



THE PILLAR

The official newsletter of the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus and Illinois Legislative Black Caucus Foundation

SUMMER 2025

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VOICES OF DOWNSTATE LEADERSHIP



From economic opportunity, healthcare affordability and infrastructure improvements, to clean water protection, non-profit funding and criminal justice reform, Illinois Legislative Black Caucus (ILBC) members have been working to address the pressing concerns raised by our communities... *read the full summary on pg. 2*

2025 ILBCF SCHOLARSHIP RECEPTION RECAP

The Illinois Legislative Black Caucus Foundation celebrated another milestone year, awarding \$150,000 in scholarships to over 100 students from across Illinois! Held at the University of Illinois Chicago, the ceremony brought together students, families and supporters gathered to honor the achievements...*read the full summary on pg. 12*



VOICES OF DOWNSTATE LEADERSHIP

Inspiring messages from our leaders about their summers & the upcoming legislative session

As lawmakers prepare for the upcoming veto session this fall, legislators across the state are reflecting on a productive summer of constituent engagement while looking ahead to key priorities. From economic opportunity, healthcare affordability and infrastructure improvements, to clean water protection, non-profit funding and criminal justice reform, ILBCF members have been working to address the pressing concerns raised by our communities, who are feeling the terrible impact of federal policy shifts designed to limit access to services, healthcare and our basic civil rights.

“It has been a busy summer with opportunities to connect with constituents throughout the district. I am continuing conversations with constituents about the issues they are facing and working to find solutions. Every year I file legislation that comes directly from constituents. I look forward to continuing that approach as I build my legislative agenda for the spring session.”

- State Sen. Doris Turner (D-48)



“Over the summer, I’ve been energized by the legislation I’ve carried and the way it’s beginning to take root in my community. Alongside that, I’ve been out gathering petitions to get on the ballot—continuing the work of showing up for my constituents.”

“One initiative I’m especially proud of is my Grocery Store Initiative bill, which addresses food deserts in both rural and urban areas. The legislation provides grants through the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) for independent, municipally owned grocery stores in communities without access to fresh food. It also creates incentives for private businesses to open in areas long overlooked.



“In my district, Venice now has a store under construction—the first grocery store in years. For too long, residents had no options for fresh, healthy food. Without those options, people are often left with high-sugar, low-nutrition alternatives that contribute to serious health conditions. This bill is a step toward equity, giving families real choices and a foundation for healthier lives.

“Another highlight from this summer is the passage of the Direct College Admissions bill. Starting next year, Illinois high school juniors who opt into the program can be automatically admitted to nine of the state’s eleven public universities if they meet GPA benchmarks. The Illinois Student Assistance Commission will partner

with participating colleges to notify students of their acceptance—no application or fees required.

“This is especially powerful for first-generation students who might otherwise talk themselves out of applying because they believe they won’t get in. By removing barriers and simplifying the process, the program opens doors to higher education for more students across the state. It also strengthens Illinois’ future by encouraging students to stay here for college and, ultimately, contribute their skills and talents to our communities.”

“Both of these bills reflect my priorities: expanding access to health, education, and opportunity. As we head into Veto session, I’m committed to continuing the fight to deliver what my constituents deserve.”

- State Sen. Christopher Belt (D-57)

“The 67th District and the Rockford region have seen a great deal of positive developments, and I am so excited! Our roads and infrastructure are vastly improved, and I recently connected 32 local non-profits with significant operational funding that will allow them to expand their reach and make greater impacts in the areas of youth development, mental health, disability services, and so much more.

“With all the positivity that has come from State investment in our community, we have felt more fear and uncertainty because of the actions of our federal government. Whether it is Black families, or our brown brothers and sisters, worried about the safety and well-being of their

loved ones, or those in our community facing disparities in healthcare, economic opportunities, and social justice, people within our community are being hurt by the policies of our current administration and Congress.”

“Heading into the 2026 election cycle, we must make sure to stay engaged in our elections and make our voices heard so that we can work to undo some of the devastating policies affecting our communities and create a stronger economic and more compassionate moral pathway forward.”

- Leader Maurice West (D-67)



"This summer was productive for Champaign-Urbana. The governor signed a number of important bills into law. I sponsored SB1723 in the House to protect our clean drinking water from the Mahomet Aquifer. This is a win for central Illinois and the more than 800,000 people that depend on this water."

"As we head into the veto session, the ever-rising cost of living and the federal government's harmful legislative initiatives loom large. I'm interested in protecting our most vulnerable and giving our constituents as much support as our state can."

"At every town hall meeting and community event I attend across the 103rd district, energy prices, housing costs and the federal government chaos are what most impact our residents most. I look forward to working with all my colleagues in the House, including my friends and partners in the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus, to redress these issues."

- State Rep. Carol Ammons (D-103)



"As we head into veto session this fall, I remain focused on passing the Clean Slate Act, a bill I've worked on for more than six years to ensure that Illinoisans who have served their time can move forward without unnecessary barriers. By automatically sealing eligible nonviolent records, Clean Slate will give thousands of people — including parents and single heads of household — the chance to access good jobs, secure housing and provide for their families."

"This bill is about improving lives, strengthening communities and addressing the workforce shortages facing our state."

"What makes Clean Slate especially significant is the broad and diverse coalition that stands behind it, from law enforcement leaders and labor unions to business groups like the Illinois Retail Merchants Association and the Illinois Manufacturers' Association. When groups that don't always agree are aligned, it's a clear signal that this legislation is not only just, but urgently needed. I look forward to working with my colleagues to deliver this critical win for Illinoisans this fall."

- State Rep. Jehan Gordon-Booth (D-92)



HIGHLIGHTS THROUGHOUT THE CAUCUS

ILBC Member Events and Public Happenings

SENATOR KIMBERLY LIGHTFORD HOSTS 16TH ANNUAL BACK TO SCHOOL EVENT



Senate Majority Leader Kimberly A. Lightford (D-4) hosted her 16th Annual Back to School event at the Brookfield Zoo, welcoming students and families for an afternoon of celebration and preparation. Children from pre-K through college received free backpacks, school supplies, food and admission to the zoo. Lightford emphasized her mission to ensure every child enters the school year prepared and supported. Since 2009, this event has been a cornerstone for families in the 4th Senate District, blending resources with a joyful kick-off to the school year.

REPRESENTATIVE MARCUS EVANS JR. SWORN IN AS PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES

State Rep. Marcus Evans Jr. (D-33) was sworn in as the NCSL President during its 2025 Summit in Boston. Surrounded by colleagues from across the country, Evans expressed gratitude for their trust and pledged to serve diligently in his new role. He was joined by Speaker Emanuel “Chris” Welch and Governor JB Pritzker, who celebrated his achievement and addressed Democratic members during the summit. As President of NCSL, Evans will represent Illinois on a national stage, amplifying the voices of his constituents while shaping legislative priorities across the country.



SENATOR ROBERT PETERS AT THE 97TH ANNUAL BUD BILLIKEN® PARADE



State Sen. Robert Peters (D-13) joined thousands of Chicagoans for the 97th Annual Bud Billiken® Parade, the nation’s second-largest parade and a long-standing South Side tradition. Known as a joyful “Back to School” kickoff, the parade celebrates the historic roots and vibrant future of Chicago’s Black community and continues to uplift our youth. Senator Peters was proud to take part in this celebration of culture, history and unity that has inspired generations.

REPRESENTATIVE CAMILLE LILLY HOSTS SENIOR TOWN HALL

State Rep. Camille Lilly (D-78) hosted a Senior Town Hall at the Lorraine Hansberry Apartments Community Room, creating space for older residents to share their experiences and concerns.

Seniors discussed issues such as building and neighborhood safety, highlighting the challenges they face daily. These conversations provide valuable insights that will help guide ongoing efforts to improve safety and quality of life for seniors.



SENATOR MATTIE HUNTER HOSTS 21ST ANNUAL FAMILY HEALTH AND FITNESS FAIR



State Sen. Mattie Hunter (D-3) celebrated the 21st year of her Family Health and Fitness Fair, bringing together partners, sponsors, volunteers and families for a day of wellness and community. Senator Hunter's long-standing commitment to health equity continues to make this event a cornerstone in her community. Each year, the fair strengthens ties between neighbors and reinforces the importance of caring for one another's well-being.

ILBCF HONORS BLACK CHAMBERS DURING TECH WEEK CHICAGO



During Tech Week Chicago, ILBCF supported the Illinois Black Chamber of Commerce and other Black-led chambers advancing equity in economic development. At the **Tech in the Park™** event, **Executive Director Tiffany Hightower** presented the Infinite Hope of Ujamaa Award to CEO Siri Hibbler, along with honors for the Garfield Park and Cook County Black Chambers. The gathering brought together entrepreneurs, community leaders and stakeholders, highlighting the impact of collective leadership and advocacy.

MAYOR FRANK SCOTT, JR.

Carrying Forward Courage and Justice

4 years ago, Ernest Green of the Little Rock Nine joined us at the ILBCF Policy Summit as our keynote speaker. We were honored to have him share his story, a pivotal moment in the Civil Rights movement and a testimony to the power of access, equity and education. In 2025, we are finding ourselves in the midst of another critical inflection point in America's struggle for Civil Rights.

Below, the ILBCF has welcomed the voice of Little Rock's Mayor, Frank Scott Jr., to share a reflection of the significance of this moment in our shared history—from Arkansas to Illinois:

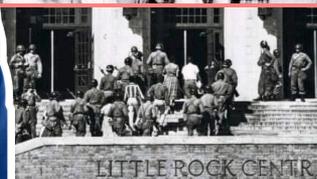
"The integration of Little Rock Central High School stands as a defining reminder that local actions can alter the course of a nation. In Little Rock, Arkansas, the story of the Little Rock Nine is not just history—it is a living testament to courage, justice, and the transformative power of policy."

"In 1957, nine extraordinary students walked through the doors of Central High School under the protection of a U.S. Supreme Court decision, yet directly into the face of fierce resistance. Their perseverance—and the resolve of leaders who upheld the law—demonstrated that policy is never simply words on paper. Policy shapes lives. Policy changes nations."

"Local decisions can—and often do—become national turning points. As Mayor of Arkansas's capital city, I carry this truth daily. I have had the privilege of sitting with Dr. Ernest Green, one of the Little Rock Nine, whose brilliance and resilience continue to inspire me. That encounter reaffirmed that the responsibility of local leadership is not only to meet the needs of today, but also to envision policies that create a legacy of justice and opportunity for generations to come.

"The legacy of the Little Rock Nine calls us to lead with courage, to look beyond the immediate, and to recognize that the choices we make in our communities can chart a course toward fairness, equity, and progress far greater than we imagine."

- Mayor Frank Scott, Jr.



COMMUNITY VOICES

A Call to Action from Chicago Votes

This quarter, Community Voices features a Call to Action from Chicago Votes, a nonpartisan organization dedicated to expanding political participation among young people, particularly those who have been historically marginalized from the electoral process. Here, Chicago Votes outlines their vision for youth-centered democracy and calls on voters, candidates and community members to help build a more inclusive political system in partnership with young people as the 2026 election cycle approaches.

A MESSAGE FROM CHICAGO VOTES

As campaign season ramps up, Illinois is once again at a crossroads. Over the next few years, our state will face choices not just about who represents us, but about what kind of democracy we want to build. At Chicago Votes, we believe that the future must be shaped by young people, especially those who have been historically excluded from the political process.

Elections are more than dates on a calendar. They are moments of possibility, moments when we can organize, mobilize, and demand that our leaders reflect our values.

Elections are more than dates on a calendar. They are moments of possibility, moments when we can organize, mobilize, and demand that our leaders reflect our values. That is why we are investing in strategies that put youth at the center of this cycle: launching a Youth Advocacy Council to craft a youth-led policy agenda, mobilizing thousands of voters through Parades and Parties to the Polls, and expanding voter engagement in jails and prisons.

Our vision is clear. Young people are not just future voters, they are today's leaders. And when candidates step onto the ballot this cycle, they will face a choice: endorse and align with the Youth Advocacy Agenda, or explain to young voters why they will not.

But here is the truth. Engagement cannot stop at the ballot box. We are pushing for long-term reforms, like expanding civic education in our prisons and restoring voting rights to incarcerated people with the Reintegration & Civic Empowerment (RACE) Act.

This election season, our call to action is simple.

- **For Voters:** Show up. Whether it is at a candidate forum, a parade to the polls, or casting your ballot, your voice matters.
- **For Candidates:** Do not just seek young people's votes. Seek their partnership in building policy. Endorse the Youth Advocacy Agenda and stand with us in making Illinois a model of inclusive democracy.
- **For Community Members:** Join us. From phone banking to leading a poll parade, everyone has a role in making sure young people's voices are heard loud and clear.

Illinois has the chance to lead the nation in reimagining what democracy looks like when it is powered by youth, creativity, and lived experience. The next election cycle is not only about who wins or loses. It is about building a political system that finally works for all of us.



BLACK BUSINESS CORNER

Where We Spend Matters.

Across Illinois, Black-owned businesses are not just places to shop, they are community hubs, storytelling vessels and living proof of legacy, resilience and vision. Entrepreneurs are building more than brands, they are creating spaces rooted in culture, purpose and pride.

URBAN ESSENTIALS SPILL THE BEANS COFFEE CAFE

Chicago's Austin neighborhood is home to Urban Essentials Spill the Beans Coffee Cafe. With coffee, pastries and meals on the menu, it's a perfect spot for both morning commuters and afternoon visitors. Urban Essentials has gained recognition beyond its immediate neighborhood, earning features from food bloggers and social media influencers.



📍 5300 W. Chicago Ave.
Chicago, IL 60651

📘 @UrbanEssentialCoffeeCafe

📷 @urban_essentials_coffeecafe

🌐 urbanEssentialsCoffee.com

LIVING FRESH MARKET



Living Fresh Market opened in October 2021 and has quickly become one of the largest Black-owned grocery stores in the country. The 71,000-square-foot supermarket also features health-focused community initiatives and programs, working to transform public health outcomes in the surrounding communities.

📍 7520 Roosevelt Rd.
Forest Park, IL 60130

📷 @LivingFreshMarket

🌐 LivingFreshMarket.com

BLACK AND BRONZE FESTIVAL

Having celebrated its inaugural festival this September, Black and Bronze: A Bronzeville Music Fest showcases the voices and contributions of Chicago's homegrown talent. The annual festival features live music, spoken word, and community gathering to celebrate the culture and legacy of Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood.

📍 4433 S. Saint Lawrence Ave. Chicago, IL 60653

📷 @BlackAndBronzeFest

🌐 blackandbronzefest.com



GOODE FOODS FAMILY



Goode Foods Family specializes in providing high quality and nutritious canned beans and vegetables, making it easier for all of our communities to eat and live well. The company is one of the only Black-owned canned good distributors in the Midwest and they supply all local WIC Centers with fresh produce, canned fruit and baby formula.

📍 175 Olde Half Day Rd.

Lincolnshire, IL 60069

📷 @GoodeFoodsFamily

🌐 GoodeFoodsFamily.com

Shop Small. Support Black Business.

GATHERING AS A COMMUNITY

Strengthening our Work through Empowering the Next Generation and Engaging in Policy Development

POLICY SUMMIT AND POWER BRUNCH

As we come together for the **2025 Policy Summit and Power Brunch**, we recognize the power of being in this space with one another. Over the course of two days, we are uniting business and civic leaders, community partners and policy experts from across Illinois to engage on the most pressing issues facing Black communities. This year's theme, *Endgame: Relentless Power*, challenges us to not only reflect on our progress but to champion bold solutions that advance equity and justice.

Together, we are building momentum that does not end here—it carries forward in the work each of us will continue long after we leave this space.



Stay tuned for the recap in the next Pillar!

2025 GOLF OUTING HIGHLIGHTS

Over 60 teams teed off in July for a successful annual golf outing that brought together community leaders, sponsors and local businesses in support of the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus Foundation. The event featured remarks from **House Speaker Emanuel "Chris" Welch** and **Speaker Pro Tempore Kam Buckner (D-26)**, and **ILBCF Joint Caucus Chairwoman State Sen. Lakesia Collins (D-5)** served as master of ceremonies. Participants took home raffle prizes generously donated by Harborside International Golf Center, corporate sponsors and members' offices. And, the outing featured our commitment to supporting Black-owned businesses by partnering with local vendors, including Moors Beer. With strong turnout, generous sponsor support, and a focus on local Black entrepreneurship, the event demonstrated the power of bringing people together for a common cause.



RECORD BREAKING CELEBRATION

The Illinois Legislative Black Caucus Foundation Proudly Supports Our Youth

The Illinois Legislative Black Caucus Foundation celebrated another milestone year, awarding **\$150,000 in scholarships to over 100 students from across Illinois!** Held at the University of Illinois Chicago, the ceremony brought together students, families and supporters gathered to honor the achievements of the next generation of leaders. ILBCF leaders, keynote speakers and alumni shared inspiring remarks, reminding recipients of the power of education and the responsibility of using their gifts to strengthen their communities.

The program highlighted the Foundation's ongoing commitment to advancing equity by creating pathways to higher education for Black students throughout the state. For many recipients, the scholarship represents more than financial support; it is an affirmation of their potential and a celebration of their hard work, serving as a heartfelt send-off as they prepare to begin their collegiate journeys.

Congratulations to all the scholars—we're excited to see what your futures hold!

Look for more about our scholarship recipients' accomplishments in the next edition of The Pillar.



GEARING UP FOR VETO SESSION

Legislation Supporting The 4 Pillars During The 2025 Spring Session

As the Illinois General Assembly reconvenes for the fall veto session— scheduled for October 14-16 and October 28-30— we are reminded that our voices, our presence and our participation matter now more than ever. In a national climate where progress feels uncertain and many communities are left feeling unheard, Illinois has the opportunity to lead with intention and equity. But, it requires us to stay engaged.

The veto session is a time for lawmakers to revisit legislation, but it's also an important moment to push for accountability, advance any unfinished work and ensure that the needs of Black communities remain a top priority in Springfield. Policy doesn't move without pressure, and our collective voice is essential in shaping our laws.

The ILBCF encourages everyone to remain active in the legislative process. Whether by contacting your legislators, attending public hearings or simply staying informed, your involvement strengthens our democracy and ensures that our communities are not forgotten.

**PILLAR 1: CRIMINAL
JUSTICE**

**PILLAR 2: EDUCATION &
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**



**PILLAR 3: ECONOMIC ACCESS,
EQUITY, & OPPORTUNITY**

**PILLAR 4: HEALTH CARE &
HUMAN SERVICES**

LEGISLATION TO WATCH

ILLINOIS SENATE BILL 3632

The Homicide Victims' Families' Rights Act creates an established process for reviewing unsolved murder cases that are over three years old with no leads, requiring fresh reviews by investigators not previously involved. It also mandates law enforcement agencies to assign family liaison officers to support victims' families, helping them receive the care and communication they deserve for closure.

ILLINOIS SENATE BILL 1784

The Illinois Clean Slate Act remains a crucial step toward giving many people the fresh start they need by automatically sealing nonviolent criminal records after a period of good behavior. It removes major barriers to employment, housing and education — especially for communities disproportionately impacted by the justice system.

ILLINOIS SENATE BILL 3441

This legislation strengthens Illinois' Equal Pay and Prevailing Wage laws by requiring all covered businesses to report to the Department of Labor confirming they pay women and people of color fairly compared to others in the same roles. This expands transparency and helps combat wage discrimination across the state.

YOU DECIDE

Should Illinois Protect or Reform a \$86 Billion Drug Program?

Illinois lawmakers are facing a tough choice about a federal program that's supposed to help low-income patients get cheaper prescription drugs. The question is simple: Should the state protect this program as it is, or demand major changes first?

The 340B Drug Pricing Program started in 1992 to help safety-net hospitals and clinics. The idea was straightforward—let these healthcare providers buy drugs at big discounts, then use the savings to help poor patients. Today, it's worth \$86 billion nationwide.

Why Some Want to Protect It	Why Others Want Reform First
<p>Community health centers and hospitals say they desperately need this program. In Illinois, these providers serve patients where 21% have no insurance and 67% rely on Medicaid. The 340B savings help pay for mental health services, substance abuse treatment and other care that might not exist otherwise. But there's a problem. Drug companies have started limiting where patients can fill their discounted prescriptions. Instead of going to any neighborhood pharmacy, patients might have to travel farther or use only one specific pharmacy chain. Health centers say these restrictions are costing them millions of dollars and forcing them to cut services and lay off staff.</p> <p>With Congress considering cuts to Medicaid, healthcare advocates worry about a "perfect storm." They want Illinois to pass a law stopping drug companies from adding more restrictions. Without this protection, they say vulnerable patients will lose access to care.</p>	<p>Critics don't oppose helping poor patients get cheaper drugs. But they say the current system has major problems that need fixing before expanding it. The biggest issue is money going to the wrong places. Illinois has lost \$238 million in Medicaid rebates because of how this program works—money that could have helped state healthcare programs. Meanwhile, large hospitals, pharmacy chains and middlemen are making profits without guaranteeing that patients actually pay less at the pharmacy counter.</p> <p>Reform supporters want new rules requiring 80% of the program's profits to directly lower patient costs when they pick up prescriptions. They also want public reports showing where the money goes, so taxpayers can see if the program is really helping patients or just boosting hospital profits. "There's nothing in current law to guarantee low-income patients will see their drug costs reduced by even a single penny," reform advocates point out.</p>

THE REAL STAKES

This isn't just about money or regulations. It's about real patients who need affordable medications. A diabetes patient might face different costs at different pharmacies based on corporate contracts. A community clinic might have to eliminate weekend services because drug company restrictions cut its revenue. Both sides agree the program should help vulnerable patients. The question is whether to protect it as-is or demand transparency and accountability.

Illinois lawmakers must decide: Should they act now to protect healthcare providers from more restrictions, or should they pause and demand reforms that ensure patients actually benefit? The choice they make will affect prescription drug access for thousands of Illinois residents who can least afford to lose it.

So, fellow Illinoisans, what do you decide?

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**Members serve on the ILBCF Board*

IN MEMORIAM

Jeffrey Daryl Revere

The Illinois Legislative Black Caucus Foundation mourns the passing of board member Jeffrey Daryl Revere, whose commitment to service and leadership strengthened our mission of advancing equity, opportunity and community empowerment. Mr. Revere brought vision, dedication and a deep belief in the power of connection to his work with the Foundation. His contributions will continue to inspire us as we carry forward the values he championed. We honor his legacy and extend our deepest condolences to his family and loved ones.





SUMMER 2025

EQUALITY IN ACTION

www.ilbcf.org



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ILBCF