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February 5, 2013

**A STATEMENT TO THE GOVERNOR AND MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL
ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS
FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF
METROPOLITAN CHICAGO**

Although pension reform has not been our highest priority as the leaders of religious organizations in Illinois, we are writing to urge you to find a fair and effective solution to this urgent issue now.

If the State's unfunded pension obligations are left unaddressed or even delayed, many of the other matters that have our highest concern will suffer immeasurably. And we believe that any solution must be fair to all public employees, reflecting appreciation for their public service and providing for their secure retirement.

That makes pension reform a moral issue of great importance in itself and for what it portends in relation to the adequate funding of programs on which all residents of Illinois depend for their life and health, for the education of their children, for their social and economic well-being individually, as families, and communities.

We profess no expertise in the field of pension financing. We can only plead that any adopted plan be based on rigorous actuarial analysis, provide a long-term solution, and avoid leaving public employees with low pension benefits in poverty, even if that requires ongoing means testing and adjustable benefits in order to meet their basic financial needs.

However questionable the processes and solutions for pensions have been in the past, we are concerned that public employees themselves not be demonized in the current deliberations. The sins of commission and omission that have led to our current situation must be shared by a wider circle of political leaders and citizens.

We expect that a new plan will be one that provides revenues for both a viable and just pension system for public employees and that funds public policies in other areas that advance the common good for all residents of the State and adequately meets the needs of the most vulnerable among us.

We trust you will be guided by a strong sense of public morality as you now address this issue that has been so long in the making.

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The Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago (CRLMC), a non-profit organization, is comprised of the head religious leadership of practically every major religious tradition in the broader Chicago area, representing nearly six million people. Through its work, the CRLMC speaks with a unified moral voice on issues of the day; creates a climate of better interfaith understanding and cooperation; and participates in programs which advance its work.