

Increase aid for elderly and disabled Illinoisans

There is a proposal before the Pritzker administration to provide an increase in the Aid to the Aged, Blind and Disabled program that will allow Illinoisans a combined income equal to at least the poverty level.

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Consider those Illinoisans who have the hardest time making basic ends meet: Older adults past working age and people with disabilities that keep them out of the workplace.

These are Illinoisans who have already spent their life savings and are trying to survive on some of the lowest incomes in our state. Most do not even have Social Security benefits. These community members are hardest hit by life's demands. They were also the hardest hit by the upheaval, health threats and added costs of the pandemic. Now, they are the hardest hit by inflation. Meeting the most basic needs has become almost impossible — rent, food, clothes, transportation and costs for caring for chronic medical conditions are out of reach. This is a group with no built-in clout in the competition for state services and resources.

But there is hope. Illinois has a program that is intended to help this group make it out of deep poverty: Aid to the Aged, Blind and Disabled (AABD), created 50 years ago to supplement the federal Supplemental Security Income program (SSI). SSI provides income at about 70% of the federal poverty level, and AABD was meant to fill the gap between that amount and an income that provides (in the words of the statute) “a livelihood compatible with health and well-being.”

In the intervening 50 years, however, Illinois has ignored the AABD program so thoroughly that it now reaches only about 10% of our residents receiving SSI, and the AABD supplement that those few receive leaves them with income still only about 80% — about \$200 short — of the poverty level.

Illinois has a chance to fix this. There is a proposal before the Pritzker administration to provide an increase in the AABD program and allow Illinoisans a combined income equal to at least the poverty level, a dramatic improvement for our state's hardest pressed people. We urge the Pritzker administration to embrace this goal and include the support in the upcoming budget proposal.

John Bouman, director, Legal Action Illinois