

Written by Erin Wilson

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Higher Education, MAP Grant Funding at Risk without

Immediate Pension Reform

CHICAGO – December 12, 2012. Governor Pat Quinn today was joined by Illinois college students to discuss how inaction on pension reform is threatening Monetary Award Program (MAP) college scholarships and access to higher education in Illinois. One after one, the students made clear how access to higher education changed their lives and prepared them for a job and career. Today's event is part of the governor's ongoing effort to educate and activate the people of Illinois to push for pension reform as he continues to work with legislators on the issue.

"A college degree gives students the foundation they need to launch a successful career," Governor Quinn said. "Nobody has more at stake in pension reform than the students of Illinois. We must make sure every student has the chance to pursue their dreams and the degree of their choosing, and that's why we must work together to enact comprehensive pension reform by January 9."

MAP grants are need-based college scholarships that provide students with merit who are in need across Illinois with the opportunity to attend a higher education institution. These grants help cover tuition and fee costs at approved universities and colleges in Illinois, and do not

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need to be repaid by the student. 18,000 students lost their MAP grant scholarships this year because of budget reductions to education. Currently, only half of eligible MAP grant applicants are able to receive the aid they need to attend college.

According to the Pew Center for the States, Illinois has the worst-funded pension systems in the nation. As Illinois' \$96 billion unfunded pension liability grows, it squeezes out more and more funding for crucial services such as health care, road repair and MAP college scholarships from the state budget. Unless comprehensive pension reform is enacted, taxpayer dollars that would otherwise be spent on ensuring that deserving students have the opportunity to pursue a degree will instead continue to cover ballooning pension costs.

In April, Governor Quinn proposed a plan that would rescue Illinois' public pension systems, ensure employees have access to benefits and prevent skyrocketing pension costs from squeezing out core services such as education, health care and public safety. The governor's plan would fully fund the pension system by 2042. The governor also launched an Internet campaign-Thanks in Advance- to boost public awareness about the "squeeze" caused by soaring pension costs and the urgent need for pension reform. Since launching, more than 34,000 unique visitors have gone to ThisisMyIllinois.com and a video featuring "Squeezy the Pension Python" has been viewed almost 25,000 times.

The legislature is scheduled to work January 3 - 8.

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