

AN ACT concerning commissions.

**Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,  
represented in the General Assembly:**

Section 1. Short title. This Act may be cited as the Illinois African-American Family Commission Act.

Section 5. Legislative findings. It is the policy of this State to promote family preservation and to preserve and strengthen families. Over 12 million people live in Illinois. African-Americans represent 15% of the population and 26% of the residents living in Cook County. Despite some progress over the last few decades, African-Americans in Illinois continue to lag behind other racial groups relative to indicators of well-being in education, employment, income, and health. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, just 26% of the African-American population over 25 years of age in Illinois completed their high school education; 6% held an associate's degree; less than 10% (9%) held a bachelor's degree; less than 5% (3%) held a master's degree; and less than one percent held either a professional (.8%) or doctoral (.4%) degree.

These levels of education attainment reflect more fundamental problems with retaining African-Americans in school. The Illinois State Board of Education reported that for the 2001-2002 school year, 36,373, or 6%, of students enrolled in public high schools dropped out. Thirty-nine percent of these students were African-Americans; 38% were White; 21% were Hispanic; and 2% were classified as Other.

Although African-Americans make up 18% of the high school population, they are disproportionately represented in the number of students who are suspended and expelled. In the 2001-2002 school year, 29,068 students were suspended from school. Forty-seven percent were White, 37% were African-American, 14% were Hispanic, and 1% were classified as

Other. In regards to expulsions Statewide, the total number of high school students expelled was 1,651. Forty-three percent were African-American, 41% were White, 14% were Hispanic, and 2% were classified as Other. Within Chicago public schools, 448 students were expelled. Seventy-seven of these students were African-American; 27% were White; 14% were Hispanic; and 4% were classified as Other. The fact that African-Americans are more likely to be suspended or expelled from school also contributes to the high dropout rate among African-American high school students.

In addition to educational challenges, African-Americans face challenges in the areas of employment and income. In the year 2000, the unemployment rate for African-Americans age 16 years or older was 15% compared to only 6% for the total Illinois population. Moreover, the median household income of African-Americans in Illinois was \$31,699 compared to \$46,590 for the total Illinois population, and the percentage of African-American families below the poverty level in Illinois was 26% percent in 1999 compared to 10.7% for the total Illinois population in that same year.

Indicators of child welfare and criminal justice reveal still more challenges that African-American families face in Illinois. In 2000, African-American children represented 18% of children 18 years of age and under, but comprised 73% of children in substitute care. African-Americans are also overrepresented in the criminal justice population. Of the total Illinois adult inmate population in the year 2000, 65% were African-American. During this same time period, African-American youth represented 58% of the juvenile inmate population in Illinois.

While the leading causes of death among African-Americans are the same as those for the general population in Illinois, African-Americans have a higher rate of death per 100,000 residents. The rate of overall deaths per 100,000 residents among African-Americans in the year 2000 was 1,181; 847 for Whites; and 411 for those classified as Other. The rate of

cancer-related deaths per 100,000 residents by racial or ethnic groups in 2000 was: 278 African-Americans; 206 Whites; and 110 of those classified as Other. The rate of diabetes-related deaths per 100,000 residents among African-Americans in 2000 was 41 compared to 23 for Whites and 13 for those classified as Other. The rate of deaths per 100,000 residents by heart disease among African-Americans in 2000 was 352 compared to 257 for Whites and 120 for those classified as Other. The rate of deaths per 100,000 residents by stroke among African-Americans in 2000 was 75; 60 for Whites; and 35 for those classified as Other.

African-Americans had higher rates of smoking and obesity than other racial groups in Illinois in 2001. African-Americans accounted for more of the new adult/adolescent AIDS cases, cumulative adult/adolescent AIDS cases, and number of people living with AIDS than other racial groups in Illinois in the year 2002. Still, 23% of uninsured persons in Illinois are African-American.

These huge disparities in education, employment, income, child welfare, criminal justice, and health demonstrate the tremendous challenges facing the African-American family in Illinois. These challenges are severe. There is a need for government, child and family advocates, and other key stakeholders to create and implement public policies to address the health and social crises facing African-American families. The development of given solutions clearly transcends any one State agency and requires a coordinated effort. The Illinois African-American Family Commission shall assist State agencies with this task.

The African-American Family Commission was created in October 1994 by Executive Order to assist the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services in developing and implementing programs and public policies that affect the State's child welfare system. The Commission has a proven track record of bringing State agencies, community providers, and consumers together to address child welfare issues. The ability

of the Commission to address the above-mentioned health issues, community factors, and the personal well-being of African-American families and children has been limited due to the Executive Order's focus on child welfare. It is apparent that broader issues of health, mental health, criminal justice, education, and economic development also directly affect the health and well-being of African-American families and children. Accordingly, the role of the African-American Family Commission is hereby expanded to encompass working relationships with every department, agency, and commission within State government if any of its activities impact African-American children and families. The focus of the Commission is hereby restructured and shall exist by legislative mandate to engage State agencies in its efforts to preserve and strengthen African-American families.

Section 10. Illinois African-American Family Commission established. The African-American Family Commission shall be renamed and established as the Illinois African-American Family Commission.

Section 15. Purpose and objectives.

(a) The purpose of the Illinois African-American Family Commission is to guide the efforts of and collaborate with the Department on Aging, the Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the Department of Corrections, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Public Aid, the Department of Public Health, the Department of Transportation, and others to improve and expand existing human services and educational and community development programs for African-Americans. This will be achieved by:

(1) Monitoring existing legislation and programs designed to address the needs of African-Americans in Illinois;

(2) Assisting State agencies in developing programs,

services, public policies, and research strategies that will expand and enhance the social and economic well-being of African-American children and families; and

(3) Facilitating the participation of African-Americans in the development, implementation, and planning of community-based services.

The work of the Illinois African-American Family Commission shall include the use of existing reports, research and planning efforts, procedures, and programs.

Section 20. Appointment; terms. The Illinois African-American Family Commission shall be comprised of 15 members who shall be appointed by the Governor. Each member shall have a working knowledge of human services, community development, and economic public policies in Illinois. The Governor shall appoint the chairperson or chairpersons.

The members shall reflect regional representation to ensure that the needs of African-American families and children throughout the State of Illinois are met. The members shall be selected from a variety of disciplines. They shall be representative of a partnership and collaborative effort between public and private agencies, the business sector, and community-based human services organizations.

Members shall serve 3-year terms, except in the case of initial appointments. One-third of initially appointed members, as determined by lot, shall be appointed to 1-year terms; 1/3 shall be appointed to 2-year terms; and 1/3 shall be appointed to 3-year terms, so that the terms are staggered. Members will serve without compensation, but shall be reimbursed for Commission-related expenses.

The Department on Aging, the Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the Department of Corrections, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Public Aid, the Department of Public Health, and the Department of Transportation shall each appoint a liaison to serve ex-officio on the Commission.

Section 25. Funding. The African-American Family Commission shall receive funding through appropriations available for its purposes made to the Department on Aging, the Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the Department of Corrections, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Public Aid, the Department of Public Health, and the Department of Transportation.

Section 30. Reporting. The Illinois African-American Family Commission shall annually report to the Governor and the General Assembly on the Commission's progress toward its goals and objectives.

Section 99. Effective date. This Act takes effect upon becoming law.