



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Blagojevich Budget Cuts a Double-Whammy for State's Economy**

*Lutheran Social Services of Illinois joins growing list  
of drug treatment providers announcing job cuts*

**(CHICAGO)** Governor Rod Blagojevich's veto of funding for Illinois' human services programs is adding to the state's economic troubles, according to one of the state's largest human services providers. Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) announced today that it is being forced to slash programs and lay off 27 employees due to the governor's cuts, adding to the state's skyrocketing unemployment rate. Those cuts are a result of the elimination of \$55 million in funding for existing drug and alcohol treatment programs, which LSSI says are essential in a down-turning economy.

"With half a million Illinoisans unemployed, common sense tells you that it's going to be harder for those trying to recover from addiction to find work and stay drug- and alcohol-free," said the Rev. Dr. Frederick Aigner, LSSI's president and CEO. "That's why we are joining with non-profit community organizations across the state to urge the Illinois House to restore funding for all human services programs when they return to Springfield this week."

On Friday, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) announced that national unemployment rose four-tenths of a percent in August, to 6.1 percent, its highest rate in five years. While BLS has not released state-by-state figures yet, July figures pegged Illinois' unemployment rate at 7.3 percent, with 491,300 unemployed, the fourth-highest unemployment rate in the nation.

Most of LSSI's cuts come to six residential treatment programs in Chicago and Elgin, which will lose 21 treatment staff members and be forced to turn away one in four patients. In addition, LSSI is being forced to close Project SAFE, located in Chicago. Project SAFE protects children and strengthens and reunites families by providing drug and alcohol treatment for mothers through the

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Department of Children and Family Services. Due to the governor's cuts, funding for Project SAFE was completely eliminated, jeopardizing children's safety and adding six more to Illinois' unemployment rolls.

LSSI and non-profit community organizations across the state hope that Illinois lawmakers will reverse the cuts when they return to Springfield this week to consider Governor Blagojevich's borrowing plan for construction projects. LSSI supports a bipartisan plan to restore human services funding being advanced by budget leaders from both chambers, State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz (D-Chicago) and State Sen. Jeffrey Schoenberg (D-Evanston). Their plan would sweep \$400 million in excess funding from a range of set-asides for special interest programs, and use those funds to restore human services programs to last year's spending levels. LSSI says the legislature must enact the plan quickly to enable service providers to reverse cuts being made across the state.

"As lawmakers return to Springfield to consider major spending for our physical infrastructure, voters need to remind them to protect our most important resource: our families," Aigner said. "Illinois can't wait until next year or even after the next election for lawmakers to do the right thing. Once our highly skilled treatment staff move on to other jobs, providers close programs and cancel leases, and people in need have fallen through the cracks and hit bottom, the damage is already done," concluded Aigner.

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**About Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI)**

Founded in October 1867, LSSI is a statewide, not-for-profit social service agency of the three Illinois synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. LSSI serves people through an array of services at 89 sites across Illinois. LSSI provides substance abuse treatment programs and services at sites in Chicago, Dixon, Elgin, Schaumburg and Sterling.