

2024 Illinois State Policy Agenda

YOUNG  INVINCIBLES

Overview

Young adults face a world in chaos. Whether it's inflation annihilating their economic security, a lack of affordable health care providers, or prohibitively expensive higher education, young adults 18-24 fear for their futures. Black, brown, and low-income young adults fare even worse by many measures. But young adult energy and optimism can alter the course of our country and state. Young Invincibles Midwest organized the following policy priorities for Illinois in 2024, with constant input from young adults directly impacted by higher education, health care, and workforce policies.

We began the process of formulating this policy agenda in July 2023, when YI gathered young adults at our annual Illinois Policy Summit. YI solicited real-time feedback from participants on barriers preventing their economic empowerment—and the solutions they demand to see. Following our conversations, we formulated major issues and points made by young adults and held a virtual Policy Summit alongside

young adults to ideate solutions together. Throughout the rest of the year, YI conducted surveys and held focus groups to expand and provide additional nuance to YI's policy agenda drafts. In November 2023, YI's Midwest Youth Advisory Board reviewed a final draft of this agenda to ensure it is aligned with young adults' priorities.

The following policy mandates from our constituency must be implemented immediately. We've been shortchanged and dismissed, but young adult energy and undeterred march towards justice will fuel progress in 2024.



Higher Education

1. **Elevate Student Voices for Equitable Systemic Funding**

All students, regardless of their socio-economic background, race, or ethnicity must have access to a supportive, high-quality public higher education in Illinois. The Commission on Equitable Public University Funding, housed within the Illinois Board of Higher Education, is tasked with furnishing recommendations to the Illinois General Assembly for a formula to equitably appropriate dollars amongst the state’s public universities. YI will advocate for a funding formula centered on equity, with student voices as the leading driver in informing the work. In the wake of the 2023 Supreme Court’s decision on affirmative action, it is more important than ever that students in Illinois have access to a high-quality education, and that begins with ensuring all public universities have adequate resources to support students of color, first-generation, and low-income students.

2. **Meeting Students’ Basic Needs for College Completion**

Students’ needs such as housing, transportation, food, and others must be addressed to ensure students are able to complete college. The available support for students’ college completion has long been inadequate, even before the pandemic, and the privatization of basic needs on campuses have led to skyrocketing costs. Not only are these problems getting worse, but new challenges unique to students of color, low-income, and first-generation students are also emerging. Factors like finances, job stability, family responsibilities, access to technology, and health concerns are compounded with the perennial challenges of balancing work, studies, and life.

It is necessary to ensure a student’s most basic needs are met. It can be difficult for a student to excel academically when they are struggling to adequately feed or house themselves. Aiding a student in meeting their basic needs through non-academic support ensures 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 promptly and timely for students. This work will require cooperation among higher education institutions, government, and community providers.

In 2022, Illinois enacted a law requiring a benefits navigator position at every public higher education institution in the state. This navigator will connect students with the appropriate benefits programs and additional resources to ensure basic needs are met. YI will continue to lead the work with students, institutions, legislators, advocates, and additional stakeholders to implement the law effectively.

3. **Maintain Financial Aid Resources to Improve College Affordability**

Students must be able to afford a post-secondary education, but many simply cannot. Historically, the Monetary Award Program (MAP) has been a critical state-based, need-based financial aid for thousands of students, but has been historically underfunded.

Last year, the General Assembly appropriated \$100 million to MAP, allowing community college students, with the help of PELL, to attend community college with tuition completely or almost completely covered. YI will continue to advocate for full funding for MAP to ensure all students who qualify for this grant receive the full amount.

MAP is critical for first generation, BIPOC, and low-income students; 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.

Health Care ---

1. **Fully Fund Campus Mental Health Supports to Invest in Health Care**
 The 2019 Mental Health Early Action on Campus Act must be fully funded annually. This law provides a framework for Illinois public colleges and universities to improve and expand their services through: partnerships with community providers, screening tools and online resources, staff training, peer support programs, improved student-to-clinician ratios, and assistance through a state-based technical assistance center. In May 2023, state lawmakers appropriated \$12.6 million for the implementation of the Act in the Fiscal Year 2024 state budget. However, a state commission has estimated that Illinois public institutions will require \$23 million in the next fiscal year to keep additional staff, continue trainings, and generally keep the work going. YI will advocate for continued, full funding for Fiscal Year 2025 to implement this law. Research has shown a direct link between student academic success and their mental wellbeing. Fully and continuously funding campus mental health services is not only necessary to meet today's student demands for mental health supports, but it is also an investment in Illinois' future economic prosperity.

2. **Expand Health Care Coverage to Undocumented Young Adults**
 Young adults, regardless of immigration status, deserve complete and affordable access to health insurance coverage, providers, and care. In 2020, Illinois became the first state in the nation to expand Medicaid-like coverage for undocumented, low-income senior citizens. Since then, program eligibility has expanded to include adults 42 years and older. Currently, all Illinois children 18 years old and younger are eligible for health care coverage through the state's All Kids program. This means that for undocumented young adults ages 19-41, there is no current option for health care coverage. YI will work with partners in the Healthy Illinois Campaign to expand the Health Benefits for Immigrant Adults program to undocumented young adults in Illinois. Health care is a human right and must not be contingent on immigration status, race, gender, or any other basis.

Workforce

1. **Improving Access to Apprenticeships and Workforce Outcomes**

Access to apprenticeships must be available for every young adult in the state. Apprenticeships can provide opportunities to learn valuable professional skills while earning a livable wage. For many, higher education may not be the most viable or attainable option, but all young adults deserve a pathway to good career options and professional success.

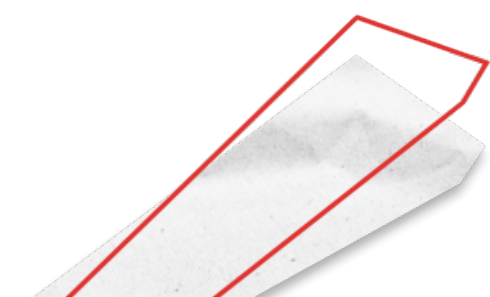
Illinois has taken important steps by establishing an apprenticeship system through the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and the Illinois Works Programs Act to ensure that women and people of color are adequately represented in the construction industry and the trades. However, less than 10 percent of apprentices are women or people of color. Illinois must find new methods to effectively improve access to apprenticeship programs and workforce outcomes for young women and people of color. As leaders of the Illinois Apprenticeship Collaborative, YI will advocate for improved access to apprenticeships and accountability for state spending on these programs, which when run efficiently, can provide a pathway to a stable livelihood for thousands of young adults.

2. **Establish Baseline Protections for Young Workers**

Young adults must have access to jobs which provide living wages, benefits, supports, and opportunities to grow. Young workers are often called upon to fill workforce gaps and help employers fill part-time, low-wage, or seasonal positions. And those who come from low-income communities and workers of color are disproportionately impacted by a lack of protections and quality jobs. They are struggling to reach financial security, stability in the workforce, and support to earn a job that comes with a livable wage and benefits. YI will advocate for every industry to generate and provide high-quality jobs that provide a living wage, access to generous benefits including protected time off, supports for child care, financial assistance for higher education, pathways to freely consider unionization, and opportunities to grow in their chosen career.

Young Worker Supports to Increase Young Adult Economic Power

3. Many young adults in low-income communities face barriers that prevent them from finding or keeping well-paying jobs that lead to stable careers. Without additional assistance, these young adults may spend years trying to secure economic prosperity. Young working parents often require additional supports because childcare costs have skyrocketed in recent years, leaving many young parents having to choose between a paycheck and child care. A Child Tax Credit (CTC) program must be expanded for workers in Illinois, and YI will advocate for fairer tax credits and fixes that help young workers, especially those with children and families of their own.





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