

# Committee on Equality, Equity, and Opportunity

## **Aspiration**

Illinois needs leadership that is committed to using an equity lens to ensure everyone has access to opportunity, human rights, and civil rights. The new administration must set an unambiguous tone and make clear its goal of building an Illinois where everyone has equal and equitable opportunity regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability status, military status, pregnancy, employment status, family status, returning citizen status, language, housing status, zip code, or income.

The new administration should strive to create an inclusive culture in the state and in government reflecting the full diversity of Illinois, with diverse leaders in decision-making roles. Leadership across state agencies should be focused on protecting human and civil rights, acknowledging, tracking, and eliminating explicit and implicit racial bias against black and brown communities, dismantling systemic oppression, and creating and enforcing anti-discrimination policies.

## **Illinois today**

Illinois has faced a number of challenges that have created or increased inequities. The state's budget impasse and ongoing fiscal challenges led to reduced staffing levels in state agencies that enforce existing human and civil rights laws, causing an increase in the backlog of unheard discrimination claims. Racial and economic inequity in communities across the state has intensified due to reduced funding for community-based human service providers that ensure children, individuals, and families have equitable access to the building blocks of health and opportunity. Inadequate state funding for schools has meant that public education has not offered equitable opportunity to all students. Barriers to health care have increased, leaving thousands of children and adults without appropriate medical care.

Economic opportunity is negatively impacted by systemic inequities in the workplace, including lack of access to good paying jobs, low wages, gender and racial pay gaps, a lack of paid medical and family leave, and inadequate protections for pregnant and parenting workers. Workplace inequities impact black and brown communities more acutely, adding to barriers for economic advancement and mobility. Sexual harassment and gender-based violence in the workplace further reduces equitable opportunity by creating unsafe and retaliatory work environments.

In some cases, the legal and policy protections already written into state law are insufficient to protect the human and civil rights of the people of Illinois. For example, without a private cause of action for people seeking compliance with our human and civil rights laws, people are

without a legal remedy. In other cases, existing legal protections should be expanded to reflect the full intent of state and federal law.

These weaknesses are significant, but present great opportunity for the new administration. The incoming administration should ensure that decision-making authority in the executive branch is held by people who reflect the full diversity of the state. Investments should seek to create equitable opportunity across government functions, from ensuring compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act to enforcing equitable school funding that gives all children the opportunity to succeed regardless of their background. And state law and resource allocation should be updated to fully protect human and civil rights and to ensure enforcement of existing laws is achieved.

Attacks from the federal level have increased threats to equality and equity, and the new administration should work with the Illinois Attorney General and other states around the country to help create a firewall of protection for Illinoisans against dangerous federal policies that harm people.

An inclusive administration that reflects the diversity of Illinois in leadership positions will be poised to set their sights on an Illinois that has equal and equitable opportunity for everyone.

### **Path Forward**

The committee examined a path forward to safeguard Illinoisans from destructive federal policies and reform Illinois systems that perpetuate inequality and inequity to ensure every resident has equitable opportunity.

Other transition committees worked specifically on the topics of economic development, capital and infrastructure, education, and restorative justice and community safety, and those recommendations are not explicitly included in this report. The administration should utilize an equity lens in the implementation of all transition committee recommendations.

The committee recommends the following priorities and actions:

- 1. The new administration should amend existing law and allocate funding to ensure state agencies can enforce human and civil rights and utilize an equity lens in decision-making and priority setting.**

The new administration should ensure leadership and staff of state agencies reflects the full diversity of Illinois. They should also identify and review the use of automated decision-making systems in all areas of state government to ensure racial bias against black and brown communities is not driving current process.

One area the new administration should focus on is updating and maintaining government data systems that can track equitable resource allocation and outcomes in communities that have experienced disinvestment. With that data in hand, the new administration should integrate

inclusion principles to achieve equality and equity for new and existing policies and resource allocation.

For example, the new administration should support legislation that utilizes data systems to make Illinois a leader in statewide school protections for students by collecting discipline data and tracking disproportionate disciplinary treatment based on race and gender. The new administration should also work with stakeholders to pass legislation to require permanent traffic and pedestrian data collection. This will help ensure that data collected by police is accessible so the state can map inequities. The new administration can use data about voting systems across the state to ensure all communities have equitable opportunity to cast their ballots.

Agencies that protect human and civil rights should be fully funded, including the Illinois Department of Human Rights, Illinois Department of Labor, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, and the Human Rights Commission. The new administration should develop a plan to eliminate the backlog of unresolved cases in the Department of Human Rights and the Human Rights Commission so people can get justice. Inclusion principles should be incorporated into any capital plan to ensure funding and projects comply with the Minority and Women Owned Business Enterprise program M/WBE, Americans with Disabilities Act, and Illinois Accessibility Code requirements. Finally, there is an opportunity to strengthen and enforce laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Illinois Accessibility Code, the Illinois Human Rights Act, the Illinois Environmental Barriers Act, the Illinois Civil Rights Act, and the Foster Care Bill of Rights.

## **2. Stand up to federal policies that infringe on the human and civil rights of Illinois residents and advocate for enforcement of federal policies that promote fairness, compassion, representation, and inclusion**

The new administration should be a firewall between Illinoisans and dangerous federal policies that hurt and discriminate against the state's residents. The new administration should strengthen state protections against federal legislation and rulemaking that increase barriers to Illinois residents striving to succeed. In some cases, there are proactive steps the state can take to minimize harm, like changing the administration of programs like SNAP (the program formerly known as food stamps) to minimize the harmful impacts of any federally proposed work requirements. The new administration can also speak out publicly against the Trump administration's proposed changes to rules that unfairly target immigrant families by penalizing them for accessing programs like health care and nutrition programs. In other cases, the new administration should work with other governors and Illinois' attorney general to ensure we are creating a legal firewall against policies and programs that diminish civil rights.

One important action the new administration should take is advocating for policies and resources to ensure the decennial census correctly counts every person in the state of Illinois, including people who are incarcerated and hard-to-count people. It is vital that the state's full population is represented in the census to ensure the state receives its fair share of federal

resources and fair legislative representation for all communities. The new administration should invest resources in communities that have experienced disenfranchisement and disinvestment to provide education about the importance of participating in the census.

Finally, the new administration should change the current lens the state uses when it comes to federal consent decrees that protect the civil and human rights of Illinois' residents. Rather than view the consent decrees as an impediment, the state should commit to fulfilling the obligations required in consent decrees and embrace the settlements as a vehicle for transformative change that provide a floor—not a ceiling—for proper resource allocation and policymaking. The new administration should ensure that every state agency is aware of requirements imposed by various federal consent decrees and ensure Illinois is meeting the needs of populations protected by consent decrees. Improved and coordinated communication about the requirements of consent decrees among the agencies and divisions and the attorney general would ensure the state's obligations are being met.

### **3. Make Illinois a safe state with equitable civic, social, and economic opportunity for all residents.**

The new administration should boldly and proactively take steps to support and protect the human and civil rights of all Illinoisans and remove barriers to equitable social and economic opportunity.

The new administration should work with stakeholders to enforce and expand the Trust Act protections and make Illinois a welcoming state for immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers where everyone is treated with dignity and provided opportunity. To achieve that goal, the new administration should allocate resources to programs that inform immigrant communities of their rights under the law. The new administration should also support legislation that eliminates barriers to state-based financial aid for undocumented immigrant students, and increase language access to government services.

The new administration should create and promote policies that ensure every Illinoisan can live free of discrimination with equitable opportunity regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. To ensure appropriate representation the new administration should support legislation that requires public education curriculum to cover history of the LGBTQ community. To ensure access to medically accurate and appropriate information, the administration should support legislation that ensures sexual health in public education is LGBTQ-inclusive.

To increase economic and civic opportunity for returning citizens, the new administration should support legislation to “ban the box” in applications to public and private institutions of higher education and remove barriers for returning citizens to access housing and employment and voting. The state can also ensure the provisions of the automatic voter registration law are

fully enforced and protect voting rights for all voters, including returning citizens, incarcerated individuals, and students.

Climate change is a risk to all Illinoisans, and the new administration should utilize an environmental justice lens to mitigate and eliminate systemic inequities that lead to disproportionate impacts of climate change and other environmental risks on communities of color and low-income communities. The new administration should fully fund the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and ensure it is enforcing laws and regulations that protect communities of color and low-income communities from environmental threats. Principles of climate resiliency should be incorporated into any capital plan.

#### **4. Enact and implement public policies that promote workplace fairness, equity, and sustainable economic opportunity for all Illinoisans**

The new administration should support equity in the workplace to ensure every Illinoisan can work with dignity for fair wages in a safe, sustainable work environment. The new administration should work with stakeholders to implement a \$15 minimum wage. The new administration should ensure its own agencies do not perpetuate racial, ethnic, and gender pay gaps and create a working group to identify tangible tactics and strategies to address those inequities across the state.

The impact of sexual harassment and gender-based violence experienced in the workplace creates an unsafe, inequitable, and unproductive work environment. The new administration should lead by example to eliminate the culture of sexual harassment, assault, gender-based violence, and retaliation in the workplace. The new administration should conduct rigorous trainings in the governor's office and across state agencies that include clear examples of sexual harassment and gender-based violence, outline prohibited retaliation, define consequences for retaliation and protections for whistleblowers, enhance empathy for people experiencing harassment, teach tools of bystander intervention, and define proper reporting process for both the victim and the person receiving the report. The administration should also take steps to ensure survivors of gender-based violence that occurs outside the workplace have the supports they need to thrive at work.

To create a stronger workforce where everyone has the opportunity to advance, the new administration should engage stakeholders and work with the General Assembly to address paid family and medical leave for Illinoisans. They should also promote equality for people who are pregnant and parenting and support policies that aid and accommodate employees and job applicants who are pregnant, recovering from childbirth, and/or breastfeeding.

#### **5. Make Illinois a national leader in eliminating barriers so everyone can access to their right to quality, affordable health care coverage**

The new administration should increase access to affordable, stable health care in Illinois to eliminate health disparities. The new administration should protect and stabilize the Affordable Care Act to eliminate racial and economic health disparities and prevent discrimination against people with pre-existing conditions. For example, the new administration can implement state law protecting people with pre-existing conditions from junk insurance plans. The new administration can also address Medicaid enrollment issues that leave thousands of children and families without health insurance coverage for months at a time. A Medicaid buy-in program would bring down consumer costs and move Illinois towards a system of universal health care.

The new administration should also extend health care coverage to undocumented adults and reduce disparities and barriers for persons with disabilities in accessing health care and home and community-based services. The administration should ensure people with disabilities have real options that provide them with supports to live independent, meaningful lives that are integrated and included in the community. To ensure access to health care in communities across the state, the new administration should prioritize creating, maintaining, and updating health infrastructure in a capital plan.

The new administration should support investments and policy changes that will reduce new HIV cases and improve health outcomes for people living with HIV. For example, the new administration should reinstate funding for PrEP, a daily prescription drug that prevents HIV infection, that was defunded under the previous administration. To increase fairness and equity for transgender people, the state should require that insurance providers, including Medicaid, cover medically-necessary services, including gender-affirming services for transgender and non-binary people.

The new administration should take action to keep abortion safe, legal, and accessible in Illinois. It should work with lawmakers to repeal the Illinois Abortion Law of 1975 and the Illinois Parental Notice of Abortion act of 1995 and replace it with legislation that keeps abortion safe, legal, and accessible. The new administration should also fully enforce HB 40.