

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS Chicago Urban League Lawsuit August 20, 2008

**Q.**

**Why has the Chicago Urban League filed a lawsuit against the State of Illinois and the Illinois State Board of Education?**

**A.**

The Urban League has filed a lawsuit against the State of Illinois and the Illinois State Board of Education in an effort to obtain a court order declaring that the current system of funding public education in Illinois is unconstitutional and a violation of the Illinois Civil Rights Act of 2003.

**Q.**

**What claims are raised in the lawsuit?**

**A.**

The lawsuit is a civil rights action that arises from 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 Plaintiffs and thousands of Illinois public school children. The lawsuit challenges the State's method for raising and distributing education funds to local school districts and ISBE's implementation of that fatally flawed system. Together, on behalf of their members and their members' children, Plaintiffs allege 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.

**Q.**

**What legal remedy is the Urban League seeking in this case?**

**A.**

We seek a declaration that the public education financing mechanism in Illinois violates the Illinois Civil Rights Act and Illinois Constitution and an order that the State of Illinois must take the necessary steps to eliminate the constitutional violation and remedy the statutory violation.

**Q.**

**Specifically, what do you expect the State of Illinois to do once you receive this court order?**

**A.**

We would like to see the State of Illinois take action and remedy this situation as soon as possible, now or at any time during the pendency of the lawsuit. Nothing stops the State of Illinois from taking affirmative steps to provide a high quality and adequate education to all children in Illinois—as required by the Constitution.

**Q.**  
**Why is the Urban League filing a lawsuit now?**

**A.**  
The Urban League has filed a lawsuit because we cannot allow the current flawed system of school funding to continue in Illinois for another school year. We cannot allow another minority child to begin a school year knowing that they will not be given the same opportunity to learn as compared to white students in well-financed schools in Illinois. Their chances of graduating from these poorly financed minority schools is about 50%. Those percentages are simply unacceptable and as people of conscience we are required to act. We urge others to join us.

**Q.**  
**Why the Urban League as the plaintiff?**

**A.**  
This is a civil rights case. The Urban League is a civil rights organization with a 92 year history. The education of African Americans has been a historic civil rights issue. Our mission seeks to empower the economic development of African Americans and a high quality education is central to our mission of preparing African Americans to compete in the global economy of the 21st Century.

**Q.**  
**What can individuals do if they care about this issue?**

**A.**  
Individuals can make themselves knowledgeable of these educational statistics and write to their legislators—both state and federal—to express their concerns about the inadequacy of the public education system in Illinois. Register to vote and then vote in November and in every election. We urge individuals to vote in this election for politicians with platforms committed to addressing the public education issue in Illinois. Additionally, we encourage individuals to write letters to the editors of their local newspapers in support of equity in school financing and our efforts.

**Q.**  
**Where can I learn more about the public education issue in Illinois?**

**A.**  
You can get more information at the Chicago Urban League website at [www.thechicagourbanleague.org](http://www.thechicagourbanleague.org) and at the following websites:

Schott Foundation for Public Education ([www.schottfoundation.org](http://www.schottfoundation.org))  
A+ Illinois ([www.aplusillinois.org](http://www.aplusillinois.org))

**Q.**  
**Why didn't the Urban League file this lawsuit earlier?**

**A.**  
The Urban League, like many others, hoped the State of Illinois would act on behalf of our children. As recently as August 12, 2008, the State of Illinois failed and/or refused to act despite a crisis in the public education system in Illinois. We now seek redress in the courts which are familiar with dealing with issues of racial discrimination in education and other public services. The courts have been dealing with these types of issues for more than 100 years.

**Q.**  
**What type of public financing system do you propose or support?**

**A.**  
The Chicago Urban League is not proposing any particular type of public financing system. We want a system that substantially raises the level of funding available for all school districts and significantly increases the State's contribution to education funding. We support any mechanism which eliminates racial disparities in student performance and disparities in the resources which the schools have in Illinois. We want a public funding system that is equitable and sustainable.

**Q.**  
**Why do you believe the public financing system is racially discriminatory?**

**A.**  
These issues will be proven in the lawsuit in detail. In general, we will show that the disparities that exist in funding have a significant and disparate impact on minorities, particularly African American and Latino students and that these disparities impact student performance. The gap in the high school graduation rate for black and Latino males as compared to white males is significant. Black males graduate at a rate of 40% in Illinois compared to white males who graduate at a rate of 82% from high school. (Latinos graduate at a rate of 62%) Black and Latino youth are more likely to attend an underfunded school than whites due to the current public financing system. These disparities are well known and despite the evidence the State has failed to act.

**Q.**  
**How does education funding affect the quality of our schools? \***

**A.**  
The issues of adequate funding and school quality are intricately connected. Smaller class sizes, teacher training, and adequate textbooks and equipment are all key factors in student achievement. Inadequate funding has a direct impact on those factors. A huge investment gap exists between school districts. Some schools spend more than \$23,000 per student per year, while others spend less than \$5,000.

**Q.**  
**How does Illinois' funding for education compare to other states? \***

**A.**  
Illinois ranks 49th among the 50 states in the amount of funding the state provides for education. State funding in Illinois covers, on average, less than 30 percent of the cost of educating a student, far less than the national average of about 50 percent. Illinois has the second worst per-pupil spending gap in the nation between wealthy and poor school districts. This troubling spending gap has persisted for far too long.

*\*Source: A+ Illinois*