



Chicago
Urban League

News Release

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Urban League achieves major milestone in education funding lawsuit

In unprecedented action, civil rights lawsuit to have its day in court

CHICAGO, IL (April 16, 2009)-The Chicago Urban League announced a major milestone in its lawsuit challenging the state's current system of public education funding today. In his ruling on the State of Illinois' motion to dismiss the lawsuit, Judge Martin Agran declared that the Urban League lawsuit's claim that the state's funding system violates the Illinois Civil Rights Act of 2003 has merit and should be heard in court. This decision was historic in that previous education funding lawsuits were dismissed at the circuit court level.

"The decision to allow our education lawsuit to move forward in the court of law is an important victory for the children of Illinois," said Cheryle R. Jackson, president and CEO of the Chicago Urban League. "It has been said by many that education is the civil rights issue of the 21st century. Allowing this case to move forward based on a civil rights violation claim kicks off the first education civil rights battle in the history of Illinois. The current funding system is not only unjust but it undermines the strength of our workforce and the economic competitiveness of our state. We can no longer wait, it must be changed now. We look forward to proving our case in court."

Jackson was joined at today's announcement by local education, civic and elected leaders at Roberto Clemente Community Academy for today's announcement including: Rep. David Miller (29th District); Miguel del Valle, Clerk of the City of Chicago; Alderman Billy Ocasio (26th Ward); Michael Scott, Chairman, Chicago Board of Education; Ron Huberman, CEO, Chicago Public Schools; Dr. Byron Brazier, Pastor, Apostolic Church of God; Dr. Leon D. Finney, Jr, Chairman, The Woodlawn Organization; and Bobbie L. Steele, former president of the Cook County Board of Commissioners.

Originally filed in August, and amended in October, the co-plaintiffs in the lawsuit include several diverse Illinois families, the Quad County Urban League, based in Aurora and serving Northwest and Western suburbs and the Tri-County Urban League, based in Peoria and serving central Illinois. Amicus briefs were filed by several school districts, including Chicago Public Schools. The plaintiffs are represented, on a pro bono basis, by the law firm of Jenner & Block LLP.

"We are thrilled by this victory," said Lisa T. Scruggs, a partner at Jenner & Block and lead counsel for the lawsuit. "Now the Plaintiffs turn their focus to litigating the disparate impact discrimination claim in the trial court. We look forward to proving that the school funding system, as it is currently implemented, results in the unjustifiable and inequitable allocation of resources to those schools that serve predominantly minority student populations."

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Urban League achieves major milestone in education funding lawsuit-page 2 of 2

Elected officials, parents challenged to drive change now for education funding reform

Jackson shared that this victory for the Urban League lawsuit comes at a critical time as the state is debating how to fund needs across the state. She encouraged state leaders to, like the Urban League, work now to change the current public school funding system.

“In Springfield there have been lots of debates and suggestions about how to change the current funding system, but there seems to be a lack of political will to choose a plan and put it into action,” she said. “The state doesn’t need a court ruling to make this change happen. However, if a civil rights lawsuit is what it will take drive the necessary change for the children of Illinois, then we are happy to go down this road as quickly as possible.”

Jackson also announced that the Chicago Urban League will, in the months ahead, launch a statewide campaign to engage parents and families around key education issues, and educate them on how they can challenge themselves and their elected officials to make the critical changes necessary to ensure a better educational system.

“We are losing generations due to under funded and underperforming school systems,” Jackson said. “Whether or not a parent has a child enrolled in public schools, it is necessary for all families to be fully aware of the impact poorly funded schools have on everyone in the state of Illinois. We are at risk of not being able to compete globally and must solve this crisis now. This is not an African American or a Latino issue, but an issue for the entire state to be concerned about and engaged in.”

More information about the lawsuit, including frequently asked questions and Illinois school funding facts can be found on the Chicago Urban League website (www.TheChicagoUrbanLeague.org).

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About the Chicago Urban League

Established in 1916, the Chicago Urban League is a civil rights organization that empowers and inspires individuals to reach and exceed their economic potential. The Chicago Urban League supports and advocates for economic, educational and social progress for African-Americans through our agenda focused exclusively on economic empowerment as the key driver for social change. For more information, visit www.thechicagourbanleague.org.

About Jenner & Block LLP

Jenner & Block is a national, full-service law firm with approximately 500 attorneys and offices in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and Washington, DC. Founded in 1914, the Firm has grown and prospered because of an unwavering commitment to our clients, to the Bar, to our people and to public service. Jenner & Block has been widely recognized for consistently delivering excellent legal representation in the courtroom and the boardroom. The Firm has also traditionally served as a leader in public service and pro bono advocacy, having been consistently ranked as one of the top ten pro bono firms in the country by The American Lawyer magazine. In 2008, The American Lawyer recognized Jenner & Block as the number one law firm in the country for pro bono service.