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FROM THE OFFICE OF STATE REPRESENTATIVE LA SHAWN K. FORD

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For More Information:

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Ford Urges Quinn to Lead the Charge to End Incarceration of Low-Level, Non-Violent Drug Offenders

CHICAGO – In an effort to reduce crime and protect taxpayer dollars, state Rep. La Shawn Ford, D-Chicago, introduced a resolution calling on the governor and urging against the sentencing of low level drug offenders to jail.

“Throwing people in jail for low-level drug offenses takes up needed resources for other state services and prevents those suffering from addiction from receiving the help that they need to turn their lives around,” Ford said. “We have to help people to be self-sufficient and often sending someone to jail or prison for non-violent crimes only puts them on a path that leads right back to jail.”

Ford’s legislation requests that the governor discourage prosecutors from recommending and judges from sentencing low level drug offenders to jail. Ford asks the governor and the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) to have low level drug offenders that are currently serving sentences in IDOC facilities released to home confinement, which would be a more cost-effective alternative to incarceration. House Resolution 1069 awaits action in the House.

“Drug addiction is a disease and should be treated as such,” Ford said. “It’s time that we update our laws to fairly match the crime committed and provide the support that people struggling with addiction need. This initiative is also supported by many federal, county and city leaders that are calling to end this system of mass incarceration at the expense of tax payers. Our justice system must reflect fairness and justice for everyone and that means budgeting for best results and outcome. I encourage my fellow legislators to stand with me and urge the governor and our state departments to end this system of injustice and help people to get better instead of leading them into a life of crime.”

According to a study by Roosevelt University’s Illinois Consortium on Drug Policy, about 93 percent of misdemeanor marijuana possession offenses end in arrest in Chicago. A 2004 survey by the U.S. Department of Justice estimated that 70 percent of state and 64 percent of federal prisoners used drugs prior to incarceration and that 1 in 4 violent offenders in state prisons committed their offenses under the influence of drugs.

Ford has spearheaded a number of initiatives to improve our justice system and provide support services to communities in need, including legislation to remove criminal background pre-screening questions on state employment applications and decriminalizing possession of small amounts of marijuana. Additionally Rep. Ford is the chair of the House Committee on Restorative Justice that is hosting a hearing on the issue in Springfield, Thursday.

For more information on substance abuse and how to receive treatment, contact the Department of Human Services helpline at 1-866-213-0548. Please contact one of Ford’s constituent service offices for any questions or concerns on state issues at 4800 W. Chicago Avenue in Chicago at 773-378-5902 or 239-E Stratton Office Building in Springfield at 217-782-5962.

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