

# Illinois Black Advocacy: A Landscape Analysis

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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PREPARED BY

Wilburn Strategic Solutions, Inc.

INTRODUCTION

**T**HE EVENTS OF 2020 have heightened the sense of urgency to create and advance a statewide Black advocacy agenda in Illinois. The disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Black lives, the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and too many other events of police violence (incidents which have fueled a Black-led movement around mass incarceration, police brutality, housing, health, and economic equity), and the 2020 presidential election (which catalyzed ongoing and emerging Black organizing and voter turnout efforts across the country) are driving the momentum for positive systemic change for Black people and communities in Illinois. For context, see the data on racial disparities at the end of this report.

RESPONSE

ILLINOIS GOVERNMENT, NONPROFIT, AND PHILANTHROPIC SECTORS convened to launch strategies to raise money and distribute resources to communities most in need. However, supporting data and policy priorities to demonstrate and prioritize need in Black communities across the state were missing from ongoing COVID-19 convenings. In response, Chicago African Americans in Philanthropy (CAAIP), the Grand Victoria Foundation, the J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Family Foundation, the Julian Grace Foundation and the Steans Family Foundation have been working together to determine a path forward.

In June 2020, CAAIP delivered a presentation on the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting impact on Black communities in Illinois, which attracted over 500 registrants. **The sheer number of participants signaled a profound interest among stakeholders and partners in a deeper understanding of the needs and priorities of Black communities throughout the state.** At the same time, it is important to recognize that such information and analysis, in particular from a Black perspective, is not easily accessible to those who want and need it to advocate for racial equity, justice, and systems change. To address this challenge, the partners engaged the consulting firm of Wilburn Strategic Solutions, Inc. to conduct a landscape analysis to determine **whether and how to structure a contemporary advocacy organization that pursues racial equity, justice, and systemic change for Black people in Illinois.**





## PROJECT GOALS AND ACTIVITIES

**T**HE LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS BEGAN with three key assumptions regarding Black-led and focused advocacy: (a) there are many organizations across the state working diligently to advance issues of importance to the Black community, (b) there is a need for an organization that can coordinate statewide advocacy efforts, and (c) no organization is currently working at a statewide scale across multiple advocacy issues with the capacity for sustained coordination. To test these assumptions, the consultants were tasked to identify the ecosystem of advocacy organizations working on Black-focused and community-driven issues and develop recommendations through the following activities:

- **Conducting a landscape scan** of Black-led and focused Illinois advocacy organizations;
- **Interviewing a cross sector** of stakeholders and practitioners;
- **Identifying and reviewing** successful and aspirational models and approaches to support statewide population-focused advocacy; and
- **Providing recommendations** for the implementation of a new or hybrid organization, or for building the capacity and impact of an existing one to include sustainability strategies.

## Landscape Analysis

To build an understanding of the current landscape, primary research was conducted to map Black leadership, geographic areas of focus, key advocacy activities, strategies, and issues.

The process included **interviews with over 70 stakeholders** across a range of community leaders, advocacy practitioners, government leaders, elected officials, and philanthropic leaders. Interviewees were asked for their perspectives on the core strengths, opportunities, needs and gaps within the ecosystem of Illinois Black advocacy.

Through primary research and information gathered from interviews, **over 100 advocacy organizations were identified** that are primarily engaged in advocacy activities across Illinois, including but not limited to justice reform, health, education, constituency building, and community development. These organizations are operating in cities and municipalities across the state, are focused on single or multiple issues, and are Black-focused (explicitly focusing and centering on Black experiences) and/or Black-led (with Black leadership).



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## Key Assets and Strengths Within the Landscape

The analysis highlighted a broad range of assets and strengths within Illinois Black advocacy. The majority of organizations with a statewide reach are located within the Chicago metropolitan region, with many utilizing multiple advocacy strategies (i.e., policy advocacy, litigation, and lobbying) to address single- and multiple-advocacy issues of importance to the Black community. Movement builders and community organizers (often focusing on specific geographies) utilize a grassroots approach that centers and elevates the community's lived experience and voice. This is an asset-based approach that builds power and solutions to establish the foundation for effective advocacy



campaigns. Those interviewed for this project agree there is the potential for great “strength in numbers” if the power and impact of these community-based and statewide-focused organizations are harnessed to build coordinated and aligned advocacy in the collective.

There are also important nuances in Black advocacy across the state, and interviewees report the importance in recognizing that the Black community is not monolithic and represents diverse perspectives and lived experiences. Building trusting relationships is an important factor in creating a statewide Black advocacy organization. Particularly among



## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

smaller, community-based organizations and organizations operating in central and downstate regions, it is essential that any future organization that emerges must be collaborative and trusted, not “bigfooting” into issues and geographic spaces other organizations and leaders have championed and advanced over time.



Through the interviews with stakeholders and analysis of the current Black advocacy landscape, a clear set of needs and requirements has emerged to meet the capacity and reach for statewide advocacy. Primarily, the organization must have respect and trust to attract



representation from a range of existing organizations and coalitions, as well as the capacity to coordinate and accelerate all the advocacy activities throughout the ecosystem of Black advocacy organizations. This would require capacity to do surveying, conduct landscape analyses, and identify which groups are working

on the same or similar social justice issues and build alignment. This organization would build collective power and foster collaboration to promote and in some cases win policy shifts within the state, allowing for autonomy on the ground but coordinated efforts in the push for specific advocacy goals. Below are a set of recommendations and strategies to achieve a path forward towards statewide Black advocacy.

## Recommendation 1

### Sustain and increase funding for existing Black advocacy organizations statewide.

Devoting resources to any future statewide Black advocacy efforts does not mean reducing the funding for existing efforts. In fact, the strength of statewide Black advocacy overall depends on the strength of the individual organizations that make up the landscape.

The landscape analysis identified over 100 advocacy organizations advancing issues of significance to Black communities across the state. The list of organizations is not exhaustive, based on the time and scope of the project, but reflects a best effort to understand a fluid and dynamic landscape. A taxonomy, developed to define and stratify these organizations, included advocacy organizations that are:

- **Black led:** Organizations advancing Black advocacy that have Black leadership (Executive Director or Chief Executive Officer), although the organization's staff and Board may not necessarily be Black.
- **Black centered:** Organizations advancing Black advocacy with an organization mission that explicitly states a focus on the Black experience.
- **Multi-issue focused:** Organizations that work across a range of advocacy issue areas of significance to Black Illinoisans, including but not limited to education, healthcare, housing, and justice reform.

- **Statewide focused:** Organizations engaged in Black policy advocacy strategies and tactics statewide (not targeting a specific geography) and often engaged with elected officials in the state capitol.

- **Advocacy action research focused:** Organizations conducting primary research (or aggregating existing research) on the status of Black Illinoisans, highlighting social gains, racial disparities, and inequities across a range of issues, with the goal of supporting ongoing advocacy efforts.

## Recommendation 2

### Establish a Black-led, Black-focused, statewide, multi-issue advocacy organization.

There is an important opportunity to align the landscape's assets towards a common agenda, narrative, and strategy. This work is envisioned to be Black led at all levels, including culture, staff, and boards. The necessary approaches for this organization (which are currently missing from the landscape) include:

- **Building a common table:** Organizing, creating, and maintaining a network of authentic relationships across the state is a pivotal role this organization can embrace to amplify the landscape's assets. The common table is how and where strategic planning and policy agenda-setting takes place.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Uplifting collective voice:** Developing an effective common narrative around Black movements and solutions can amplify the common table's messages, priorities, and goals. Included in this approach are media, communications, messaging, and social media campaigns that affect the wider public's "hearts and minds" on key issues of racial justice and equity.
- **Establishing coordinated advocacy:** Many of the organizations in the current landscape are leading coordinated advocacy campaigns on particular issues. The organization envisioned by this project should bolster existing campaigns as well as have its own capacity to organize and lead campaigns, especially on issues that do not have existing Black leadership.

### Recommendation 3

**Establish or leverage (through partnerships) key capacities for statewide advocacy.** A range of capacities and strategies must be leveraged (individually and in combination) to successfully achieve statewide advocacy:

- **Community organizing and constituency building:** Continue to build people power in Black communities and identify new leaders.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Leadership development:** Build the next generation of Illinois's Black leaders, who may lead not only as community members but also as nonprofit, advocacy, and other civic leaders.
- **Communications support:** Conduct messaging research, develop asset-based narratives, and organize communications strategies for both specific-issue campaigns and broader narrative change.
- **Action research and policy expertise:** Highlight Black community outcomes and disparities to support community narratives and define practical policy solutions.
- **Litigation and government relations:** Improve legal precedent, pass legislation, and educate policymakers.
- **Electoral or political organizing:** Focus within government to support policy advancement.

Following this report, a steering committee will be established to shape the next steps in establishing the statewide organization and ensure Black communities, leaders, and advocacy organizations remain at the center of decision-making processes.



## BACKGROUND

**A**LTHOUGH BLACK RESIDENTS IN ILLINOIS CONSTITUTE 14.5 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL POPULATION, Black communities consistently rank near or at the bottom of key prosperity measures.

- **Education attainment:** In the 2018–2019 academic year, 90.8% of white students graduated from high school, compared to 76.5% of Black students.<sup>1</sup>
- **Life expectancy**
  - Compared to white residents, life expectancy is shorter by a decade or more in Black communities on Chicago’s south and west sides.<sup>2</sup>
  - In Illinois, Black women are six times as likely to die of a pregnancy-related condition as white women and the infant mortality rate for Black infants (10.5%) is more than twice the rate for white infants (4.6%).<sup>3</sup>
- **Wealth gap**
  - For every dollar earned by white men in Illinois, Black men earn

<sup>1</sup>“High school graduation rates by race–ethnicity — Illinois and Chicago in Illinois,” KIDS COUNT Data Center, Voices for Illinois Children, accessed April 26, 2021, <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/9735-high-school-graduation-rates-by-race-ethnicity--illinois-and-chicago#detailed/2/any/false/1696,1648,1603,1539,1381,1246,1124/2160,4739,2159,2161,2757,3307/18997>.

<sup>2</sup>Judith Singleton and Euan Hague, “Inequality In Life Expectancy in Chicago Neighborhoods: Can Active Transportation and Sustainability Programs Make a Difference?,” accessed April 26, 2021, <https://las.depaul.edu/centers-and-institutes/chaddick-institute-for-metropolitan-development/news-and-events/Documents/FinalChaddick%20Presentation%20-%20060617JS.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup>Illinois Department of Public Health, Illinois Maternal Morbidity and Mortality Report, October 2018, <http://dph.illinois.gov/sites/default/files/publications/publicationsowhmaternalmorbiditymortalityreport112018.pdf>.

## BACKGROUND

67 cents and Black women earn 63 cents.<sup>4</sup>

o Although Black LGBT residents comprise 14% of Illinois' LGBT population, 37% of Black LGBT Illinois residents report not having enough money to feed themselves, and Black same-sex couples are three times more likely to live in poverty than white same-sex couples.<sup>5</sup>

- **Incarceration:** An estimated 14% of Black adults in Illinois are currently or formerly incarcerated, compared to 3% of adults overall.<sup>6</sup>
- **Childhood poverty:** In Illinois, the percentage of children living below 200% of the poverty level is 28% for white children and 60% for Black children.<sup>7</sup>
- **Home ownership:** Home ownership in Illinois is highest among whites at 75%, compared to Black home ownership at 38%.<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, the pandemic continues to have a disproportionate economic and social impact on Illinois' Black communities.

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<sup>4</sup>Katie Buitrago, The Gender Disadvantage: Why Inequity Persists, Heartland Alliance, March 2019, [https://www.heartlandalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/PR19\\_DESIGN\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.heartlandalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/PR19_DESIGN_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>5</sup>Equity Illinois, "Archive for the 'Issues' Category," accessed April 26, 2021, <https://www.equalityillinois.us/category/issues/>.

<sup>6</sup>Katie Buitrago and Sandra Escobar-Schulz, Never Fully Free: The Scale and Impact of Permanent Punishments on People with Criminal Records in Illinois, Heartland Alliance, June 2020, <https://socialimpactresearchcenter.issuelab.org/resource/never-fully-free-the-scale-and-impact-of-permanent-punishments-on-people-with-criminal-records-in-illinois.html>.

<sup>7</sup>Annie E. Casey Foundation, "2020 Kids Count Profile," accessed April 26, 2021, [https://www.aecf.org/m/data-book/2020KC\\_profile\\_IL.pdf](https://www.aecf.org/m/data-book/2020KC_profile_IL.pdf).

<sup>8</sup>Housing Action Illinois, "Promoting Sustainable Homeownership," accessed April 26, 2021, <https://housingactionil.org/what-we-do/policy-advocacy/homeownership/>.

## BACKGROUND

● **The disproportionate impact on Black Chicagoans was evident from the earliest weeks of the pandemic.** As early as April 2020, 61 of the 86 recorded deaths (70%) in Chicago were Black residents, in a city that is 29% Black.



- Despite high rates of death due to the pandemic, **Illinois Black residents continue to experience barriers to accessing COVID-19 vaccines.**
- **Black CPS students experience lower rates of remote learning participation** than white students during the pandemic.
- Due to job losses during the economic crisis, **60% of Black households in Chicago report having serious financial problems**, compared with 36% of white households.

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<sup>9</sup>Chuck Goudie, Illinois' Black, Latinx residents getting fewer COVID-19 vaccines, early data shows, Barb Markoff et al., ABC 7 Chicago, February 12, 2021, video, 2:15, <https://abc7chicago.com/illinois-vaccine-covid-race-racial-disparity/10334705/>.

<sup>10</sup><https://www.chicagotribune.com/coronavirus/ct-remote-learning-cps>

<sup>11</sup>Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and National Public Radio Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, The Impact of coronavirus on households in major U.S. cities, September 2020, <https://media.npr.org/assets/img/2020/09/08/cities-report-090920-final.pdf>.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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