

# Young Invincibles 2017 Policy Priorities for Illinois

Illinois has gone without a full budget since July of 2015, leaving millions of young Illinoisans without critically needed state supports. At the same time that services are disappearing, young adults across the state face high youth unemployment, skyrocketing tuition, and disproportionately high uninsurance rates.<sup>1</sup> Not only has tuition soared, but the state has also cut the average grant for low-income students by 28% during a time when higher education has become more important than ever to access high quality employment opportunities.<sup>2</sup> Illinois' recovery from the recession has lagged behind the rest of the country with slower than average job growth.<sup>3</sup> These challenges may have contributed to tens of thousands' young adults decision to move away from Illinois.<sup>4</sup> Our budget crisis has made a tough economy worse for Millennials, and has hit vulnerable populations the hardest.

Throughout the past year, Young Invincibles heard directly from hundreds of Millennials from across Illinois about the biggest pocketbook challenges in their lives. Young adults expressed the need for greater higher education access and accountability and more youth employment opportunities, as well as access to health services to undocumented individuals. The policy platform we put forth addresses some of the biggest barriers holding back young adults.

Although the state's tight fiscal outlook makes it difficult to fully enact our recommendations, decision-makers can put Illinois on the right path by passing a budget and making a down payment on our policy recommendations. Unless we provide Millennials access to basic services, we are failing to set young adults up to be the future leaders capable of driving the state's economy forward. As we enter our second year of budget stalemate, we hope to see the state take proactive, positive steps that put young adult perspectives at the forefront.

## **HIGHER EDUCATION**

Illinois' higher education system is crumbling following a decade of disinvestment. Student enrollment plummeted at regional universities across the state, with some freshman classes shrinking by 25 percent from the previous year.<sup>5</sup> This hurts campuses in the near term and the brain drain threatens the state's long-term economic prospects.

***Pass a fully funded, responsible budget that supports students with the higher education funding they need to succeed.***

Illinois has the fifth highest tuition in the country, and the average four-year public university graduate leaves with almost \$30,000 in student debt.<sup>6</sup> Over the last decade, in-state tuition at four-year universities has skyrocketed by 57 percent.<sup>7</sup> Budget cuts and corresponding tuition increases have hit students hard. Illinois's need-based Monetary Award Program (MAP) has long been a source of pride for the state, helping low-income and working class students from across Illinois to pay for college. Currently more than 128,000 students receive support through the program.<sup>8</sup> However, rising tuition and state disinvestment have meant that the average MAP Grant doesn't go as far today as

it did a decade ago.<sup>9</sup> The recent budget stalemate has left schools in crisis, forced to lay off faculty and close programs. It has also left MAP Grants in limbo, leaving our neediest students vulnerable. In order to support our students as they work to achieve economic stability, we need to pass a responsible budget that allocates enough funding to keep our schools open, our graduation numbers rising, and to ensure that the MAP Grant program is fully able to support the students who rely in it. This year, Illinois should move towards restoring spending to pre-recession levels by passing budget at or above FY 2015 levels.

### ***Provide students with increased access to the longitudinal data needed to make informed college and career decisions***

Illinois needs to provide students with the information needed to make educated decisions about where to attend school and what to study. We should provide students with reports and online tools that include information about tuition, costs, student loan default and repayment rates, degree completion rates, job placement information, admission standards and criteria, and overall career outcomes, building on a framework created by the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association.<sup>10</sup> The format of these reports should be tailored carefully to meet the needs of the audience, with the consumer-facing report geared at providing students with data in a straightforward, accessible way that has been focus-grouped with diverse groups of young adults. This relatively low-cost policy would increase transparency and enable greater accountability of higher education institutions.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Make need-based aid available to students regardless of immigration status***

Undocumented students are currently ineligible to receive federal student aid, Pell grants, Illinois MAP Grants and other forms of state-based financial aid.<sup>12</sup> However, federal law allows individual state legislatures to offer undocumented students eligibility for state financial aid. Illinois already invests in primary and secondary education for undocumented students. During the 2016 legislative session, the revenue-neutral Student ACCESS Bill, which would have provided four-year institutions the freedom to award need-based aid to undocumented students passed in the Senate but narrowly failed to pass in the House.<sup>13</sup> Illinois needs to revisit this critical bill in 2017 - providing this access to aid will help up to 1,500 students a year complete their degrees and become productive members of the workforce.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Hold hearing on student parents' needs, including access to on-campus child care***

Education is a key pathway toward economic security and is essential for competing in today's job market in Illinois, but accessing higher education remains uniquely challenging for young parents. Around a quarter of all postsecondary students nationally are parents, and 43 percent of student parents are single moms.<sup>15</sup> Simultaneous cuts to higher education and child care spending in Illinois have left student parents in a uniquely vulnerable situation. Currently only two schools in Illinois received federal Child Care Access Means Parents in School Program (CCAMPIS) funding, leaving the vast majority of our state's campuses with severely-limited child care options for student parents.<sup>16</sup> Illinois should explore how the state can support student parents by hosting a hearing on the specific set of challenges that student parents face on the ground.

## ***Targeted campus-based advising services***

Students from low-income families benefit the most from academic and financial counseling, yet have the lowest access to the counseling services crucial for their ability to enroll in and complete college.<sup>17</sup> Campuses can address this by preserving counseling services during the budget impasse, seeking innovative solutions, and targeting resources to Monetary Award Program (MAP) grant-eligible students. Roughly 40 percent of MAP grant recipients do not graduate with a degree within six years.<sup>18</sup> Institutions should set minimum counseling requirements for MAP grant students, boosting the likelihood that the state's scarce need-based aid is used effectively. Recognizing that over half of MAP grant applicants do not receive aid, institutions should also prioritize serving students from low-income families.<sup>19</sup>

This strategy is an important step, though not the final destination. The MAP Task Force, charged in 2012 with considering new rules for MAP grants, recommended that MAP grant and other high-need students receive special advising prior to enrolling and throughout college.<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, the higher education system needs higher advisor-student ratios, but until this is possible with the passage of a budget, institutions should use limited resources wisely, prioritizing the needs of under-resourced students.

## ***Create an Equity-Based Improvement Model***

Illinois should ensure MAP grants are used well by tackling predatory practices and setting low-performing institutions on the pathway to improvement. As public investment in higher education has dwindled, leaders including former-President Obama and the University of Illinois have suggested performance-based funding to incent colleges to use scarce resources wisely and invest in activities that drive improvement.<sup>21</sup> Performance-based funding often fails to recognize differences in resources and challenges across institutions and can penalize colleges serving mostly high-need students rather than supporting improvement.<sup>22</sup> This is disconcerting because Minority Serving Institutions and higher education systems serving large numbers of first-generation and low-income students are important post-secondary entry points for underrepresented millennials. Yet institutions disproportionately serving high-need students typically have the fewest resources.<sup>23</sup> If Illinois moves towards performance-based funding, the state should create an equity-based approach that drives improvement, while avoiding penalizing institutions where poor-performance reflects limited resources relative to the needs of the student body.

At the same time, Illinois should recognize and address negligent, misleading practices occasionally employed by for-profit institutions.<sup>24</sup> Low-income African American students are more likely to attend for-profit colleges, and some of these institutions target and mislead young people of color.<sup>25</sup> The federal government addresses this practice through the Gainful Employment rule.<sup>26</sup> This rule is not only under attack, but also missing critical student protections.<sup>27</sup> We recommend the state proactively identify for-profit colleges that mislead students and take corrective action.

## ***Ease the Transfer Process***

With roughly one-third of Illinois' community college students transferring to four-year institutions, transferring is a challenging process for many students, especially for first-generation students.<sup>28</sup> Challenges cited include difficulty in transferring credits and differences in curriculum.<sup>29</sup> Dual de-

gree and admissions are one promising solution, creating a clear pathway from community colleges into four-year programs. Students enroll in two programs and the transfer process is determined from the start. Dual degree and admission processes can bypass the issues of curriculum differences and ability to transfer credits, creating a direct, clear pathway for students.

## **EMPLOYMENT**

Illinois has the ninth highest youth unemployment rate.<sup>30</sup> Illinois residents' average unemployment period lasts 38.5 weeks, which is five weeks longer than the national average.<sup>31</sup> Low-income communities and people of color are particularly hard-hit. According to a 2014 study from the Urban League, just 16 out of 100 African-American male teenagers in Illinois are employed, and these rates are even lower in Chicago.<sup>32</sup> Resolving this issue will require a multifaceted, long-term strategy to overhaul the education and training pipeline and economic opportunity landscape. While the state's ongoing budget negotiations make a comprehensive approach unlikely, Illinois can move the needle by exploring expanding apprenticeships.

### ***Study the role the state can play in improving and expanding apprenticeships opportunities***

Apprenticeships provide individuals career training while receiving payment. By the time former apprentices reach age 65, projections suggest public benefits of \$23 for each \$1 invested.<sup>33</sup> Currently Illinois faces a middle skills jobs gap: 54 percent of jobs require more than a high school degree but less than a four-year diploma, yet only 48 percent of workers are trained at a middle-skill level.<sup>34</sup> Apprenticeships directly address this jobs gap and help ensure that employee training meets employer needs.

The Governor and his Cabinet for Children and Youth recently voted unanimously to make the Illinois Apprenticeship Plus Model a priority.<sup>35</sup> The Illinois Workforce Innovation Board is seeking federal support for expanding apprenticeships. Given apprenticeships' potential to provide jobs to a demographic struggling to secure employment and create qualified candidates for difficult to fill positions, the legislature should study how it can support the Apprenticeship Plus Model and the work of the Workforce Innovation Board.

## **HEALTH**

Young adults are less likely than older age groups to enroll in health care or feel confident in using the resource. In Illinois, approximately 14 percent of 18-34 year-olds lack insurance.<sup>36</sup> While the Affordable Care Act's passage has significantly cut the number of young adults without health insurance, the recent gain in coverage and care quality is at risk.

### ***Protect Expanded Medicaid and CHIP***

Since the rollout of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), more than 406,030 young adults between the ages of 18 and 34 in Illinois have enrolled in new health plans, reducing the uninsurance rate for young adults to 13 percent.<sup>37</sup> Across Illinois, consumers have benefitted from key ACA protections such as free preventive services, the elimination of annual and lifetime caps on coverage, and access to affordable coverage for individuals with pre-existing conditions. Proposed national changes to, or repeal of, the Affordable Care Act would leave newly covered young adults without coverage

once again. Illinois stands to lose 49.9 billion dollars in federal funding if the ACA is repealed.<sup>38</sup> State decision-makers in Illinois should send a strong message to federal policymakers on the critical need to protect health coverage for new enrollees across the state. Regardless of changes in federal health law, Illinois needs to protect expanded Medicaid coverage in full, in order to ensure

**About Young Invincibles:**

Young Invincibles is a non-profit dedicated to expanding economic opportunity for young adults ages 18-34, particularly those from low-income and underserved communities. We engage in outreach, public education, research, and policy analysis to tackle the employment, education, and health challenges facing this generation.

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## Endnotes

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