

June 22, 2017

To: The Honorable Governor Rauner Illinois Senate President Cullerton
Illinois House Speaker Madigan
Illinois Senate Leader Radogno
Illinois House Leader Durkin
Members of the Illinois General Assembly

I am writing to you on behalf of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), the regional accrediting agency responsible for assuring the quality of colleges and universities for students in nineteen states, including Illinois. In this role, HLC also serves as a federally-recognized gatekeeper for student financial aid, including the more than \$4 billion distributed to students in Illinois in 2016-17. I am contacting you because of HLC's preeminent role in protecting students.

In February of 2016, I wrote to you with many of the same concerns about the lack of a state budget that I am going to reiterate today; however, these concerns have grown exponentially since that time. Sixteen months after my initial memo there remains no sustainable funding for higher education in Illinois. The continued lack of such funding places the higher education system of Illinois at considerable risk and is injurious to the very students the system purports to serve. As the accrediting agency tasked with assuring quality, I must warn you about the accreditation consequences of the failure to provide sustainable funding for Illinois higher education.

HLC has closely monitored Illinois institutions of higher education over the past two-and-a-half years and has observed the increasingly dire effects of this budget crisis. These include but are not limited to the following:

- Increased tuition and fees for students and loss of MAP money for needy students;
- Significantly declining student enrollments;
- Loss of faculty and staff and elimination of academic programs and services;
- Canceled capital projects and cuts to plant operations, further diminishing jobs; and,
- Depleted or diminished cash reserves and loss of grant and charitable donation income.

Institutions exhibiting these problems, regardless of cause, are still subject to HLC standards that require the availability of appropriate financial, physical, and human resources. **When institutions no longer meet, or are at risk of not meeting these standards, HLC is obligated to implement its system of sanctions and public information to alert the public about the impact on educational quality; some institutions may ultimately face withdrawal of accreditation. Students attending institutions that do not have status with an accrediting agency recognized by the federal government cannot access federal financial aid.**

You have the power to stop this spiral of diminishing quality of higher education in Illinois and the resulting accreditation consequences. I urge you to act immediately to fund higher education in Illinois. You have the future of thousands of Illinois college students in your hands. Do what is needed to ensure that they have a strong education in Illinois.

As you deliberate this most consequential decision, please contact me with any questions or concerns. Sincerely,

Barbara Gellman-Danley, Ph.D. President, Higher Learning Commission

Emphasis added.