

Honorable Senator Manar
119A Capitol Building
Springfield, IL 62706

Honorable Representative Burke
246 W-Stratton Office Building
Springfield, IL 62706

April 17, 2018

Dear Illinois Legislature,

As groups that represent, work with, and hire students from across Illinois, we know that today's students are collectively facing fundamental challenges with accessing Illinois' higher education system. After over a decade of cuts, Illinois has the fifth highest tuition in the country.ⁱ Illinois has historically offset this high tuition with a strong need-based aid program (Monetary Award Program or MAP Grants) that ensured low-income families had access. Yet, MAP Grants today only serve 42 percent of those who are eligibleⁱⁱ and covers 32 percent of the cost at public universities.ⁱⁱⁱ The rising costs are hitting low-income students the hardest. Middle-class families in Illinois set aside twenty-five percent of their total income for a student to attend a four-year institution; *for low-income families, it's sixty-three percent.*^{iv}

The results of this inequitable system are startling. Illinois is the second largest exporter of students to out-of-state colleges, with freshman enrollment dropping at nine of Illinois' 11 universities by as much as 11 percent.^v African-American student enrollment dropped by 25 percent between 2011 and 2015,^{vi} and the college degree attainment gap between African-Americans and whites is 18 percent and 27 percent between Hispanic-Latinx and whites.^{vii}

The health of Illinois' economy depends on creating an educated workforce. In recognition of the growing importance of a college degree, Illinois committed in 2009 to increasing the proportion of adults in Illinois with a college degree or postsecondary credential to 60 percent by 2025.^{viii} The goal is critical for young adults and employers. Eighty percent of Illinois employers report needing employees with some postsecondary training.^{ix} Unemployment drops and income rises with more education. For people holding a high school degree, their median annual earnings are over \$28,000 and the unemployment rate is 9.5 percent.^x For people holding an associate's degree, their median annual earnings are \$36,000 and the unemployment rate is 5.3 percent.^{xi} It is clear Illinois does better when people hold degrees that lead to careers.

Illinois can increase access to higher education and careers for young adults of color and young adults from low-income communities by increasing funding for MAP Grants. The MAP program serves high-need, underrepresented populations: 56 percent are first-generation college students and the average annual family income is \$33,632.^{xii} MAP Grants are effective with MAP recipients graduating college at about the same rate as their peers at the same institutions.^{xiii} Yet the biggest challenge facing MAP is that the program is underfunded.

We, the undersigned group of stakeholders, call on the legislature to provide these students the chance to succeed by supporting the Illinois Board of Higher Education's request for a \$100 million increase in

funding for MAP Grants.^{xiv} This would allow more students to receive the aid they need to enroll and complete their education and secure a career.

Sincerely,

Afterschool for Children and Teens Now (ACT Now)

Bottom Line

Chicago Citywide Literacy Coalition

Children's Home and Aid

College Possible

Illinois Collaboration on Youth

National Louis University

One Million Degrees

OneGoal

Partnership for College Completion

Rosecrance

Start to Finish Coalition

Strengthening Chicago's Youth

United Way of Illinois

United Way of Metro Chicago

Voices for Illinois Children

Women Employed

YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago

Young Invincibles

Youth Guidance

Sources

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- ⁱⁱ "Why MAP Matters," *Illinois Student Assistance Commission*, Accessed February 6, 2018, <http://www.isac.org/home/map-matters/why-map-matters.html>
- ⁱⁱⁱ "Basic ISAC Program Data", *Illinois Student Assistance Commission*, January 2018, 4, http://www.isac.org/e-library/research-policy-analysis/documents/2017_Basic_ISAC_Program_Data.pdf
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- ^v Dawn Rhodes, "Falling public university enrollment shows effects of state budget impasse," *Chicago Tribune*, September 12, 2017, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/ct-state-university-enrollment-drops-met-20170912-story.html>
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- ^{viii} "The 60% by 2025 Goal for Illinois," *Illinois Board of Higher Education Data Points*, February 2017, <http://legacy.ibhe.org/DataPoints/60x2025Goal2017.pdf>
- ^{ix} "60 by 25 Network - About," *60 by 25 Network*, Accessed April 2, 2018, <http://60by25.org/about/>
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- ^{xi} Ibid.
- ^{xii} "MAP Matters," *Illinois Student Assistance Commission*, Accessed February 10, 2018, <http://www.isac.org/home/map-matters/map-facts.html>
- ^{xiii} Ibid.
- ^{xiv} Bowman, Al, and Tom Cross. "In Amazon Race, Illinois' Trump Card Is Its University System." *Crain's Chicago Business*, March 9, 2018. <http://www.chicagobusiness.com/article/20180309/OPINION/180309858?template=printart>.