

# Illinois State Appropriations Higher Education 4-24-25 Audio Transcript

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Illinois State University, higher education, budget increase, MAP funding, AIM HIGH program, unfunded state mandates, Senate Bill 1987, HB1581, SB13, deferred maintenance, equitable funding formula, student retention, workforce needs, diversity initiatives, international students, financial aid, academic enhancement fee.

## SPEAKERS

Chairperson Ford, President Tarhule, Cobi Blair

### Chairperson Ford 00:02

Welcome President Tarhule. It's good to see you again.

### President Tarhule 00:08

Thank you. Thank you for allowing me to present this testimony on behalf of Illinois State University. I would like to begin by extending my thanks to chairperson Ford, vice chairperson Meyers-Martin, Republican spokesperson Severin and all the committee members. My name is Aondover Tarhule, Illinois State University President. And I would like to introduce Ani Yazedjian, Vice President Academic Affairs and Provost, Glen Nelson, Vice President for Finance and planning and Cobi Blair, student body president, who will also share a few remarks this morning. I'd like to thank Governor Pritzker for his continued commitment to higher education and his proposed budget. The Governor's proposed 3% operating budget increase represents nearly \$2.4 million for Illinois State. We also appreciate the rise in map funding as Illinois State enrolls over 7,100 students who receive MAP funding grant funding. Similarly, Illinois State University has over 3,400 students who are receiving AIM high funds increases to the AIM high program will help retain students in Illinois for FY 26 Illinois State University has requested a \$20 million increase in appropriated operating funds to help cover financial aid, expand high need disciplines in Illinois, and replace tuition revenue for unfunded state mandates. Unfunded state mandates cost Illinois State approximately \$12 million annually in lost tuition and fee revenue. Consequently, I want to express my gratitude to Senator Dave Koehler and co sponsor Senator Paul Faraci for introducing Senate Bill 1987 and to Representative Sharon Chung for agreeing to carry this bill in the House. The bill will allocate, if approved, \$6 billion to Illinois State University to reimburse the school for lost tuition revenue related to state mandated Special Education tuition teacher tuition waiver program. I would be remiss if I did not bring several significant challenges confronting the university to your attention. First, like many universities nationally, Illinois state faces a challenging, physical environment in which expenditures are rising faster than revenues. Second, total compensation increases to return talented faculty and staff reached \$7.6 million in FY 24. Third, our list of unfunded capital maintenance, or deferred maintenance backlog totals \$250 million for state supported buildings to ensure safety and regulatory compliance, we are compelled to charge fees to students who help me to help maintain facilities that the state should support. This raises the cost of attendance, typically for students who are least able to afford it, undermining our efforts to control costs and to support students. In the fall of 2024 Illinois State University took preemptive action to avoid a budget crisis by adopting a multi faceted approach called RISE, Illinois state's parts to resilience, renovation, sustainability and

excellence. Our initial measures included reduced hiring, deferral of non urgent projects, and a university wide budget hold back. It is worth mentioning that Illinois State receives only 14% of our total operating budget from the state today. Therefore, why I'm encouraged by our progress, I must stress that without significant increases in state appropriation on the scale proposed in the equitable funding formula bill, these actions are not sustainable. Consequently, on behalf of Illinois State University, I humbly urge you all to support the adequate and equitable public university funding formula, and here I must especially thank Representative Ammons for your leadership and support for each HB 1581 and SB 13. Despite this challenges, our successes are many. Illinois State is consistently in the nation's top echelon for graduation and retention rates, programmatic quality ratings, value for investment, military friendliness, best college town, civic engagement, low loan default rates, and research and creative scholarship. I'd like to share some additional points of pride with you. Illinois State continues to serve Illinois students and their families. The percentage of in state students at undergraduate students at ISU, who are from Illinois, is 96.2% our total enrollment for fall of 2024 was 21,546 a 2.7% increase over FY 23 which included the largest freshman class in school history. FDIC student retention is 81.4%. Underrepresented students retention has increased significantly from 69.4% to 74.3% during the past six years. A recent study by the Bloomington Normal Economic Development Council showed that Illinois State University contributes approximately \$1 billion in output to the region. It supports further 9,702 jobs, and generates tax revenues totaling \$188 million this study also indicates that for every dollar that ISU spends \$1.75 is returned to our community. Therefore, Illinois State's continued success is vital to our region and to Illinois. Illinois State University is committed to developing academic programs that help meet workforce needs. We graduate nearly 1,000 highly trained K through 12 teachers annually across our 27 licensure pathways, making us the largest provider of teachers in Illinois and one of the largest nationally. We have taken steps to address the nursing shortage in Illinois. Our new College of Engineering will welcome its first class this fall, and a new interdisciplinary major in data science will also welcome its first students. ISU has established strong partnerships and numerous pathways to ensure a smooth and seamless transfer process for community college students with 135 articulated courses, ISU leads the state of Illinois in the Illinois articulation Initiative, or IAI. In addition to IAI courses, ISU has transferred guides with all Illinois community colleges and 38,000 articulated courses. Illinois State also has a Redbird Promise program that guarantees admission for all students who obtain their associate's degrees and end a GPA of 2.5. This collaboration and partnerships have been effective, so we are concerned about the current proposal that which would allow community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees. Alongside the other presidents of public four year institutions. Illinois State will continue to collaborate with the Governor's office to develop a mechanism that meets the state's workforce creation needs without undermining the viability of existing programs at four year institutions as we look to the future of higher education in our country, we stand at a pivotal moment, shaped by challenges and opportunities in these times of transition, the role of colleges and universities is more crucial than ever in fostering creativity, equity and resilience. Thank you, and at this time, I would like to give the microphone to Cobi for his remarks.

**Cobi Blair** 08:49

There we go. Good morning. Thank you, President Tarhule. I am very grateful for the opportunity to speak before this committee today. My name is Cobi Blair. I am currently a graduate student studying accounting at Illinois State University as part of a five year program, and in just a few short weeks, I'll be graduating with my master's degree in accounting. I also have the distinct honor and privilege of serving as the student body president for the 2024 2025 academic year. Illinois State has been instrumental in helping me build my success story. I'm the first in my family to attend and graduate from college. I'm from Oakley, Illinois, a small rural community in Macon County, and I was raised by my paternal grandparents from a young age. They were working class people and could not afford to help support me through college. So I knew early on that I would have to make the most of any opportunities that I had. I did well in high school, and was fortunate to be able to take some dual credit courses

through Richland Community College, including accounting 101 and 102. I was surprised at how much I enjoyed accounting and so when the time came to begin applying for universities, I was looking for those that had good accounting programs. I applied to several schools, but Illinois State offered me the best package by far, through generous financial aid and scholarships, my cost to attend was zero. That wasn't just a deciding factor in choosing Illinois State over other colleges and universities. It was a deciding factor for me in choosing whether I'd be able to go to college at all. To be offered complete coverage of expenses was life changing. Illinois State offered a strong BS MPA program in accounting. That's a five year program that ends with a master's degree and CPA exam eligibility. I called ISU admissions, told them about my community college dual credit, and asked them, would I be able to do this five year program in four years? They told me yes, and they followed through with that. So I was looking at a situation where for four years with no student debt, I could get a master's degree and be eligible to become a CPA. I could not believe that opportunity. I accepted the offer and attended Illinois State for my first semester in fall 2021. Coming from a high school with a graduating class of less than 60 to a 21,000 student campus was overwhelming in the best way possible. I got as involved as I could, and by the end of my freshman year, I was elected to our Student Government Association Senate. That's when I discovered another strength of Illinois State, the university's commitment to shared governance and the inclusion of student voices. Our Student Government at Illinois State is deeply involved in the policy making process and works closely with ISU Academic Senate and with the administration. Since then, through Student Government, I have had the opportunity to serve on multiple university committees, from the RISE Task Force dealing with the budget and finance to a task force that about the impacts of AI in higher education and as opportunity to co chair a committee reviewing the student fees, as well as numerous other committees that I have had the opportunity to serve on. These are just a few examples of how ISU empowers its students, and only a few of the groups that I've served on it reflects a culture that truly values student input and involvement through connections in ISU's Department of Accounting, I learned about an internship opportunity at State Farm. I was lucky enough to earn a spot in their summer program, and had a fantastic experience. I was able to apply skills that I learned through the College of Business, especially those involving Excel and data analysis techniques to real world projects during my internship. I believe that that experience backed by is use preparation is what led me to receiving a full time offer as a tax analyst, which I accepted. I'll begin working there in June, while also working towards completing my CPA certifications. I'm still amazed at how far I've come thanks to the opportunities that Illinois State has given me. My starting salary at State Farm is higher than anyone in my family has ever earned. I've not just been able to get involved, but I've been able to lead and to grow and most importantly, I've been treated by the university, not just as a student, but as a valued partner in the university community. While I'm sure I may have found success at other institutions, I genuinely believe that no place but Illinois State could have offered me the opportunities, support, and sense of belonging that I've been fortunate to experience. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to you today.

**Aondover Tarhule 13:41**

Thank you, Cobi, and that concludes our remarks.