



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 26, 2026

[Springfield, IL] – Answering Student Demand and Critical Workforce Needs — Community College Bachelor’s Degree Legislation Returns to Springfield

Building on Governor JB Pritzker’s leadership and a carefully negotiated legislative framework, Senate Bill 4034 and House Bill 5319 return this spring to expand opportunity for Illinois students and strengthen the state’s workforce. The legislation would authorize Illinois community colleges to offer a limited set of baccalaureate degrees in high-demand fields to create more affordable, accessible pathways to bachelor’s degrees for working adults and place-bound students.

“My administration is committed to uplifting our students, supporting affordable education, and growing our unmatched workforce in communities across the state. This legislation would increase Illinois’ supply of bachelor’s level talent in critical industries like nursing, advanced manufacturing, and early childhood education,” said Governor JB Pritzker.

“We all want a plan that serves all students and prioritizes collaboration over unproductive competition. To that end, last spring the university presidents spent months negotiating in good faith on the Governor’s proposed community college baccalaureate bill. Our neutral stance from last May, of having no position on the bill, remains unchanged,” said Dr. Dan Mahony, President of Southern Illinois University. “We look forward to continuing our partnerships with community colleges and supporting students on their journey to a degree.”

“This proposal is the result of deliberate negotiation and systemwide collaboration. It establishes caps, regional limits, and rigorous review standards that protect affordability, prevent unnecessary duplication, and align community college baccalaureate programs with documented student and workforce need,” said Dr. Brian Durham, Executive Director of the Illinois Community College Board.

Expanding Bachelor’s Degree Attainment for Illinois Students

Community college students are primarily working, place-bound adults—78 percent work while enrolled. Many are supporting families and many live in regions of Illinois that function as baccalaureate deserts. For these students, cost, long commutes, rigid schedules, relocation, and added debt make traditional bachelor’s pathways out of reach.

The impact extends beyond students already enrolled. When bachelor's degrees are offered locally, affordably, and flexibly, adults who are not currently participating in higher education enter the pipeline. Community colleges are uniquely positioned to reach these learners because they are embedded in the communities they serve.

"Illinois students are clear—they want affordable pathways to earn bachelor's degrees while remaining in the communities where they already live and work," said State Senator Mike Halpin. "Community college baccalaureate programs are an affordable option that expand access in a way that fits the realities of working adults and strengthens opportunity across the state."

"This is about making sure affordability includes higher education," said State Representative Tracy Katz Muhl. "Community college students are balancing work, family, and school. Expanding local bachelor's degree options removes barriers to completion and opens the door to higher-paying careers."

"Community colleges are already embedded in the communities they serve. They understand their students, their employers, and their local workforce needs. Allowing targeted bachelor's degrees builds on that foundation and ensures students can complete their education close to home," said Jim Reed, Executive Director of the Illinois Community College Trustees Association.

"Community colleges exist to open doors for students from all backgrounds," said Dr. Avis Proctor, Chair of the Illinois Council of Community College Presidents and President of Harper College. "Adding affordable, much-needed bachelor's degrees will bridge the gap between intention and attainment—allowing students to complete their education without sacrificing income, relocating, or choosing between advancing in their careers and honoring their personal and professional commitments. This path allows them to do both. Thus, it's a win for students and their families, employers, and the long-term health of Illinois' economy. I am glad to have worked with our universities to get the legislation to its current state."

The demand is clear—from students seeking affordable bachelor's degrees and from employers seeking advanced credentials. It's time Illinois joins the 24 other states that authorize community colleges to offer four-year degrees, and help meet student and employer demand for affordable, high-quality baccalaureate degrees.

About the Supporting Organizations

The **Illinois Community College Board** is leading the effort to expand community college baccalaureate (CCB) programs in Illinois, with strong support from the **Illinois Community College Trustees Association** and the **Illinois Council of Community College Presidents**. Together, these organizations represent Illinois' 45 community colleges—the nation's third-largest system and the state's leading public workforce trainer. Serving more than 575,000 residents annually through credit, noncredit, and continuing education courses, the Community Colleges of Illinois provide high-quality, affordable, and accessible education.

- **The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB)** is the state coordinating organization for the Illinois Community College System.
- **The Illinois Community College Trustees Association (ICCTA)** advocates for policies that strengthen community colleges and expand opportunities for students. As the primary organization spearheading this initiative, ICCTA works closely with state legislators, education leaders, and industry partners to advance workforce-aligned degree pathways.
- **The Illinois Council of Community College Presidents (ICCCP)** supports policies that enhance the role of community colleges in workforce development and economic mobility.

For more information, please contact:

Matt Berry
Chief of Staff
Illinois Community College Board
matt.berry@illinois.gov
217-785-7411