

# 2022 Illinois Policy Agenda

## Higher Education

### Meet Student Basic Needs

The available supports for students has been inadequate even before the pandemic, but not only are those problems now worse, there are also emerging challenges unique to students of color and low-income and first-generation students. Factors like money, jobs, family responsibilities, access to technology, and health concerns are compounded with the perennial challenges of balancing work, studies, and life, as we found in our [2020 report on student support services](#).

Students should have access to high-quality and effective services on campus such as tutoring and office hours with instructors, which should be available virtually should public health guidance deter in-person connection. These academic supports must be available for working students, students with children, and provide accommodations for students with disabilities. Students should also have access to affordable classroom materials such as textbooks.

Non-academic supports ensure students can enroll, engage, and thrive in a post-secondary environment. Non-academic supports such as child care, food security, housing assistance, and transportation all must be provided consistently, affordably, and timely for students. This work will require cooperation among higher education institutions, government, and community providers. YI will continue to advocate for better data collection of student parents, campus awareness of available resources, and other avenues to ensure students have their basic needs met and can concentrate on their education.

### Maintain Financial Aid Resources

Students must be able to afford a post-secondary education, but many simply cannot. Lawmakers must appropriate an additional \$122 million for Fiscal Year 2023 to fund the Monetary Award Program (MAP) grants. For first-generation students and students of color, MAP is even more critical; according to the Illinois Student Assistance Commission, about half of undergraduate students at Illinois' public universities who identify as Black or Hispanic receive a MAP grant, and over half of MAP recipients are first-generation college students. Additional financial assistance for BIPOC students such as the Minority Teachers of Illinois scholarship must also be funded.

### **Protect Students By Ensuring Institutional Accountability**

The newly-established Equitable Funding Commission must include students in various discussions and ensure recommendations are based on equity, data, and students' needs. All students in Illinois must have a high-quality education, and that begins with ensuring all higher education institutions have fair and equitable access to state funds.

### **Examine Black student enrollment rate at the University of Illinois**

Black residents are almost 15 percent of the state's population, but in 2019, they were only about six percent of University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign's undergraduate and graduate students. As the state's flagship system, the University of Illinois should be easily accessible to every state resident. YI will work with stakeholders to learn from Black students about possible solutions to increase Black student enrollment at multiple campuses at the University of Illinois.

## **Health Care/Mental Health**

### **Promote the adoption of best practices for mental health service delivery across the state's public colleges and universities to better meet student mental health needs**

Through our Mental Health on Campus Learning Collaborative established with NAMI Chicago, higher education institutions will share best practices, create connections, and overcome current challenges through five sessions dedicated to pressing topics for clinical staff and administrators. YI will ensure student voices are part of these conversations.

### **Fully fund the Mental Health on Campus Act to provide adequate mental health support to students statewide**

With full funding, the Mental Health Early Action on Campus law would provide a framework for colleges to improve and expand their services through partnerships with community providers, screening tools and online resources, staff training, peer support programs, student-to-clinician ratios, and a technical assistance center. YI will advocate for \$19 million for Fiscal Year 2023 to implement this law. This figure, based on a 2019 Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability report, must also be updated for the next few years to ensure the appropriate funding is allocated. This \$19 million appropriation is a critical investment in meeting student mental health needs and boosting college completion rates: students with mental health problems are twice as likely to drop out of college.

### **Disseminate accurate and useful information to young adults about their health care**

From a lack of transparency of mental health service costs to misinformation about the COVID-19 vaccine, young adults have a difficult time accessing the information they need to make the best choices for themselves. YI will continue to provide accurate information to young adults through outreach, community events, social media campaigns, and trainings.

## **Workforce Development & Financial Empowerment**

### **Establish baseline protections for young workers**

Young adults have experienced significant setbacks in the wake of the pandemic. To ensure young adults do not simply recover but thrive in the emerging economic reality, Illinois should adopt a Young Workers' Bill of Rights. Protections for gig workers, who are disproportionately young adults, and the right to access paid work-learning opportunities are among several key provisions that lawmakers should advance in worker-centered policies.

### **Furnish recommendations, with the Illinois Office of the Comptroller, to the Illinois General Assembly and the Office of the Governor on strengthening financial empowerment at public higher education institutions in Illinois**

Based on feedback from young adults, the YI team in 2021 partnered with young adults and financial education advocates to draft and advocate for legislation to improve the financial capability of young adults. The resulting advocacy led to the adoption of [the Financial Literacy for Students House Resolution](#), which calls on the Illinois Comptroller's Bank On Commission to develop recommendations for improving the financial capability of students enrolled in Illinois' public postsecondary institutions. Implementation with the Bank On Commission has already begun, and YI is thrilled to be a leader of these conversations.

### **Increase awareness of career pathway opportunities among frontline workers with foster youth and youth emerging from the justice system**

Training these frontline workers on apprenticeships and other career pathways could improve vulnerable young adults' awareness of and connection to meaningful work. These frontline workers must be able to disseminate information and help connect young adults to resources to enter and thrive in the workforce. YI will research any current obstacles and issue policy recommendations to better prepare youth exiting state systems.

### **Ensure the tax system works for young adults**

Tax policies undoubtedly impact young adults' financial health. However, biases against young workers are embedded within the tax system. The current tax system must be modernized and young adults must receive support to improve their tax-related decision-making processes. Specifically, young adults ages 18-24 must be eligible for the Earned Income Credit.

### **Advocate for state job barrier reduction funding with a carve out for young adults**

Illinois should create a fund or identify existing funding that helps low- and no-income jobseekers afford the transportation, equipment, child care, and other costs that workers encounter when they enter internships, apprenticeships, and other work-based learning programs. Federal assistance in 2021 was much needed, but now is the time to ensure these supports remain in place.