



**Chicago
Urban League**

News Release

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Chicago Urban League Files Civil Rights Lawsuit on School Funding

*Lawsuit calls for an end to discriminatory practices that have left
African American and Latino children behind*

CHICAGO, IL (August 20, 2008)-The Chicago Urban League has filed a lawsuit against the State of Illinois and the Illinois State Board of Education calling for the state's current school funding scheme to be declared unconstitutional and in violation of the Illinois Civil Rights Act of 2003. The lawsuit asserts that the State of Illinois has, for decades, discriminated against families based on race and has deprived African American, Latino and other minority children of a high quality education. The lawsuit, which was filed in the Circuit Court of Cook County, was announced today at Chicago Urban League headquarters on the city's south side.

"Today we have gone to court to seek an end to decades of inadequate and unequal funding the State of Illinois has given our schools," said Cheryle R. Jackson, president and CEO of the Chicago Urban League. "Our children, especially African Americans and Latinos, have been left behind because of poorly funded schools while their white counterparts in wealthy communities are thriving. Their basic right to a quality education is being denied. Through our litigation and civic engagement around this issue, we want to make sure no more children are given a second-class education."

Jackson was joined by civil rights groups, ministers, education advocates and administrators including: Theodia Gillespie president and CEO of the Quad County Urban League, a co-plaintiff in the lawsuit; Mary Ellen Guest, campaign manager, A+ Illinois; Arne Duncan, CEO, Chicago Public Schools; Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, Sr., founder and president, Rainbow PUSH Coalition; Karl Brinson, president, NAACP Chicago, Westside branch; Dr. Byron Brazier; pastor, Apostolic Church of God; Dr. Leon Finney, pastor, Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church; Dr. Marshall Hatch, pastor, New Mt. Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church; Rev. Sen. James T. Meeks, pastor, Salem Baptist Church of Chicago; Rev. Otis Moss III, pastor, Trinity United Church of Christ and Rev. Stephen Thurston II, co-pastor, New Covenant Missionary Baptist Church.

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"Unbalanced and unfair school funding is hurting children all over the state of Illinois," said Theodia Gillespie, president and CEO of the Quad County Urban League, which serves African Americans and other minorities in DuPage, Kane, Kendall and Will Counties. "The system is clearly broken and must be fixed."

About the lawsuit

In court documents, the Chicago Urban League asserts that the civil rights lawsuit has been filed because of the State's failed school funding scheme, the discriminatory impact that the scheme has on minority students, especially African American and Latino students and the inadequate educational opportunity it creates for thousands of Illinois public school children.

The lawsuit challenges the State's method for raising and distributing education funds to local school districts and the Illinois State Board of Education's implementation of the system. Represented on a pro bono basis by the law firm of Jenner & Block LLP, the Urban League asserts that the State's public school funding scheme (1) disparately impacts racial and ethnic minority students who attend Majority-Minority Districts in violation of the Illinois Civil Rights Act of 2003; (2) violates the Uniformity of Taxation provision of the Illinois Constitution; (3) violates Plaintiffs' right to attend "high quality educational institutions" guaranteed by the Education Article under the Illinois Constitution and (4) violates Plaintiffs' right to equal protection under the Illinois Constitution.

The Chicago Urban League wants the court to agree that the public education financing mechanism in Illinois violates the Illinois Civil Rights Act and Illinois Constitution and order the State to take the necessary steps to eliminate the constitutional violation and remedy the statutory violation.

"Illinois ranks 49th in the nation for the funding gap between rich and poor students, and white and minority students," said Mary Ellen Guest, campaign manager of A+ Illinois, the state's leading advocate for improved school quality and funding. "It should come as no surprise that Illinois also ranks near-last for the achievement gap between these groups of students."

Guest applauded the Chicago Urban League for its work in closing the achievement gap, adding, "Illinois' schoolchildren will be asked to compete globally for the high-tech jobs of the 21st Century. How many of them will be left behind?"

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Call to action issued

Jackson encouraged citizens to learn more about the disparities in school funding, reach out to elected officials, their communities and the media to voice their support of the lawsuit. “No matter your race, gender, or economic status, students receiving low quality education affects all of us. An underfunded system leads to low quality education, and underachieving students. A child’s limitation should only be how big they can dream not which school district they happen to live in. This vicious cycle must end now.”

More information about the lawsuit, 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, 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.