

## **Living free from poverty in Illinois**

**Chicago Tribune**

**April 17, 2008**

This is in response to "Prices take bite out of aid; A record number of Americans this year will receive food stamps, which aren't keeping pace with the rising cost of groceries" (Page 1, April 8). The steep rise in the price of a gallon of milk, a carton of eggs and other food staples is posing a huge challenge for many Illinoisans teetering on the tightrope of poverty, as your article aptly points out.

To make matters worse, amid this sea of rising prices, most Illinoisans have seen little to no growth in their incomes, when adjusted for inflation. Add to this the current torrent of the housing meltdown and the economic downturn, and the situation is looking only grimmer by the day for many.

Here in Chicago, the Greater Chicago Food Depository now is serving 12 percent more hungry individuals and families this year. And nearly one in every 10 households in Illinois struggles to put food on the table.

These aren't households in some abstract sense. It's the neighbor down the street who's behind on mortgage payments and fears foreclosure.

It's the family member who is struggling to figure out how to pay for both the medical bill and skyrocketing utilities. It's the unemployed friend who wonders if he can find another job.

These struggling families aren't concerned about hunger alone. Their worries extend to issues such as keeping a roof over their heads, getting health care, securing a job and receiving a good education or training.

Our state constitution articulates a fundamental goal of eliminating poverty. However, Illinois has no game plan in place to examine and tackle these issues comprehensively.

Fortunately our elected officials at the state level currently have the opportunity to address hunger and the variety of connected needs. The General Assembly should support the new Food for Families Program, which promises 7 million pounds of nutritious food for Illinois' food banks next fiscal year.

Legislation is also pending to create and provide the needed resources for a state Commission on the Elimination of Poverty. The commission, if enacted, would create a comprehensive vision and plan for Illinois that addresses hunger, as well as many other critical, basic issues that intersect with poverty, such as housing and health care. Its fundamental goal—to cut in half the number of Illinoisans living in extreme poverty by 2015—would help realize everyone's human right to live free from poverty.

—Kate R. Maehr  
President  
Illinois Food Bank Association  
Executive director  
Greater Chicago Food Depository

—Rev. Sid L. Mohn  
President  
Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights  
Chicago

