

Leadership + Investment + Training = A Stronger Illinois

With one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation and rates well over 10% in some communities, Illinois is at a critical juncture in its economic growth. Nearly three million adults have only a high school degree or less, but the job market — with increasing opportunities in manufacturing, healthcare, and transportation — demands skills and work experience, leaving many job seekers behind. Ignoring these challenges will mean an enduring drag on Illinois' economic growth. Illinois needs an aggressive strategy to correct the workforce barriers that keep job seekers from getting into work, onto career pathways, and contributing to their local communities. The following recommendations are solutions to the most serious workforce challenges faced by our state.

Governor's leadership is the key to success: As its top elected official, Illinois' next Governor should use the office to make reducing long-term unemployment the top priority of his economic agenda. His leadership is critical to enacting a unified workforce development vision, purpose, and priority with which state agencies can act in alignment. The people of Illinois need the governor to set ambitious statewide goals for reducing the number of long-term unemployed, increasing credential attainment, and reducing the barriers faced by the chronically unemployed. The Governor must:

- **Create a high-level workforce policy staff position in the Governor's office.** With the designation by the Governor, this staff person will coordinate educational and workforce initiatives across state agencies to maximize outcomes, meet statewide goals, and align with the Governor's priority to reduce long-term unemployment.
- **Invest in the Illinois 21st Century Workforce Development Fund.** The Fund's advisory committee — composed of private, public, and philanthropic workforce and economic development experts from across the state — is positioned to help state agencies invest their workforce resources to develop and implement strategies that will reduce long-term unemployment.
- **Adopt one career pathways framework to unify Illinois' education and workforce systems.** One framework for all systems and programs helping adults seeking skills will reduce duplication, improve outcomes, better connect the education and occupational needs of adults, and further strengthen the economy.

Three million Illinois adults have only a high school degree or less, but 67% of jobs in Illinois will require some type of post secondary training by 2020.

Currently, in Illinois nearly **15%** of people are **unemployed or underemployed.**

This includes those who have been out of work for up to a year, lack opportunities, have out-of-date skills or are **stuck** in part-time jobs but need full-time employment.

Prioritize economically struggling communities: Illinois can succeed in reducing long-term unemployment only when it partners with leaders in communities that face the biggest labor market challenges. Illinois already has policy tools tied to local economic priorities that target business and communities that need them. By targeting the state's limited workforce and economic development investments to communities that face the highest rates of poverty, unemployment, and recidivism, local communities can prosper and contribute to the state's economic health.

- **Implement the Illinois Emergency Employment Development Act** (PA 97-0581), which provides a statewide system for helping businesses grow by supporting the hiring of new workers through a temporary wage subsidy.
- **Expand the Jobs Training and Economic Development program**, a nationally recognized program that supports businesses partnering with community-based training organizations to train new and existing employees.

Focus resources on long-term unemployed: Because the most challenged job seekers in the current labor market rely on other state systems for support, Illinois must use a workforce strategy to help them succeed in the job market. The tens of thousands of Illinoisans not counted in the unemployment rate cannot be left behind. Federal resources can be increased to expand workforce, education, and support services for them.

- **Invest in a manufacturing training program for individuals leaving incarceration** to provide an industry-recognized credential, support services, job placement, and retention services after completion.
- **Expand the state's SNAP Employment and Training services** by leveraging federal matching funds and increasing education, training, work experience, and support services.