



June 27, 2017

Gov. Bruce Rauner
Office of the Governor
207 State House
Springfield, IL 62706

Dear Governor Rauner:

We write with great concern regarding the announcement by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) that certain colleges and universities in Illinois may lose accreditation should the state's budget crisis continue. We, the College Democrats of Illinois and its associated chapters, have spoken out before on the budget crisis, but this recent HLC announcement is disastrous to us specifically. To quote the letter sent to you and the leading members of the state legislature, [“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.”](#)

The withdrawal of accreditation and corresponding withdrawal of federal financial aid would cripple ours and the next generation of Illinoisans. To some, a college education is the first step on the long path from poverty. To others, it may turn a passion into a vocation. But for all of us, it remains one thing: a great opportunity that must not be threatened. We implore you to pass a budget before the end of the special session in order to end this more than seven-hundred-day streak and prevent this direct threat to all students of Illinois. Should you continue in your failure to pass a budget, even after this warning by the HLC, it will be clear that you do not care about the future of Illinois, only about forcing your own agenda down our throats.

Destroying public higher education and peoples' access to it will not only hurt those in Illinois who cannot afford a private education, it will also further contribute to the “brain drain” the state is suffering from. Per Chicago Magazine, [“Illinois' budget woes are a huge factor for young people choosing to go to other states' public colleges.”](#) A loss of collegiate accreditation would push our already falling enrollment numbers to record lows, and this drop would hurt the state both culturally and economically. “Almost half of the Urbana

alumni who are still alive reside in Illinois,” the article continues, and these alumni are tax-paying citizens who make our state better.

“Illinois is home to great higher education institutions all over the state, as evident in our organization. We have over 26 chapters all over this state. Sadly, young people are leaving, and this will haunt us for decades to come,” said Jack McNeil, president of CDIL.

This sentiment was echoed by Anusha Thotakura, president of College Democrats of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, our largest public university, and CDIL’s Legislative Director, who said, “Illinois is home to incredible leaders and innovators who are products of our state’s universities. Without a state budget, Illinois loses out on the opportunity to secure an investment in students who will be the problem-solvers of the future. Students are looking for support from the state to guarantee that if we choose Illinois, Illinois will choose us and make our education a priority over politics.”

In conclusion, we urge Governor Rauner to make this investment in our future and pass a budget. The loss of accreditation for Illinois’ public colleges and universities would destroy the state’s future in two ways. First, low-income students, for whom a college degree means the difference between poverty and employment, would be trapped, prevented from achieving the American Dream. Second, our best and brightest native Illinoisans will continue to flee the state at record numbers, exacerbating our “brain drain”. By passing a budget, these problems will be ameliorated, but if a budget is not passed, you can never again claim to an advocate for education in the state of Illinois.

Sincerely,

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