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January 6, 2020

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Pritzker Administration Provides New Path to State Financial Aid for Undocumented and Transgender Students

Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid provides qualifying students an opportunity to apply for MAP Grants

CHICAGO – For the first time in Illinois, eligible undocumented students and transgender students who are disqualified from federal financial aid will now be able to apply for all forms of state financial aid. Thanks to the [Retention of Illinois Students and Equity \(RISE\) Act](#), a new law passed by the General Assembly and signed by Governor Pritzker last June, more students across the state will be able to afford to go to college.

“I’m committed to expanding college affordability for every student in Illinois because it’s a common sense investment in our future – with more students attending college here, there will be more opportunities to create good jobs, to keep talent in Illinois and to grow our economy for everyone,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “After years of college students choosing to leave Illinois, we’re turning the page to a new era to make our schools more affordable for all students by increasing funding for MAP grants, AIM HIGH scholarships, and increasing funding for our schools.”

More information about the RISE Act can be viewed here https://youtu.be/9Zl_t7yETF0 or at www.isac.org/AlternativeApp.

In addition to providing a pathway to state aid for qualifying undocumented and transgender students, Governor Pritzker increased the amount of funding available for MAP grants to historic levels. This year, MAP received \$50 million more in funding that has served thousands of additional students and increased award size for existing students after years of decline. In addition, Governor Pritzker provided an additional \$10 million in funding for AIM HIGH scholarships, which is a merit-based program.

“In order to build a stronger and more equitable Illinois, we must invest in our young people and make college more affordable,” said House Assistant Majority Leader Lisa Hernandez (D-Cicero), the lead sponsor of the RISE Act. “The Illinois RISE Act expands opportunity to all students, regardless of race, immigration status or gender identity.”

The [Illinois Student Assistance Commission](#) (ISAC) created the new [Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid \(Alternative Application\)](#) for qualifying undocumented students and for transgender students who are not eligible for federal financial aid because they did not register for selective service. The Alternative Application

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provides these students with a pathway to apply for Monetary Award Program (MAP) Grants--the state's need-based grants for college. In order to receive a MAP grant, a student must still meet the [eligibility criteria](#) of the MAP program itself. The Alternative Application is now available on the ISAC website at <http://www.isac.org/AlternativeApp>.

The Alternative Application is for state aid only and is an option for qualifying Illinois undocumented students and transgender students. **Most students in Illinois will still file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®)**, the form that simultaneously allows them to apply for federal, state and institutional aid, including MAP grants. Undocumented and transgender students can use the pre-screening questions on the Alternative Application to determine whether they should complete the new application or the FAFSA. Interested students are also encouraged to speak with their college counselor or their school's financial aid office if they are unsure which application to file.

ISAC is providing various forms of assistance to students who are completing either the Alternative Application or the FAFSA. A [User Guide](#) for the Alternative Application is available online, and ISAC is providing assistance in English and Spanish through statewide outreach efforts and a call center. ISAC also offers training for professionals who work with students, including school counselors and financial aid officers.

"Our goal is to support students on their path to postsecondary education with both financial assistance and objective and comprehensive information to help them make more informed decisions," said Eric Zarnikow, executive director of ISAC. "For the implementation of the RISE Act, that means developing the application that is the pathway to MAP for eligible undocumented and transgender students, as well as helping to ensure that these students have the same level of support and resources as those who are navigating the FAFSA."

"The RISE Act and increased MAP funding represent a powerful package of reforms to help ensure that there is the funding available to make college possible, and that all Illinois students, regardless of race, socioeconomic background, immigration status or gender identity, have access to that aid," said Sen. Omar Aquino (D-Chicago), chief Senate sponsor of the RISE Act.

"These efforts to recognize and represent the needs of our diverse communities, in particular, students of color, by increasing access to postsecondary education will be life-changing for not only our students today, but also for generations to come," said Mony Ruiz-Velasco, executive director of PASO-West Suburban Action Project and board president of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights.

For more information about the Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid, including eligibility, and to access the application, visit www.isac.org/AlternativeApp. For one-on-one assistance, students can contact the [ISACorps member](#) in their area, or ISAC's Call Center at 800.899.ISAC (4722). Assistance is available in English and Spanish.

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