



BRAVEN

November 4, 2020

Re: Recommendations for equitable workforce development in Illinois : Ensure Jobless Youth Considerations Include Recent College Graduates

To the Honorable Members of the Senate Higher Education Committee,

In America, we've promised that hard work and ambition will be met with equality of opportunity. The reality is that many college undergraduates are in a quiet crisis. While education has the potential to be the great equalizer, even before Covid:

25%

25% of the 1.2 million annual first-generation or low-income 4-year college enrollees landed strong jobs after graduation.

66¢

a bachelor's degree holder from a low-income background started their career earns only 66 Cents on the Dollar compared to those from higher-income backgrounds.¹

\$2.7 trillion

\$2.7 trillion of African Americans' potential income is lost due to wage disparity, atop a loss of "\$90 billion to \$113 billion in lifetime income lost from discrimination in accessing higher education."²

For these reasons and more, we encourage Illinois policymakers and stakeholder to consider the challenges facing jobless youth earning or who have earned bachelor's degrees alongside those without those degrees. We urge policymakers to consider a broad spectrum definition of jobless youth that includes young people earning or who have earned college degrees - especially young people of color, from low-income households and/or under-represented neighborhoods in IL such as the South and West sides of Chicago.

We call on legislators to prioritize investments in helping Illinoisans return to work by funding academic courses focused on career at the community college and Baccalaureate levels, designing policy to empower young people to obtain strong jobs and remove employment barriers that create disparities, and promoting more effective data transparency between state agencies serving Illinoisans, to help the state better address this economic crisis and to allow our young people to thrive.

ABOUT BRAVEN

Braven partners with colleges such as National Louis University to offer a credit-bearing course that empowers promising, underrepresented young people—first-generation college students, students from low-income backgrounds, and students of color—with the skills, confidence, experiences and networks necessary to transition from college to strong first jobs, which lead to meaningful careers and lives of impact. Undergraduates who have worked their way to and through college have earned the right to compete and have significant potential to be economically mobile but also face systemic headwinds in accessing jobs worthy of their degrees.

As we think about today's jobless youth, supporting this group (alongside others) will help boost the middle class and shrink the wage gap. The IL economy will meet its fullest potential when marginalized job seekers have a fair opportunity to participate in the labor market.

¹ Brookings Institution.

² [Cost Of Racism: U.S. Economy Lost \\$16 Trillion Because Of Discrimination, Bank Says](#)

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. 2. Use a racial equity lens to put public funding to work to accelerate the careers of all jobless youth including those working on or with college degrees.

- Fund academic courses focused on career at the community college and Baccalaureate levels.
- Create an evidence informed innovation fund to test and scale effective strategies around workforce development solutions for a broad spectrum of young people from opportunity youth to those enrolled in higher education.
- Invest \$100 million in MAP grants to move towards providing need-based aid to all eligible students.
- Increase career accelerating opportunities for jobless youth from underrepresented and/or low income backgrounds and neighborhoods by funding paid internships
- Direct public resources to the communities most impacted by racism, disinvestment, and the harms of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, state agencies could utilize the map of Disproportionately Impacted Areas (DIAs) to direct not only business and cannabis investments, but workforce and career education program dollars.

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.

4. Create a Strong Jobs Fund that is:

- **Results oriented - is focused on a set of common outcomes that could be achieved through multiple means** (i.e. academic courses focused on career, expanded career services staff and resources, partnerships with employers, etc.)
- **Increases the number of career accelerating, integrated work experiences** such as research, internships, apprenticeships, capstone projects with employers and more.
- **Public and privately funded through an employer matching grant**
- **Open to 2 and 4-year IHEs (preference for MSIs and public schools) or Non-Profits** serving significant percentages or numbers of Pell grant recipients, first generation college students and/or Black, Hispanic and/or Native American students.

We believe that these policy changes will allow our current students and alumni 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. **A broad definition of jobless youth that includes both the traditional definition plus young people from a low-income or under-represented background who are earning or who have earned bachelor's degrees is in the best interest of Illinois.** Investing in job seekers is a win-win scenario for both jobseekers and employers and can help Illinois make a more equitable recovery.

Sincerely,

Aimée Eubanks Davis
Founder/CEO, Braven

For more information, view our website at braven.org or email: Aimee@bebraven.org