



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Church Leaders Call for State to Adopt a Moral Budget**

*Letter to Gov. Quinn urges state leaders to preserve local programs that protect public health, improve public safety, enhance learning and revitalize local economies*

(CHICAGO) As Governor Pat Quinn prepares to present his proposed budget to state lawmakers, several of the state's top Christian leaders are urging lawmakers and the Governor to protect local human services programs from cuts in the upcoming year.

In a letter delivered today to Governor Quinn, 13 of the state's top Christian leaders are calling on lawmakers to take the difficult yet necessary steps to protect and strengthen Illinois' infrastructure of community-based programs. Church leaders say that the state has a moral responsibility to ensure that every community has access to preventative programs like those that address malnutrition, reduce domestic violence and help kids succeed in school, as well as job-training programs that enable families to lift themselves out of poverty and into the middle class. Many of those programs are administered through local non-profit organizations affiliated with churches or groups like the United Way.

"Our churches across northern Illinois offer emergency assistance through our food pantries, but as the economy has slumped, we've seen demand nearly double," said Bishop Gary Wollersheim, head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Northern Illinois Synod, which is based in Rockford. "Nearly one million Illinoisans from practically every village, town and city are facing malnutrition, including one in eight children. Our congregations simply cannot meet the needs of every community alone, and we need the state to live up to its moral responsibility."

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The church leaders also note that every dollar invested in community services returns six to eight dollars to the taxpayers by preventing much bigger social problems down the road. For example, programs that end alcohol or crystal meth addiction are much more cost-effective than the burdens on the health care system, welfare system or criminal justice system where there are no local addiction treatment options available. The leaders also note that delivering state services through local non-profits, which are governed by local business, community and religious leaders, also ensures that programs are efficiently managed and meet the most pressing needs of the community.

“When Christ called upon us to look after our neighbors, he didn’t say ‘Only when it’s easy or times are good.’ Now is not the time for us to turn our backs on our neighbors, our neighborhoods, or communities across this state,” said Rev. Gary McCants, presiding elder of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church’s Illinois Conference for the Fourth Episcopal District, which is headquartered in Springfield.

“We all know that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, and just as we shouldn’t consider slashing funding for hospitals, police, or schools, both common sense and the common good demand that the state live up to its moral obligation to ensure a strong infrastructure of local community services,” concluded Rev. McCants.

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