



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Heather Shadur
312/226.5100
heather@shadur.com

Budget Cuts Endanger Nearly 10,000 Illinoisans Served by Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

225,000 Lutherans mobilized in support of tax increase

[CHICAGO] One of Illinois' largest providers of community-based services is warning that state budget cuts will force it to turn away nearly 10,000 people in Illinois if lawmakers from both sides of the aisle don't find common ground to resolve the state's budget impasse. Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI), an agency of Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), warns that cuts in services including child abuse prevention, mental health services, and care for the elderly and developmentally disabled are not only morally irresponsible, but also fiscally irresponsible, because investing in preventative community-based programs prevents much bigger costs to taxpayers down the road.

"No matter what their faith, people in Illinois share a set of values, including our recognition that strong families are the building block of strong communities," said Bishop Warren Freiheit of the Central/Southern Illinois Synod of the ELCA. "Most people are horrified when they learn that lawmakers are cutting programs that families depend on, including care for the sick and disabled, victims of abuse, and our seniors and children."

Approximately 2,500 children and their families served by LSSI will be impacted by cuts in programs ranging from counseling for sexually abused children to safe homes for children at risk for abuse and neglect. Supportive services for abused and neglected children in foster care will be slashed by 70 percent, and funding for their food, shelter and other basic necessities will be cut in half.

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Of the 2,500 children and families affected, 700 families will lose wrap-around (supportive) services including sexual abuse counseling, family preservation, post-adoption services, and emergency shelter for displaced foster children. Studies show one in six children in Illinois are at risk for abuse or neglect, and one in three girls and one in six boys are sexually abused before the age of 18.

In addition, 1,630 seniors served by LSSI will be impacted by cuts in basic human care programs that help them remain in their homes and independent for as long as possible; 730 elderly will lose supportive home care services and another 700 will have their hours of care reduced. Cutting these basic services will force many seniors into nursing homes or require family members to quit their jobs to care for them. Another 140 seniors will lose adult day care services, and 60 seniors will lose supportive housing, forcing many into nursing homes.

One of the most fragile populations served by LSSI will also be impacted by these cuts and left with nowhere to turn. Several living facilities that offer a home and support services to almost 80 people with developmental disabilities will no longer be viable and may be shuttered.

Additionally, 4,900 children, teens and adults served by LSSI will lose mental health services, including life-saving treatment for depression, eating disorders, and alcohol and drug addiction. Studies show that one in eleven Illinois teens ages 12 – 17 have used illegal drugs in the last month, and the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University recently reported that Illinois' current failure to provide sufficient treatment for drug and alcohol addiction costs state taxpayers \$4 billion a year. The costs of untreated addiction account for 80 percent of the state's criminal justice budget and 12 percent of our public school budget, primarily to meet the special education needs of young drug victims. LSSI warns that plans to eliminate more than \$50 million in funding for addiction prevention and treatment programs across the state could cost taxpayers an additional \$350 million in the long run.

“Every dollar we invest in preventative community programs saves taxpayers an average of \$6 to \$8 down the road. These cuts aren't just morally irresponsible, they are fiscally irresponsible,” Freiheit warns.

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“If we turn our back on abused children, people with mental illness, our seniors and disabled, they don’t just magically disappear. They turn up again in our special education classes, our prisons, our emergency rooms and nursing homes, but at much greater cost to the taxpayer.”

In response to the proposed cuts, LSSI is launching a statewide effort to educate 225,000 members of the ELCA in 500 congregations across all 102 Illinois counties. Most ELCA leaders have backed an increase in the personal income tax that eliminates the state’s structural budget deficit, and congregation members are being urged to tell their lawmakers it’s time for a balanced budget that combines cuts in non-essential programs with a modest tax increase that ensures Illinois’ infrastructure of vital programs is well-maintained. The effort began this past weekend in churches across the state and e-mails to supporters at www.LutheranAdvocacy.org. Leaders say that the effort will continue until lawmakers from both sides of the aisle fulfill their shared responsibility to protect the common good.

“Our faith teaches us that we are our brother’s and sister’s keeper, and that we are only strong when our communities and the families who live there are strong,” Freiheit said. “We understand lawmakers fear voting for a tax increase, but we believe that faith is much stronger than fear. We are calling on them to have courage and do the right thing for the people and communities of this state.”

About Lutheran Social Services of Illinois:

Founded in 1867, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) is a statewide, not-for-profit agency of the three Illinois synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). LSSI serves 72,583 people through an array of services at 83 program sites and 59 counties across Illinois. For more information, call 847/635-4600 or visit www.LSSI.org.

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