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ILLINOIS HIGHER EDUCATION EMERGENCY FUND RAISES \$550K

SPRINGFIELD –Illinois Board of Higher Education, Illinois Community College Board, and Illinois Student Assistance Commission are rallying private funders to support grants to meet emergency needs of low-income students at the state’s public colleges and universities. Illinois public universities serve more than 50,000 low-income students, and the state’s community colleges serve more than 81,000 low-income students. To date the fund has raised \$550,000.

Deputy Governor for Education Jesse Ruiz said, “Students are our priority and Illinois is doing everything it can to keep them safe and keep them on a path to their educational goals. That means taking extraordinary measures to make sure they can still participate in their classes when faced with emergencies, like not being able to pay the utility bill or needing to put food on the table. I appreciate the three boards for initiating the Public University and Community College Student COVID-19 Emergency Fund.”

“We are reaching out to the civic and philanthropic community that cares about equity in higher education,” said IBHE Chair John Atkinson. “We know COVID-19 is already severely impacting minority communities disproportionately from a health perspective, but it also puts at risk thousands of students’ ability to continue their post-secondary education.”

The money raised will be allocated to public universities and community colleges based on their percentage and number of low-income students.

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“While colleges and universities are doing all they can to help students during this pandemic, vulnerable students still face the unstable housing, food insecurity, or lack computer equipment and internet access,” explained IBHE Executive Director Ginger Ostro. “This fund will help meet those needs.”

ICCB Executive Director Brian Durham said, “This fund, in conjunction with institutions’ emergency funds, will make the difference between a student who can stay in college and a student who has to drop out. The COVID-19 pandemic has been especially hard on low-income students, and I’m impressed by the donors who are making it possible for these students to weather the transition.”

Examples of students who are at risk of dropping out due to the impact of COVID-19 include:

- A student in quarantine at home awaiting a COVID-19 test, who is not eligible for paid time off from his job. He cannot afford food or medication and worries how this will affect his education.
- A single mother in college who has lost her job and is no longer able to afford diapers or formula.
- A student studying from home whose only computer is too old to support the software needed for classes. Plus, her father, a restaurant worker, is concerned that he’ll lose his job.

“We know that low-income students have great financial need in the best of times. These are not the best of times. Students who stop out of class are less likely to complete their education,” said Eric Zarnikow, ISAC executive director. “The challenges faced by these students right now, coupled with the economic downturn as a result of the pandemic, means students who drop out now may never come back to finish their studies. This fund can help students across the state bridge that gap.”

This fund will be administered by the Southern Illinois University Foundation. The institutions each have an established foundation capable of quickly receiving and distributing funds.

All part-time and full-time students in good standing are eligible. The money will be distributed as grants, which do not have to be paid back. Students should contact their school directly to find out how to access the emergency funds.

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