

Gov. Pritzker Signs Package Of Legislation To Advance Equity In Higher Education

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SPRINGFIELD — Governor JB Pritzker today signed a package of legislation that advances equity and expands opportunity in higher education institutions across Illinois. The three pieces of legislation, Senate Bill 1085, Senate Bill 815, and House Bill 3359, help protect prospective college students and their families from predatory college-planning companies, advance equity in state funding for higher education, and ensure

personal support workers can attend classes with students with disabilities, free of charge.

“With the laws I’m signing today, Illinois will continue to lead the nation in providing students with more equitable access to higher learning opportunities,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “This isn’t just a win for our students and their families – it’s a win for the future of our entire state. Making college more affordable and accessible while helping Illinois retain its designation as a top source for talent and innovation will grow our economy and create jobs across our state.”

Senate Bill 1085

To protect families in the college-planning process, SB 1085 creates the Educational Planning Services Consumer Protection Act. The law adds consumer protections to ensure families of prospective college students are not taken advantage of by predatory, for-profit college-planning firms.

The legislation specifies terms that must be included in a contract for educational planning services and any contract that is inconsistent with the Act will be voided. The contracting requirements include specifying certain disclosures, such as contact information of the consumer and service provider.

To expand equity for all families, if a college-planning provider speaks in a language other than English, then the provider is required to translate all disclosures and documents required. Furthermore, SB 1085 prohibits college-planning providers from charging any enrollment or maintenance fees.

“As the state’s college access and financial aid agency, we want to make sure all students and families have access to the college planning services they need and deserve,” said Eric Zarnikow, executive director of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC). “This consumer protection measure will help ensure that families are not trapped in long-term predatory contracts for educational planning services such as college search and financial aid application assistance, and that they know that similar services are available for free from a student’s school, a library, ISAC, or a variety of principled organizations.”

“For more than twenty years I have worked with families who look for help after they have already paid for or signed contracts with companies that charge a premium for either no service at all or services that are available for free from reputable organizations,” said Jacqueline Moreno, ISAC’s Managing Director of College Access

and Outreach. “As college becomes more expensive, these organizations have proliferated and prey upon the highest need students and first-generation college students. The Segura Law finally provides protection and recourse for families.”

“This measure reels in bad actors that prey on low-income and first-generation students,” said State Senator Celina Villanueva (D-Chicago). “Families must have options to get out of deceptive, long-term contracts when these services are offered by the state free of charge.”

“The transparency created by this bill will be a breath of fresh air for people in communities who have been generationally preyed upon by unscrupulous educational planning services,” said State Rep. Kam Buckner (D-Chicago). “In the pursuit of the American dream way too many Illinoisans, especially those who are first generation Americans and from low income communities have been sold a bill of goods that has hampered them with extraordinary amounts of debt for the rest of their lives. Illinois has become a leader in protecting our citizens from these actors and their bad practices.”

SB 1085 is effective January 1, 2022.

Senate Bill 815

To establish an equity-based funding model for the allocation of State funds to public universities, SB 815 creates the Commission on Equitable Public University Funding. The Commission will evaluate existing funding methods, while also recommending specific data-driven approaches to the General Assembly, to fund Illinois’ public universities in a more equitable manner.

The 30-person Commission will be co-chaired by four individuals: one member appointed by the House Speaker and Senate President, one from the chair of the Illinois Board of Higher (IBHE), and one appointed by the Governor. While members of the Commission will serve without compensation, IBHE will provide administrative support. By July 1, 2023, the Commission will publicly publish the findings and recommendations on the IBHE website.

“This legislation will ensure that Illinois’ funding for public universities centers on equity and that institutions will have the resources they need to close equity gaps, both core strategies of IBHE’s new strategic plan, A Thriving Illinois,” said Executive Director Ginger Ostro. “We thank the Governor and the sponsors for establishing this Commission. Illinois’ economic future and educational equity are inseparable. Our funding systems must recognize and reinforce that.”

“Universities and colleges that serve members of disadvantaged communities need fair funding in order to serve their students and reverse the damage caused by historic and systemic racism,” said Senate Majority Leader Kimberly A. Lightford (D-Maywood). “I’m pleased to see this legislation signed into law.”

“I am honored to have led the work on SB815, which will help advance a new model of funding for higher education across the state of Illinois. The ultimate goal is to research ways to better fund our public universities with an equity-focused lens,” said State Representative Carol Ammons (D-Urbana). “It’s a clear next step in the development of an equitable and adequate education system and I’m appreciative of Gov. Pritzker’s signature on this landmark legislation.”

SB 815 is effective immediately.

House Bill 3359

To ensure all students have access to a quality education, HB 3359 allows a student's personal support worker (PSW) to attend class with the student. The legislation also prevents IBHE from charging a PSW tuition or fees for attending the class.

PSWs can help in circumstances such as a child or adult living with disabilities. The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) defines a PSW as someone who can help individuals with activities of daily living, supervision, or teaching skills that promote safety and wellbeing.

“Thanks to the Governor and sponsors of HB 3359, this legislation enables students with disabilities to have the support they need in the classroom and allows for an educational environment where students and adults can thrive, in a thoughtful collaborative, and truly inclusive experience,” said Grace B. Hou, Secretary, Illinois Department of Human Services.

“I’m honored I was able to serve as the lead sponsor for this bipartisan legislation and see it signed into law by the Governor,” said State Representative Chris Bos (R-Lake Zurich). “When I became aware of the situation involving a constituent in my district, I was frankly shocked. The fact that not one, but two, public community colleges had prevented a student with developmental disabilities from having his support worker with him in class didn’t make sense. Today, we make sure this won't happen again in Illinois and ensure all students will have access to the support they may need to be successful in the classroom.”

“Unfortunately, discrimination against the disabled still occurs today, which is why this legislation is so important,” said Leader Dan McConchie (R-Hawthorn Woods). “This sad reality is personal to me as this discrimination happened to a constituent who was denied an opportunity for an education because of his disability, which requires him to have a support worker for assistance. Sadly, this young man was turned away from two local colleges because they wouldn’t allow his support worker to sit with him in class unless the support worker also paid tuition. This is just plain wrong. Discrimination has absolutely no place in our higher education system. Everyone should have the ability for continued education, regardless of their disability. This new law is one step toward pushing disability rights forward here in Illinois. I hope that now no other disabled person will suffer in a similar manner.”

HB 3359 is effective immediately.