



November 4, 2020

## Recommendations for Equitable Workforce Development in Illinois

Honorable Members of the Senate Higher Education Committee,

Instituto del Progreso Latino is proud to encourage the Senate Higher Education Committee to reinvest in equitable workforce development to improve the dire outlook for working people in 2020. COVID-19 has devastated an already inequitable labor market and left many families without a lifeline. Over 2.4 million Illinoisans have filed for unemployment benefits since March, and the state unemployment rate remains high at over 10%. Families are still struggling to access work. The burdens of the pandemic and ensuing economic crisis are hitting Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities in Illinois hardest.

The labor market is unpredictable, leaving working Illinoisans struggling to navigate the few jobs that are opening up - and creating greater disparities in the hardest-hit communities in the state. BIPOC workers continue to disproportionately face employment barriers, including occupational segregation, disinvestment, housing, transportation, child care issues, and others. Added to this, the challenges of COVID-19's health and economic impacts have left many more households unsure how they will stay housed or fed, let alone how they will advance their career.

Illinois 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.

Instituto del Progreso Latino is dedicated to contribute to the fullest development of Latino immigrants and their families through education, training, and employment that fosters full participation in the changing US society while preserving cultural identity and dignity. In response to the devastating impact of COVID 19 on Latinx and other immigrant communities, Instituto has expanded its workforce initiatives to support economic recovery. Efforts include:

- Expanding our Carreras en Salud and Instituto College program to prepare more bilingual Certified Nurse Assistants and Registered Nurses while adding new programming to directly address COVID health needs, including Pharmacy Technician, Health Navigator and Contact Tracer Programs.
- Modernizing and growing our Retail Customer Service / Entrepreneurship Career Pathway to support connect more qualified job candidates and introduce innovative small business leaders to opportunities to catalyze neighborhood economic recovery.
- Expanding Youth Employment to programs to engage young people in community health and economic recovery efforts.

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- Initiating partnership with major employers to modernize our Manufacturing Career Pathway to focus on high-skill, high-wage industrial trades such as electrician and environmental engineer

We proudly serve immigrants, refugees, asylees, and the Latino community in Chicago. Covid-19 has had a devastating impact on our clients, but they faced challenges with securing quality employment that predate the pandemic. The vast majority of Instituto's clients are ESL low-income hourly under-skilled and underserved workers with an average annual income of \$19,100. Within four weeks of April, over 60 percent of our clients reported lost income or hours. 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.

As a major workforce development organization serving predominantly people of color in the Chicago area, we urge you to recognize development and investment in an equitable workforce as a top priority. As we ramp up our efforts to make workforce development the critical lever for recovery of the Southwest Side—expanding our programs: expanding retail into entrepreneurship, modernizing our manufacturing and technology programs, and strengthening our medical career pathways to expand into behavioral health, we urge you to recognize that all of these efforts require strong support to yield the results.

We believe that these policy changes will allow our clients and students 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 jobseekers and employers and can help Illinois make a more equitable recovery.