

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**February 14, 2006**

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## **Illinois Community College Presidents and Trustees Call on Legislature to Restore \$7.5 Million in Funding for Counseling and Tutoring Services**

*New report shows low-income students—a majority at Illinois community colleges—need counseling and tutoring help to succeed*

*Colleges working to maintain services amid cuts;  
student-to-counselor ratios average 800 to 1*

CHICAGO – The presidents and trustees of Illinois’ community colleges—the third largest community college system in the country—called on the state legislature today to restore \$7.5 million in funding for counseling and tutoring services. Without the funding, the leaders said, the state may not be able to generate enough qualified workers to meet future business needs.

At the same time, a new report from Women Employed Institute shows that Illinois community college students—among the most economically disadvantaged of students enrolled in postsecondary education in the state—need more help making good career and course decisions, as well as academic and other help once they are enrolled.

“Illinois community colleges are the principal provider of postsecondary education to low-wage workers trying to move up the economic ladder and to individuals working to upgrade their skills. We will not meet the future economic needs of our state unless we help these students. They are our future workforce,” said Tom Bennett, President, Illinois Community College Trustees Association.

At Illinois community colleges, student-to-counselor ratios average one counselor for more than 800 students.

“Students in our study told us that, with no one to help them, they often got well into a program before they realized that they were training for the wrong career. With this funding, we can save families and the state money by making sure students are on track right from the beginning,” said Toni Henle, Director of Workforce Development Policy, Women Employed.

Women Employed Institute’s report—*Investing in Success: Educational Supports for Illinois Community College Students*—documents how key services—tutoring, career counseling and advising, and personal counseling—make it possible for students to succeed in class and complete their studies.

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“Community colleges are key to the state’s economic future,” Henle continued. “By 2013 more than 80 percent of 23 million new jobs will require some higher education. Sixty percent of all Illinois undergraduate students are enrolled in the state’s 48 community colleges. A majority of them are economically and academically disadvantaged. If we don’t educate this group of people, we will lose out to other states with a better educated population.”

Women Employed Institute, the Illinois Community College Presidents’ Council, the Illinois Community College Trustees Association, and the Cook County College Teachers Union Local 1600 called on the state legislature to restore funding for Illinois’ Student Success Grant (formerly the Special Populations Grant). In FY2003 funding for the Grant was eliminated, down from more than \$13 million in FY2002, forcing community colleges to cut or eliminate key student services including personal counseling, academic and career counseling, tutoring, testing and assessment, mentoring, and retention programs for specific populations.

“Student success at the community college level is directly linked to student services such as tutoring, academic advisement, and career counseling” said Marguerite E. Boyd, Ph.D., president, Harry S. Truman College. “Even as demand for these services grows, funding has been inadequate or cut completely.”

The Student Success Grant is funded through the budget of the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), which submits its budget to the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE). IBHE’s budget, including funding for the ICCB, is reviewed annually by House and Senate Appropriations Committees. Funding from the Student Success Grant is allocated to each community college, which use the funds to provide student services based on students’ needs. The Senate and House Committees that oversee higher education appropriations will review the IBHE budget and funding for the Grant on Wednesday, February 15, 2006 and Thursday, February 16, 2006.

Key findings from *Investing in Success: Educational Supports for Illinois Community College Students* include:

**Career exploration and planning are key to timely degree completion.** Many students don’t know which career they are interested in or have little knowledge of their chosen career. As a result, students often switch majors or take classes that don’t count toward their chosen major later on, wasting valuable credits.

**Current configuration of the Monetary Award Program (MAP) creates barriers for low-income students and displaced workers.** In 2003, a new rule was adopted as a result of underfunding of MAP—the state’s tuition assistance program for low-income students—that capped the number of credit hours for which a student can receive a MAP award during their freshman and sophomore year of college at 75 credit hours. Many respondents were forced to leave their community college program before completion because they reached the 75-hour limit, unable to return without the financial aid. Many students who reach the limit prior to completion do so because of prior postsecondary enrollment or remedial courses taken their first year, both of which count toward the 75 hour limit.

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**Flexible, on-campus child care options are necessary for working students to succeed.** Of the 42 community colleges offering child care, only 11 colleges offer flexible or drop-in care, only 13 offer care for children under the age of two, 10 offer evening care, and only one offers weekend care.

**State-funded stipends will remove transportation barriers for students.** Transportation is a major factor in whether or not students complete their degree because many students travel up to 40 miles a day between work, school, and child care. High gas prices, inability to pay for repairs if a car breaks down, or a complete lack of any form of transportation are the main factors that inhibit students' ability to enroll in or continue at a community college.

**Domestic violence counseling is crucial for women experiencing family opposition to their pursuit of higher education.** Nearly every community college administrator interviewed cited family issues as one of the top three greatest interruptions in a student's pursuit of a degree, behind financial issues, and lack of employer flexibility and support. Some women have been beaten after deciding to go to school, had partners that interfered with their studies by tearing up books or refusing to baby sit, or lived with harassment for not focusing on their domestic responsibilities.

Research for the report is based on nine discussion groups with 80 low-income, working adults and a follow-up survey with student service providers at every Illinois community college. The discussion groups took place at community colleges in Chicago, Lake County, West Suburban Chicago, Champaign, and surrounding areas of Champaign. The adults in the discussion groups were predominantly women, all had children, and all were working in low-wage jobs earning on average \$9.46 an hour. Discussion groups were held with current students, students who had to leave college before completing, and students who wanted to go to community college, but had not yet enrolled.

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*Women Employed's mission is to improve the economic status of women and remove barriers to economic equity. Since its founding in 1973, Women Employed and its affiliate, the Women Employed Institute, have won historic changes in public and private sector policies that have expanded women's opportunities and improved workplaces throughout the country. Today, Women Employed is a leading national advocate for women earning low wages. Women Employed promotes fair employment practices, increases access to education and training, and provides women with innovative tools to plan their careers. In 2003, Women Employed launched the Illinois Career Pathways Initiative, a collaborative effort to enable individuals of varied skill and ability levels to move along clear educational pathways and into good jobs. This report is a part of that initiative. For more information, visit [www.womenemployed.org](http://www.womenemployed.org).*