

FACING RACE: Illinois Report Card on Racial Equity 2006

Full Text of the Report:

<http://www.arc.org/downloads/ARC-IllinoisReportCard2006.pdf>

Media Contacts:

**Josina Morita, Applied Research Center**

Ph: 312-376-8235

Cell: 773-844-7296

**Senator Kwame Raoul**

Ph: 773-363-1996

**Senator Martin A. Sandoval**

Ph: 708-656-2002

**Terry Keleher, Applied Research Center**

Ph: 312-376-8234

Cell: 773-610-5673

Press Release

**RACIAL DIVIDE DEEPENS AS SOLUTIONS STALL IN SPRINGFIELD, NEW REPORT FINDS**

November 13, 2006 (Chicago, IL) With the state legislature convening this week for the Fall Veto Session, a new report Monday finds that dire racial inequities remain unchecked in Springfield.

Representing the first time Illinois lawmakers have been evaluated on their response to issues of racial equity, **Facing Race 2006: Illinois Legislative Report Card on Racial Equity** was released today by the Midwest office of the Applied Research Center, a national policy institute.

Despite significant strides, the report shows that key legislation to remedy deep-seated racial disparities in income, education and health stalled in the last session, threatening the state's economic and social stability, and in particular its 3.2 million residents of color.

**“While racial disparities are pervasive in Illinois, they need not be permanent. For this state, the time has come to begin facing race,”** said Josina Morita, Senior Policy Analyst at the Applied Research Center and the report’s author. **“Overcoming institutional racism involves restructuring rights and resources in this state through equitable policy change.”**

They based that finding on sixteen legislative proposals that stalled in the General Assembly. Notable bills to decrease racial inequities that failed include:

SB 37, Indexing the Minimum Wage to Inflation, which never made it out of the Senate, would annually adjust the state’s minimum wage according to changes in the consumer price index. This would provide needed income to minimum wage earners, 60 percent of whom are people of color.

HB 5000, Tax-Exempt Hospital Accountability Act, which never cleared the House, would require non-profit hospitals to contribute 8 percent of their operating costs to charity care (up from a current average contribution of 1%). This would provide needed health care access to the uninsured. Working-age Blacks and Latinos are, respectively, twice and three times as likely as whites to have no health insurance. Undocumented Latinos are five times as likely as whites to be without health insurance.

SB/HB 750, School Funding and Tax Reform, which failed to pass in the Senate or House, would create the School District Tax Relief Fund in order to provide more equitable school funding. This measure is intended to help reduce racial gaps in educational opportunities and performance. In 2003 the funding gap per student between the school districts with the highest and lowest minority populations was nearly \$1,500.

**“Inequalities exist across issues of education funding, access to quality health care, access to transportation, and economic opportunities,”** says Senator Kwame Raoul. **“It is important to address these issues, but also the underlying racial inequities that produce these disparities.”**

The demise of key legislation linked to racial equity overshadows other progress lawmakers have made to improve conditions for people of color in Illinois, the authors said.

**“Though there’s much to be done to end the state’s deep racial disparities, in some key areas Illinois’ elected officials are making real strides to create policies that promote racial equity,”** Ms. Morita noted.

The report identifies 20 bills deemed to have a positive impact on racial equity that the General Assembly approved and the Governor signed into law. Some notable “racial equity” bills included:

SB 92: Creation of a new Juvenile Justice Department, distinct from the Illinois Department of Corrections, is charged with providing comprehensive rehabilitative programs to the state’s incarcerated youth, 52 percent of whom are Black. A related measure, SB 283 eliminates automatic transfers of juveniles to adult court, 99 percent of which involved youth of color between 1999 and 2000.

HB 615: The Reduction in Health Disparities Act provides grants to improve health outcomes in communities of color and requires the Office of Minority Health to establish measurable goals for reducing racial health disparities in priority areas. While Illinois has one of the nation’s highest mortality rates related to asthma, the Black asthma death rates is twice that of whites.

For their votes on racial equity measures, the Senate and House collectively received B grades. 16 of 59 Senators and 36 of 118 Representatives made the “honor roll” for supporting all 20 racial equity bills.

Although many positive measures received support across racial and party lines, legislators of color supported more racial equity bills than white legislators. Legislators from districts with the highest percentages of people of color were more likely to support racial equity bills.

**“Illinois is experiencing an unprecedented growth of communities of color in nearly every county with a people of color majority expected by 2050”** said Morita. **“We need the political will to squarely face up to the realities of institutional racism. False notions of “colorblindness” – pretending that race and racism don’t exist – will not move us forward.”**

The Applied Research Center will be monitoring the upcoming legislative session and plans to release an annual edition of the Facing Race report .

The Applied Research Center is a public policy institute advancing racial justice through research, advocacy and journalism.

# # #