Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law





2021 Annual Report



Dear Friends of the Shriver Center,

2021 was a year of extraordinary challenges for low-income families and communities across Illinois and the nation. As the COVID-19 pandemic continued, millions of people faced housing instability, food insecurity, unemployment, and limited access to health care. These hardships exposed and deepened longstanding racial and economic inequalities, reinforcing the urgent need for the Shriver Center's work.

Yet 2021 also brought opportunities for meaningful change. With renewed attention to racial justice, economic security, and equitable public policies, advocates and community organizations worked to address both the immediate consequences of the pandemic and the systemic barriers that have prevented families from achieving stability.

Throughout the year, the Shriver Center remained committed to advancing justice through legal advocacy, policy reform, and collaboration. Our efforts focused on strengthening public benefits, protecting access to affordable housing and health care, supporting working families, and expanding economic opportunities for communities too often left behind.

These accomplishments reflect the dedication of our staff, partners, and advocates, who continued working through difficult circumstances to achieve meaningful results. Whether advancing legislation, challenging inequitable policies, or building coalitions, our goal remained the same: to ensure that everyone has the resources, protections, and opportunities needed to live with dignity.

We recognize that lasting change requires persistence. The challenges facing low-income communities cannot be resolved overnight, but every policy improvement, every strengthened protection, and every new opportunity represents progress toward a more equitable society.

As we reflect on 2021, we are proud of the work accomplished and grateful to the individuals and organizations who made it possible. Your generosity, partnership, and commitment continue to sustain the Shriver Center's mission.

Together, we look forward to building on this progress and advancing a future where justice and opportunity are within everyone's reach.

Janice E. Rodgers
Chair of the Board of Directors



Poverty isn't a simple problem. Ending it isn't simple either.

A Year of Unprecedented Challenges

In 2021, continued economic instability and the lasting effects of the pandemic brought renewed attention to issues the Shriver Center has addressed for more than four decades. Families across the country faced growing hardship, making effective advocacy for low-income individuals and communities more urgent than ever. The Center responded through initiatives addressing health care, job training, affordable housing, public benefits, and economic security. Working at the intersection of law, public policy, and community advocacy, the Shriver Center sought not only to address immediate challenges but also to confront the systemic barriers that prevent families from achieving lasting stability and opportunity.

Advancing Justice Through Advocacy

Combining grassroots advocacy with innovative legal strategies, the Shriver Center worked alongside communities to protect dignity, expand opportunity, and advance economic and social justice at every level.

The Power of Partnership

At a particularly critical time, supporters and donors strengthened the Shriver Center's ability to respond with urgency, determination, and purpose. Their continued commitment enabled the Center to pursue meaningful legal and policy reforms while meeting the urgent needs of vulnerable communities.



Housing



Protecting Public Housing in Rockford

The Shriver Center helped settle a lawsuit against the Rockford Housing Authority and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The agreement prevented the demolition of 84 public housing units without replacement, required 77 new affordable homes, and established a housing mobility program to help residents move into integrated, low-poverty communities.

Defending Families at Evergreen Terrace

In Joliet, the Center defended residents of Evergreen Terrace, a 356-unit affordable housing development threatened by eminent domain. Representing tenants facing displacement, it challenged the city's actions in federal court.

Strengthening Protections for Survivors

With the Center's support, Illinois amended its Safe Homes Act to protect survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and sexual violence from landlord retaliation after breaking a lease.

Preserving Affordable Housing

The Shriver Center continued monitoring the Chicago Housing Authority's plans for the Henry Horner Homes, helping draw national attention to the importance of preserving public housing and protecting vulnerable residents from displacement. The Center also supported the MacArthur Foundation's Preservation Compact, a collaborative initiative bringing together housing advocates, policymakers, and community organizations to protect affordable rental housing throughout Cook County. These efforts helped advance long-term preservation strategies that gained national recognition and served as a model for other communities.



Children and Youth

Expanding Access to Quality Child Care

Through sustained advocacy by the Shriver Center, Illinois child care providers participating in the Child Care Assistance Program received increased state funding. The Center also supported higher reimbursement rates for providers meeting stronger quality standards, helping working families gain access to affordable, high-quality care. These efforts recognized that reliable child care is essential not only to children's development but also to parents' ability to maintain employment and achieve financial stability.

Making Child Care More Affordable

The Illinois Department of Human Services released Making Quality Child Care Affordable for Illinois's Working Families, a report drafted by the Shriver Center outlining recommendations to expand access to safe, affordable child care.

Supporting Young Women in Schools

Through the Ensuring Success in School Task Force, the Center advocated for students facing domestic violence, sexual violence, pregnancy, and parenting challenges.

Building Stronger Educational Protections

Working with the Illinois State Board of Education, teachers' unions, school districts, and advocacy organizations, the Shriver Center helped establish the Task Force's priorities and agenda. The Center also prepared a report for Illinois lawmakers and continued promoting the Ensuring Success in School model policy in other states, extending protections and educational opportunities to vulnerable students.

Workforce and Economic Development

Creating Opportunities for Working Families

The Shriver Center advocated for policies connecting workforce development with economic opportunity, emphasizing that meaningful employment is essential to long-term financial stability. As a leader of the Illinois Works for the Future campaign, the Center brought together business leaders, labor unions, government representatives, and policy experts to advance strategies that respond to the needs of working communities. Through collaboration, the campaign promoted job training, economic mobility, and workforce development initiatives designed to help individuals overcome barriers to employment and adapt to changing economic conditions. These efforts reflected the Center's commitment to building a more inclusive economy in which workers and families have greater opportunities to succeed.

Building Pathways to Stable Employment

The Shriver Center also advocated for a national transitional jobs program to help unemployed individuals gain the skills, experience, and support needed to secure lasting employment. By combining immediate paid work opportunities with practical training and supportive services, the proposed program aimed to create pathways toward permanent jobs and greater financial independence. This approach recognized that overcoming unemployment requires more than access to jobs alone; it also requires meaningful preparation, ongoing support, and opportunities for long-term advancement.



Increasing Financial Assistance for Families

A Major Victory for Illinois Families

Following two years of advocacy by the Shriver Center, more than 27,000 Illinois families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) saw their monthly cash grants increase by 9 percent. For a family of three in Chicago, benefits rose from $396 to $434. The largest increase since 1994, this achievement marked an important victory after years of stagnant benefit levels and demonstrated the value of sustained advocacy.

Helping Families Meet Essential Needs

For families facing financial hardship, increased assistance helps cover necessities such as food, transportation, and school supplies. Although the increase did not fully bridge the gap between benefits and living costs, it helped families meet essential needs and manage everyday expenses.

Turning Advocacy into Lasting Change

This achievement reflects the Shriver Center's commitment to combining policy expertise, coalition-building, and persistent advocacy. The TANF increase demonstrated how coordinated efforts can produce tangible results for low-income families while strengthening the social safety net. These efforts continue to advance economic security and dignity.



Public Benefits

Advancing Financial Security for Families

The Shriver Center continued serving as co-chair of the Illinois Asset Building Group, a leading coalition promoting financial security for low-income families. The coalition supported legislation establishing the Children's Savings Account Task Force to explore a statewide savings program. The Center also advocated for stronger consumer protections, financial education, and greater access to resources that help families build assets and achieve long-term economic stability. These efforts reflected a commitment to helping families move beyond immediate financial hardship toward greater independence.

Creating Opportunities to Save and Invest

Economic well-being depends on more than income alone. By promoting access to savings, financial education, and investment opportunities, the Shriver Center worked to help low-income households plan for the future and strengthen their financial security.

Building a Foundation for Lasting Stability

Beyond immediate financial assistance, the Shriver Center advocated for policies that give families the tools to build lasting economic security. Its work focused on expanding access to savings, education, and financial resources while addressing barriers that prevent low-income households from accumulating assets. By supporting policies that encourage financial independence, the Center continued working toward an economy in which more families have the opportunity to achieve stability, withstand unexpected hardships, and build a stronger future.





Health Care

Protecting Health Coverage for Illinois Families

In April, a court ruling threatened Illinois's FamilyCare coverage for thousands of families, placing another 500,000 people at risk of losing health insurance. The Shriver Center responded quickly, intervening in the case and securing a stay from the Illinois Supreme Court. This critical action prevented an immediate disruption in coverage, allowing parents and children to maintain access to essential medical services while the legal challenge continued.

Advancing Legislative Solutions

To protect families regardless of the court's final decision, the Shriver Center worked with state lawmakers to develop legislation clarifying Illinois Medicaid law and preserving coverage for vulnerable households.

Combining Legal Action and Advocacy

By combining litigation with legislative advocacy, the Shriver Center addressed an immediate threat while pursuing lasting protections. Its coordinated strategy demonstrated the importance of responding quickly to legal challenges while developing policies that safeguard access to health care. For families already facing financial hardship, maintaining insurance coverage meant avoiding additional uncertainty, delayed treatment, and potentially overwhelming medical expenses.

Expanding Access Beyond Illinois

The Center also partnered with the State of Iowa to help lawmakers develop an affordable, comprehensive health care program for children at all income levels, extending its advocacy beyond Illinois.

Impact

Holding Congress Accountable

The Shriver Center's interactive 2021 Poverty Scorecard evaluated members of Congress based on their votes on major poverty-related legislation. Each senator and representative received a grade from A+ to F, giving the public a clear picture of how elected officials addressed issues affecting low-income families. By making voting records accessible and understandable, the Scorecard encouraged transparency, informed civic participation, and greater accountability in federal policymaking.

Turning Legal Knowledge into Results

In its forty-second year, the Clearinghouse Review: Journal of Poverty Law and Policy remained an essential resource for attorneys and advocates serving low-income communities. Through legal analysis, practical strategies, and policy guidance, the publication helped professionals address complex challenges. Its impact was demonstrated when an attorney from the Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberlands reported that one article helped secure benefits for hundreds of rural clients affected by state clerical errors.

Protecting the Rights of Older Adults

Special issues included Let Elders Age Independently and with Dignity, offering practical strategies to protect older adults' rights, independence, and well-being. These publications equipped legal professionals with tools to address inequality and advance economic and social justice.



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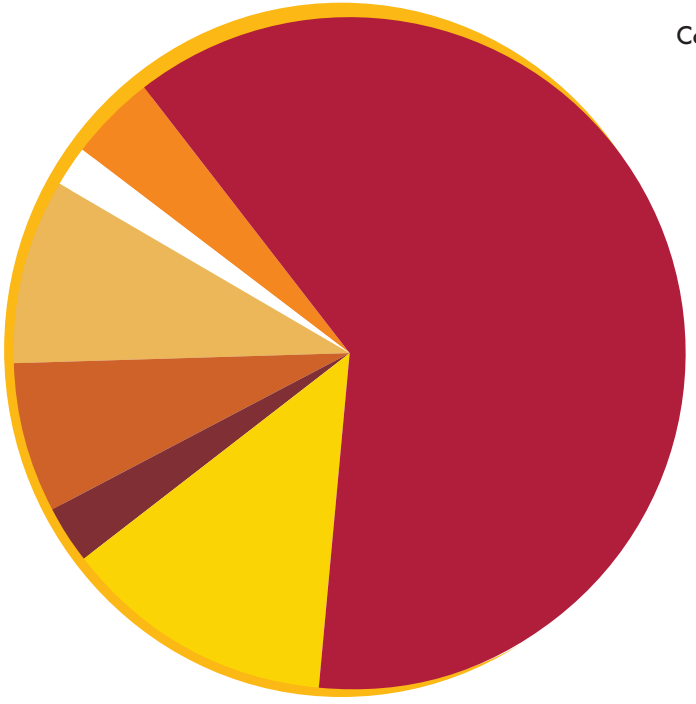
The Shriver Center thanks its generous donors for their continued support and commitment to its mission. Their contributions help advance meaningful change and expand opportunities for families facing poverty. This generosity strengthens the Center's ability to advocate for social and economic justice.

Special thanks go to the Taproot Foundation and the volunteers who contributed to the 2021 Annual Report. Their dedication, creativity, and expertise were essential to bringing this publication to life.

The project team included Kathi Boyd, Project Manager; Simone Esubi, Marketing Manager; Nathalie Gribinski, Graphic Designer; and Allison Rong, Strategy Analyst.

Cristina Rutter served as Photographer, Kara Spak as Copywriter/Editor, and Ruth Young as Account Director.

2021 Shriver Center Total Revenue (in percentages)



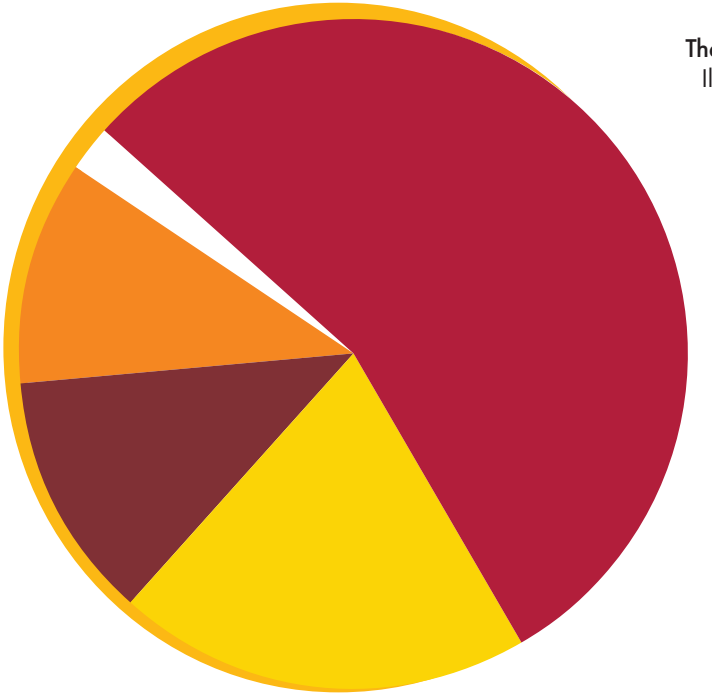
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Contributions, grants, and pledges receivable are periodically reviewed for collectability. Uncollectible amounts are written off when identified. Management believes receivables are collectible in all material respects, and no allowance for doubtful accounts has been recorded unless otherwise indicated.

Grants	62%
Individual Donors	13%
Special Events	9%
Subscription Revenue	7%
Other Revenues	4%
Donated Goods and Services	3%
Fellowship Grants	2%

2021 Shriver Center Total Expenses (in percentages)



The advocacy unit works to reduce poverty through policy development and legal advocacy in Illinois and around the United States, promoting economic opportunities and eliminating barriers to economic advancement.

The communication programs unit uses a variety of communication techniques to promote the best and most efficient practices in using law and policy to end poverty.

Management and general expenses provide for resources needed to support the overall operations and management of the Shriver Center, and include costs associated with the Board of Directors, financial management, administrative support, technology support, human resources administration, maintenance of office facilities and procurement and maintenance of office supplies and equipment.

Fundraising provides the structure necessary to encourage and secure private financial support from individuals, foundations, and corporations.

Advocacy	55%
Communications	20%
Fundraising	12%
Management and General	11%
Cost of Direct Benefits to Donors	2%

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The Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law works to advance social and economic justice for people living in poverty. The Center provides national leadership by developing creative, collaborative solutions that address the root causes of inequality.

Through advocacy campaigns in Illinois and across the country, the Center works to strengthen policies and programs that affect everyday life. Its work focuses on issues such as housing, health care, asset building, job training, and public benefits.

Beyond these initiatives, the Center also promotes broader principles of justice, opportunity, and human rights. By bringing together advocates, policymakers, and communities, it helps create lasting solutions that expand opportunity and build a more equitable society.

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