



June 2, 2021

## Final Days of Our General Assembly Session

I want to offer some personal reflections on this spring's General Assembly following our adjournment. As we continue to deal with the short and long-term impacts of the pandemic, it was critically important that we pass a budget that prioritizes investment in communities that have been hit hard. Not only was it crucial for us to invest in education, small businesses, and health care, we had to focus on protecting essential services that our most vulnerable rely on.

I appreciate our efforts to offer rental assistance and other lifelines to ensure families can stay in their homes, but more work remains to be done. The coronavirus pandemic has disproportionately impacted people of color, and we have to make sure our communities are not forgotten as we begin our path of recovery.

In recent months, the General Assembly and governor have taken critically important steps in criminal justice reform and other initiatives to improve the lives of Black residents here in Illinois who have been overlooked for far too long. We need to recognize the effective leadership of our first Black Speaker of the Illinois House of Representatives, Speaker Emanuel "Chris" Welch. We cannot just say that 'we have made progress regarding racial disparities, but there is much more to do.' We cannot just look at the past or the future. We have to identify racist systems right now in the present, seize the moment that is ours, and do all we can to change these systems to create equity and improvement in the lives of Blacks and other people of color.

After a decade of advocacy, we finally reversed the process of 'prison gerrymandering' that unfairly counted state prisoners in districts far from their homes. We also corrected errors in the rollout of cannabis legalization to make the industry more diverse and ensure minority communities receive the investment they deserve. Powerfully, our state is also now on the verge of finally recognizing Juneteenth as an official state holiday.

The passage of these initiatives underscores the value of advocacy, civic engagement, and making your voice heard. There is a lot of work left to do, but I am encouraged and optimistic that the will is there to improve the lives of all residents in Illinois, no matter their background. I am thankful for the opportunity to serve as your voice in Springfield for Austin and the Near West Suburbs. I look forward to continuing to work with you, my fellow Illinoisans. Please do not hesitate to contact me at [repford@lashawnford.com](mailto:repford@lashawnford.com) with your comments, ideas, and suggestions.

Sincerely,

La Shawn K. Ford  
State Representative-Eighth District