defense to a prostitution charge to show that, as victims, they should not be held criminally liable. Illinois should not be punishing victims of human trafficking.

**Earned Income Tax Credit.**

EITC helps move workers and children out of poverty.

Sponsor: Representative Barbara Flynn Currie

The Earned Income Tax Credit, or EITC, lets low-and-moderate income working families keep more of their earnings to help pay for things that keep them working, like child care and transportation. This bill can help lift working families and boost local economies by doubling the EITC in Illinois over 5 years.