

Voice of the People

A Chicago Tribune blog for letters to the editor

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Empowering women with tax reform

Usually, when one hears the words 'tax policy' or 'tax reform,' we anticipate a long, dry lecture filled with jargon like 'graduated rates,' and 'most regressive taxes in the nation.' But what if tax reform actually meant racial justice and the empowerment of women? Would we pay more attention?

The benefits of increasing the Illinois Earned Income Tax Credit are many, primarily because it makes an immediate, material impact on the family who receives it. Low-income families making less than \$16,000 a year pay over 13 percent of their income in state and local taxes, while those earning more than \$300,000 pay *less than* 6 percent in state and local taxes. A modest increase would put more money in their pockets and make its way back to the community.

The opportunity to create real tax reform is much more than a good public policy idea when you examine who would benefit most from the Illinois EITC increase – it becomes a response to the cries for racial justice and women's economic empowerment.

Black and Latino households are located almost entirely in 'low opportunity' communities in metropolitan Chicago and our surrounding suburbs. Greater Grand Crossing, West Garfield and North Lawndale, primarily Black and Hispanic communities, are neighborhoods where the poverty rate for families is over 30 percent and the median family income is either below \$25,000 annually or between \$25,000 and \$30,000 annually. Imagine the renewal that could take place in these communities of color if its working families could keep more of their income to support themselves and their children.

We believe when a woman is able to provide a stable life for her family, her individual success has far-reaching effects on her surrounding community. However, a present-day snapshot of working women paints a devastating portrait for an entire generation of women entering the workforce. The Eleanor Foundation reported that nearly 300,000 women and children in Chicago live in female-headed households with a total income of \$10,000 and \$30,000. Nearly 90 percent of these women of the working poor work at least 20 hours per week and 65 percent work full-time or more, with most of them working in office or administrative support jobs.

The unifying vision of YWCA Metropolitan Chicago, and one we would like to urge upon our leaders in Springfield, is that communities of color and all women in Chicago have the capacity to transform their own lives and revive the economic life of some of our most vulnerable neighborhoods, thereby benefiting us all. With a modest increase in our state's Earned Income Tax Credit, this ambitious, progressive and socially just dream could become a reality.

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