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With new legislative leadership in Springfield....

Forward Illinois Coalition Outlines Progressive Agenda for 2021 Legislative Session

Due to shortened 2020 session, new leadership makes passing progressive priorities more urgent than ever

SPRINGFIELD - On Tuesday, March 9, members of Forward Illinois - a coalition of major advocacy organizations and labor unions united around a progressive vision for our state - outlined, in a virtual press conference, a progressive agenda for Illinois to be achieved during the 2021 legislative session.

“This bold progressive policy agenda demonstrates the Forward Illinois commitment to our shared values of inclusion, opportunity, equity, justice, security, and the freedom to be who you are without burden or discrimination. Illinois has come so far, but there is still more work to do,” said Myles Brady Davis, Director of Communications at Equality Illinois. “For instance, 30 states require personal health and safety education, but Illinois is not one of them. The REACH Act (HB 1736 and SB 647) would require age-appropriate, comprehensive, and inclusive personal health and safety education for K-12 public schools in Illinois. Why is the REACH Act important for Forward Illinois? Because we are united in seeking to build a better Illinois and ensuring affirming, safe, and inclusive environments – inside the classroom, but also in our neighborhoods, too. Illinois must keep moving forward in 2021.”

“The Block Illegal Gun Ownership (BIO) and Fix the FOID Bill SB568/HB3245 will curb the flow of illegal guns - like the ones used to kill two of my children - to communities by expanding background checks to all gun sales.” Said gun violence survivor and GVP IL advocate Delphine Cherry. She continued “It also will allocate funding for mental health services in the communities, like mine in Hazel Crest, that have been the most impacted by gun violence. I also support the Forward Illinois Agenda because every organization here is pursuing policies that will deter violence and even the playing field.”

“When we exclude people from our democracy, we allow for their needs to go unheard. Silencing those directly impacted by incarceration perpetuates further injustice. Restoring the right to vote to people in prison, people who are enduring daily injustices, is a necessary step to dismantling harmful systems,” said Chicago Votes communications and digital strategy manager Katrina Phidd. “Like all of legislation included in Forward Illinois’ agenda—the Clean Energy Jobs Act, the BIO and Fix the FOID bill, and the REACH act—Voting In Prison is bold and extremely

necessary. And bold action is exactly what Illinois needs to become a fairer, more equitable, and more progressive state.”

“The Clean Energy Jobs Act (HB804/SB1718) is a comprehensive plan to get Illinois to a 100% clean energy future in ways that center equity and prioritize jobs and new business opportunities for those who need it most - communities of color and those facing the transition from fossil fuels,” said Jack Darin, director of the Sierra Club, Illinois Chapter. “Sierra Club is proud to be a part of Forward Illinois because we know protecting the environment includes protecting each other from discrimination, injustice, violence, and poverty; and by working together we can mobilize hundreds of thousands of Illinoisans to pass this agenda and move Illinois forward.”

“SEIU HCII stands with Forward Illinois, because we need to implement progressive and fair solutions to balance the budget in a way that preserves, protects, and expands essential services,” said Beth Menz, Vice President of the Home Care Division for SEIU Healthcare Illinois & Indiana. “We need to use progressive revenue measures that do not balance the budget on the back of our Black and brown communities. We must avoid cuts to vital programs and services, as these are more desperately needed now than ever before. We need to make bold investments in the resources and support structures that will enable a full recovery for all of Illinois - a recovery that includes the essential workers who continue to put their lives on the line every day to provide crucial services to our state’s most vulnerable.”

Included in this package are the Clean Energy Jobs Act, the REACH Act, and the Block Illegal Ownership and Fix the FOIA Bill, which coalition members urge legislators to pass. The coalition is also ready to hold legislators accountable for their votes against these key issues.

During a period of rapid change in Springfield, the largest advocacy organizations in the state are uniting across issues to push major progressive policies forward as well as a budget that protects working families from hurtful cuts. By sharing and promoting this agenda, Forward Illinois wants state legislators to recognize and pass the coalition's legislative priorities that will keep Illinois moving forward.

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Participating members of Forward Illinois include Equality Illinois, Sierra Club Illinois Chapter, Planned Parenthood Illinois Action, Gun Violence Prevention Illinois, Local 881 UFCW, Chicago Votes Action Fund, SEIU Illinois State Council and SEIU Healthcare Illinois Indiana.