

**2024/02/15**

**IBHE Commission on Equitable Public University Funding**

**Transcript of Testimony:**

Commission, thank you for the time and thought that you are selflessly investing in this life changing matter!

*My name is Joshua Stafford and I serve as the school superintendent in Vienna. All over the rest of the world it is pronounced V-E-Anna, but in the great state of Illinois it is V-I-Anna. We Illinoisans seem to always have to be unique. So if you ever get to the Kentucky line on Interstate 24 you can impress your family with how to correctly pronounce Vienna!*

*Speaking of that unique nature, I think that is worthy of a celebratory note that Illinois has achieved major strides in economic growth and stability in recent years. Let me say that again... It is also important to note that Illinois has been making major strides in economic growth and stability. Per Crain's via Capitol Fax "federal data indicates that the size of Illinois' total economy has passed the \$1 trillion mark in annualized GDP. Illinois crossed that threshold in the first quarter of 2022, according to quarterly estimates from the U.S. Department of Commerce, and hit \$1.024 trillion in the second quarter of that year. Illinois is only the fifth state to top \$1 trillion in annualized GDP." The report goes on to explain, "...Illinois' Q2 number was 20% higher than the closest midwest state, which was Ohio at \$818 billion, and Illinois more than double the GDP of Indiana, which was only \$452 billion."*

*The economic stature of Illinois clearly demands that Illinois have a world-class education system to supply and fuel its economy. Adequately funding all schools in a state like Illinois should be a foregone conclusion, and I am convinced, can be for our institutions of higher education with the work that this group is doing. State economic growth and stability correlate to higher education growth and stability in that respective state.*

*The geography of Illinois allows it to have over 1,200 miles of borders. In Southern Illinois our residents are geographically closer to universities such as Ole Miss, Murray State, Wash U. St. Louis University, UK, Vanderbilt, University of Southern Indiana and Southeastern Missouri State University than they are to Michigan Avenue. These states and institutions seem to be very hungry to attract our Illinois students. I think that it is because they know the ROI for their respective economics that results due to attracting great Illinois talent.*

*It is important to note that our Illinois universities have been doing great work to ensure that this talent stays in Illinois and I am grateful for that! However, we must adequately and equitably resource these institutions for Illinois to win this battle.*

*Without adequate and equitable funding in our Illinois universities we will have students that either go out of state, go nowhere, or are buried in insurmountable debt. I am fearful that statistically our biggest enemy is the go nowhere group.*

*Evidence-based funding has been pivotal in raising up underfunded K12 students in Illinois and I am confident that a well developed funding model for Illinois higher education will do the same.*

*And... no bias, but go Salukis! It is in our back yard here at Vienna and our students need to have a system in which they have no reason to consider any of those other out of state second class universities that I mentioned earlier!*