

LONG-OVERDUE SUPPORT FOR OLDER ADULTS AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES
Making ends meet in hard times

FY24 Budget Priority: Allocate funds to the Department of Human Services to modernize the **Aid to the Aged, Blind or Disabled (AABD) program** so that older adults and people with disabilities have enough income to live at least at the poverty level.

AABD serves about 20,000 very low-income people who are 65 or older or who are blind, or have permanent disabilities that preclude work. **The group is disproportionately people of color and women. Many were homemakers, or their or spouses' wages did not count towards Social Security. They have experienced health disparities, barriers to accumulating assets, and exposure to hunger and housing instability.**

Long Overdue: AABD has been ignored for decades and fallen far behind its original purpose to supplement federal SSI benefits (which alone are just over 70% of the poverty level). AABD reaches less than 10% of Illinois SSI recipients, and for those it does reach the anemic grants leave them barely over 80% of the poverty level, more than \$200 per month short. Within the past year:

A 66-year-old SSI recipient lives in Hillside with her 8-year-old adopted child. She receives AABD benefits of just \$66.65 per month. AABD budgets just \$48.50 for her rent and \$13.15 for utility costs, even though her rent is \$750 and gas and electricity are \$141. The family's total income is at 83% of federal poverty guidelines for a family of two. They have very little money to make ends meet and none to cope with an emergency or unusual expense, like winter clothes or demands of a pandemic.

A woman with disabilities receives SSI plus a mere \$83 of AABD benefits each month. She uses this monthly income (well under \$1000) to cover her rent, cell phone, electricity, gas, over-the-counter medications, and other living expenses like laundry and personal care items. She is battling cancer with radiation therapy but cannot afford even small expenses like the lotions that would aid her skin healing, or ride shares or cabs, despite the nausea caused by vans, buses, and trains. She worries constantly about continuing to afford her rent, and she has no cushion should she encounter any unexpected needs, like replacing winter clothing.

Ensuring an income closer to the federal poverty level would add crucial financial capacity to help seniors and people with disabilities meet their basic human needs and escape the deepest poverty. This rectifies a glaring neglect and supports the pandemic's most challenged population.

Supporting groups (in formation): Access Living; Age Options, AARP Illinois; Shriver Center on Poverty Law; Legal Council for Health Justice; Legal Action Chicago

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