

YOUNG INVINCIBLES

Morgan Diamond
Young Invincibles

November 4, 2020

Re: Senate Higher Education/Education Committees, Joint Hearing on Workforce Development and Strengthening Meaningful Work Experience Opportunities for Illinois' Jobless Youth, November 5, 2020, 9am

Dear Honorable Members of the Senate Higher Education and Education Committees:

Young Invincibles is dedicated to amplifying the voices of young adults in the political process and expanding economic opportunity for our generation. We proudly empower young adults 18-34 year olds throughout the state and work to expand their research and advocacy capacity. Covid-19 has had a devastating impact on Illinois' young adults, but they faced challenges with securing quality employment that predate the pandemic. [Illinois had the second highest youth unemployment rate](#) in the country in 2017 and in the state's largest city, [45% of young Black men](#) are disconnected from school and work. [Young adults, particularly those of color, are facing some of the highest unemployment rates](#) in the country and are entering a glutted job market at a critical juncture in their professional and personal lives.

To address the long-standing needs of young Illinoisians, we must prioritize state and federal funding to invest in education, skills training, and barrier removal to build the foundation for a widely-shared recovery and re-skill the workforce for a new landscape. Cultivating and investing in our state's diverse talent can unleash regional innovation, economic growth, and community well-being as the economy recovers. Ninety-five percent of job training dollars in Illinois comes from dwindling federal investments, which have decreased over 30% in real terms over the past two decades. Furthermore, the federal response thus far has not included nearly enough for workforce development, despite unprecedented numbers of unemployed Illinoisians in need of help getting back to work. I am writing to call on legislators to prioritize investments in helping working Illinoisians return to work by funding workforce development programs, designing policy to remove employment barriers that create disparities, and promoting more effective data transparency between state agencies serving Illinoisians, to both help the state better address this economic crisis and to allow our residents to thrive.

Our state's economy will only meet its fullest potential if the most marginalized job seekers are provided with a fair opportunity to participate in the labor market. **To support Illinois' young adults, we recommend the following policy priorities:**

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1. Use a racial equity lens to invest state funding in inclusive career pathways programming to ensure shared economic recovery for Illinoisans who face barriers to employment.
 - Ensure that job seekers can afford to live while building their skills. One way to achieve such a goal is to **fund critical strategies for inclusive and equitable apprenticeships, with a focus on wraparound supports and barrier reduction, school/employer partnerships, and pre-apprenticeship programs that build foundational skills.** Young Invincibles has produced several reports ([Closing the Divide](#), [Making Apprenticeships Work for Illinois' Youth](#), [Pathways to Opportunity](#); [The Third Pillar of Apprenticeship](#)) that outline recommendations for making apprenticeships accessible. We believe that by enacting the policy recommendations outlined in the reports, young adults of all backgrounds will be poised to take advantage of these earn-and-learn opportunities.
 - Invest \$100 million in MAP grants to move towards providing need-based aid to all eligible students.
 - Ensure any public investments in clean energy promote inclusive and equitable access to jobs and green job training - like the Clean Energy Jobs Act.
 - Provide increased, permanent funding for the Illinois YouthBuild Act to offer paid training and work opportunities to low-income youth.
2. Align policy to eliminate non-skill barriers to employment disproportionately faced by people of color, foreign-born workers, and women in Illinois.
3. Increase data sharing and transparency across state agencies that touch education and workforce training to identify and address equity gaps in our public investments.

We believe that these policy changes will allow young adults to overcome barriers to employment, build the skills that they need for in-demand occupations and retain the jobs that can support them and their families. Investing in job seekers is a win-win scenario for both job seekers and employers and can help Illinois make a more equitable recovery.

Sincerely,
Morgan Diamond
Midwest Program Manager
Young Invincibles