



July 24, 2019

## Illinois DHS Secretary Grace Hou Visits Austin

The Department of Human Services is one of Illinois' largest agencies, with more than 13,000 employees and a \$6 billion budget. Illinois created IDHS in 1997 to provide our state's residents with streamlined access to integrated services, especially those who are striving to move from welfare to work and economic independence, and others who face multiple challenges to self-sufficiency. The department's vision for Illinois is to have healthy, independent people of Illinois living in safe, strong communities, with a mission to strengthening Illinois by building up lives and communities. This is why on Tuesday, July 23, 2019, we welcomed Grace B. Hou, Secretary of the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) to Austin. As it turns out, Secretary Hou visited the West Side on the same day that President Trump announced that he is prepared to sign a farm bill on July 24, 2019, that will likely force many more food stamp recipients to prove that they are working if they want to continue receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, or food stamps.

The Illinois General Assembly recently passed a \$45 billion spending budget and a \$45 billion construction capital bill to rebuild Illinois. That's why it's important to invite and have a good relationship with Illinois' secretary of Human Services – we need to work with DHS to ensure that resources come to the West Side where they are needed. The median household income for Austin was \$31,435, in contrast to \$47,831 for the city as a whole. Our area's residents were disproportionately lower-income, with 41.0% of residents earned less than \$25,000; 27.6% of residents earned between \$25,000 and \$49,999; 14.1% earned between \$50,000 and \$74,999; 8.0% earned between \$75,000 and \$99,999; 6.4% earned between \$100,000 and \$149,999; and 2.9% earned \$150,000 or more. There were 41,807 residents in the labor force. 18.9% of workers were employed in the healthcare industry; 11.3% were employed in retail; 11% were employed in administration; 8.4% worked in education; and 8.3% worked in hospitality and food services. The area had an unemployment rate of 22.1%.

This is why the Secretary and I walked the community - to give her a true pulse of our community. We agreed to help the Illinois Department of Human Services live up to the vision and mission of the agency. Secretary Hou agreed to help bring resources to the Austin community to deal with childcare, health care, employment, and to work with the West Side Heroin/Opioid Task Force.

Sincerely,

La Shawn K. Ford  
State Representative-Eighth District