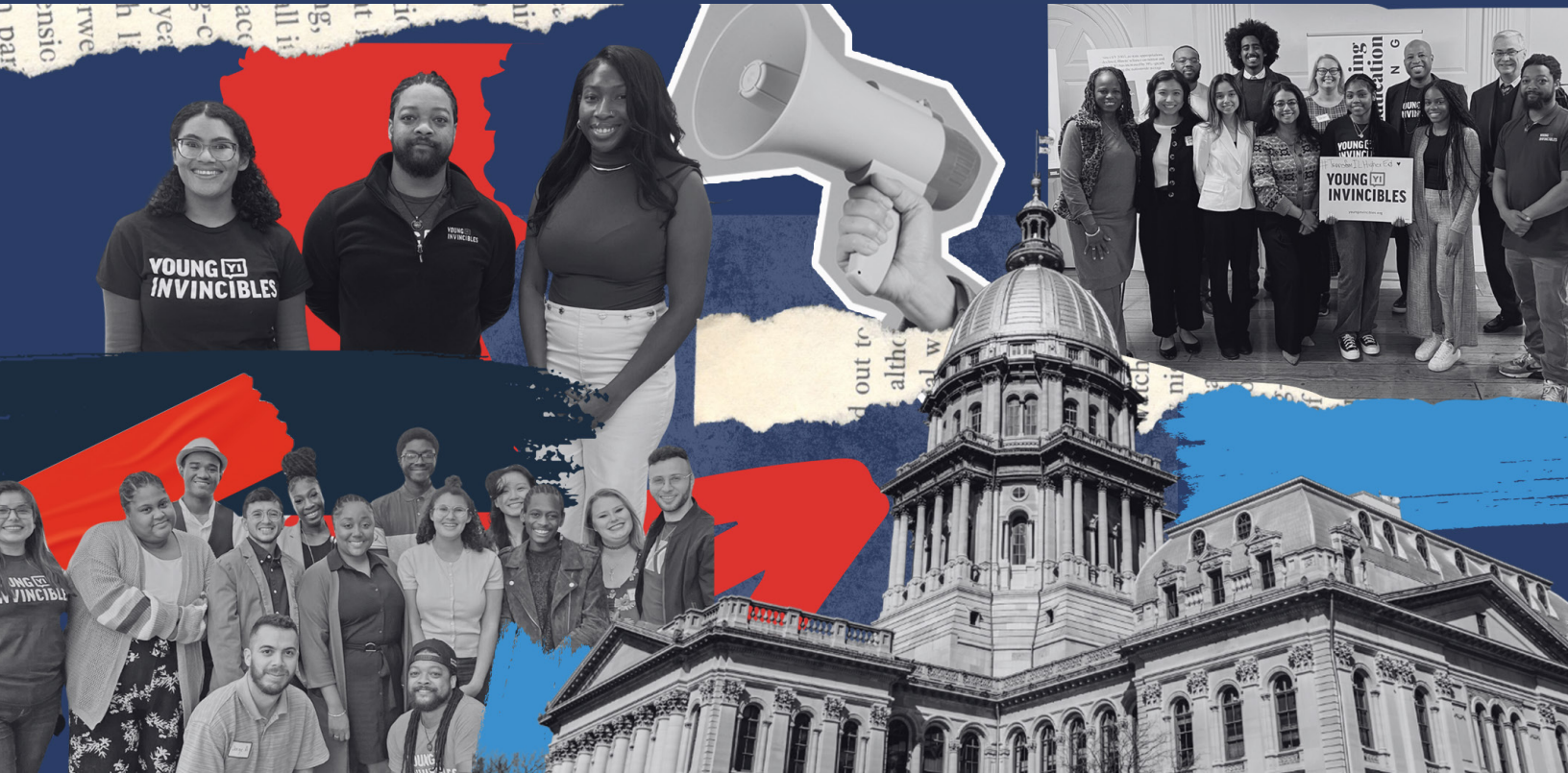


# Illinois State Policy Agenda



## 2025 Illinois State Policy Agenda

Young adults aged 18 to 34 years old are facing a daunting reality and complex challenges in society like no generation before them. We acknowledge the systematic and social barriers young adults face to achieve economic security, affordable health care, access to mental health services, forgiveness or cancellation of student debt, and access to higher education and postsecondary success. We believe young adult power and agency can, and will, alter the course of our country, state, neighborhoods and communities.

Our 2025 Illinois Policy Agenda was developed from direct and continuous input from young adults across the state. This includes input from our Young Advocates Program (YAP), Youth Advisory Board (YAB), and attendees of our annual Young Adult Policy Summit. We began this process by gathering young adults and advocates at our annual Policy Summit where we receive real-time feedback of the barriers they face and the solutions they demand to see across YI's issue areas: Higher Education, Workforce, Health Care and Civic Engagement. In addition, YI conducts surveys and holds focus groups of young adults to refine our agenda and ensure alignment with the wants of young adults. Each December, YI's Midwest Youth Advisory Board (YAB) reviews a final draft of this agenda to ensure it is aligned with young adults' priorities.

## Statement from Young Invincibles 2024 Illinois Youth Advisory Board

“Young adults today are navigating a complex and polarized political landscape. Fear and uncertainty is growing across communities, especially among marginalized groups. The possible erosion of rights, coupled with divisive rhetoric and harmful policies, threatens the well-being and future of many young adults. Despite these challenges, young people remain hopeful and determined. We recognize the importance of empathy, critical thinking, and collective action in our current political climate. We hope to build a more equitable and just future for all by advocating for social justice across healthcare, workforce, and higher education.”



YI Midwest is leading campaigns to ensure all students, regardless of their background, have access to postsecondary opportunities and success.

## **Establishing an Adequate and Equitable Funding Formula for Public Universities**

All students, regardless of their socio-economic background, race, or ethnicity must have access to a supportive, high-quality public higher education in Illinois. Led by Senator Kimberly Lightford and Representative Carol Ammons, the proposed legislation was informed through recommendations made to the Illinois General Assembly by The Commission on Equitable Public University Funding. Through the Coalition for Transforming Higher Education, Young Invincibles has uplifted and centered the voices of students and ensured that the funding model is informed by young adults across Illinois.

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.

## **Meeting Students Basic Needs on College Campuses**

The cost of college is just the first hurdle for many students attending. Students' needs such as housing, transportation, food, and others must also be addressed to ensure students are fully supported to complete college. Illinois has made initial strides in addressing this issue through establishing public benefits navigators on campus and passing legislation such as the Hunger Free Campus Act. However the available support and resources are not enough, students are still having a very difficult time accessing benefits on their campus. Disproportionately impacting students of color, low-income, rural communities, and first-generation.

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. Young Invincibles will continue to urge legislators and state agencies to find ways to make it easier to access public benefits for students. Along with funding and continuing to make support systems for students stronger on college campuses.

## **Providing Additional Funding for Illinois' Monetary Award Program (MAP)**

The Monetary Award Program (MAP) is a state-funded, need-based grant program administered by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC). This program has a significant impact on college students, particularly those from low-income families, by providing direct grants to support in making college affordable. By covering a portion of tuition and fees, MAP grants help students avoid taking on excessive student debt relieving financial stress while attending and after completing college. Last year the General Assembly appropriated \$10 million reaching an investment of \$711 Millions for MAP, however we are still far from our goal of \$1 billion by 2031.

In order to ensure that Illinois can stay on track with our goal of a \$1 billion total investment into MAP and keep up with the rising cost of attending college, we are urging for an additional \$50 millions be appropriated to the Monetary Award Program.



YI Midwest is leading access and affordability to Mental Health Care services on Illinois's college campuses. We recognize the high stigma and sheer number of under-utilized resources in many communities with a specific focus on low-income individuals and people of color across college campuses in Illinois.

## ■ Fully Fund Campus Mental Health Supports to Invest in Health Care

In 2019, YI led efforts for the passage of the Mental Health Early Action on Campus Act. This law provides a framework for Illinois public colleges and universities to improve and expand their mental health 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.

Research has shown a direct link between student academic success and their mental wellbeing. A study by the American Psychological Association found that college students with anxiety or depression were twice as likely to drop out of school compared to those without mental health conditions. Fully and continuously funding campus mental health services is not only necessary to meet today's student demands for mental health services, but it is also an investment in Illinois' future economic prosperity.

In May 2024, state lawmakers appropriated \$13 million for the implementation of the Act in the Fiscal Year 2025 state budget. However, the estimated amount that Illinois public institutions will require is \$23.5 million to fully implement this Act. YI will advocate for continued, full funding for Fiscal Year 2026 to ensure that all students at any public college in Illinois can have the support they need when tending to their mental health.



YI advocates for young adults in the workforce by advocating for expanding job opportunities by strengthening worker protections, including for those entering apprenticeships and gig work.

## ■ Improving Access to Apprenticeships and Workforce Outcomes

Access to apprenticeships and workforce development programming must be available for every young adult. 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.

## ■ Establish Baseline Protections for Young Workers

Young adults must have access to jobs which provide living wages, benefits, support, 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.

## YI Midwest supports the following initiatives and coalitions:

- Coalition for Transforming Higher Education Funding
- Cost of Living Refund Coalition
- Chicago Jobs Council Skills Agenda
- Time to Care Coalition
- Paid Family Medical Leave
- Just Democracy
- Protecting the Minority Teachers of Illinois (MTI) Scholarship

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