

ILLINOIS
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20
25

Annual Report



TABLE *of* CONTENTS

03	PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE
05	ACTING AS THE STRONGEST VOICE FOR TAXPAYERS IN 2025
07	LOOKING AHEAD
09	FREE MARKET INNOVATION IN PRACTICE
11	COMBATTING THE CORRUPTING INFLUENCE OF GOVERNMENT UNIONS
15	THE STRONGEST TAXPAYER ADVOCATE IN ILLINOIS
17	ACHIEVING POLICY IMPACT
19	CULTIVATING EMERGING LEADERS
22	1818 SOCIETY
23	FINANCES
24	OUR LEADERS
25	CLOSING REMARKS
26	HAVING A LAUGH

President's Message

MAKING AN IMPACT ISN'T ALWAYS ABOUT CHASING SUCCESS

IN 2025, SOMETHING unusual happened at the Illinois Policy Institute. Our audience grew to more than 120 million views annually.

And that growth could have been our downfall if we hadn't been thinking ahead.

Let me explain.

One of our core strategies is to earn the attention of Illinois taxpayers. That is why we do not limit ourselves to white papers and policy reports. We tell stories on Instagram and TikTok. We produce explainer videos on YouTube. We send daily emails that help people make sense of the news.

The result is that our work is now seen hundreds of thousands of times each day. In fact, a free market think tank is now generating more attention than nearly every Illinois news station combined.

The reason is clear. With only 28% of Americans having a great deal of trust in the news, people do not stop engaging. They look for information they trust.

In Illinois, we have become that source.

And that is where the risk emerged.

I remember sitting alone in my office, looking at a dashboard of our weekly metrics: video views; email opens; new subscribers. Every line was moving up and to the right.

Every metric was getting stronger, yet something did not feel right.

Getting attention has a way of changing incentives. Every feedback loop quietly delivers the same message: grow bigger.

I will be honest: it's fulfilling to hear a stranger say, "I read and watch your content every day." Or hearing someone say, "The Illinois Policy Institute is the north star in Illinois."

And there is a quiet voice that asks, what if we reach another 100 million views?

That is the mistake many organizations make. They confuse the tactic with the strategy.

And it's not hard to see why. If you focus on the metric itself, it gets harder to ask the more important question: why are we working to grow these numbers?

We almost made that mistake ourselves.

We nearly let reach become the goal instead of the tool. We were winning attention so rapidly that it would have been easy to stop asking whether it was translating into real change. That is how organizations drift. Not because they fail, but because they succeed and then lose discipline.

Our goal is not to have the largest audience in Illinois. Our goal is to change the direction of Illinois.



To prevent families from being forced into a false choice: stay and tolerate corruption and rising taxes or leave behind everything that makes life meaningful. Friends. Family. Jobs. Coworkers. Faith communities.

More views alone do not change that reality.

It's fulfilling to hear a stranger say, "I read and watch your content every day." Or hearing someone say, "The Illinois Policy Institute is the north star in Illinois."

So, we made a deliberate decision. Instead of chasing attention for its own sake, we treated our audience as a proving ground. We used it to test ideas. We measured our efforts at persuasion. And we held ourselves accountable for real outcomes.

Outcomes matter because of the scale of what we are up against.

Illinois Policy Institute and our nonprofit 501(c)(4) advocacy arm, Illinois Policy, combined have \$12 million annually with which to compete against hundreds of millions of dollars in special interest and union spending. In most states, that imbalance alone determines outcomes. In Illinois, it has entrenched them for decades.

Yet in 2025, we proved that a disciplined strategy can outperform raw spending.

We scaled our operations from a single municipality to dozens across Illinois, transforming isolated wins into repeatable models that can be deployed wherever policy failure follows the same predictable patterns.

Through the Chicago Policy Center, we positioned ourselves to deliver solutions not only for Chicago, but for cities across the country. We demonstrated that even the most complex urban challenges can be addressed with rigor, clarity and execution.

We confronted poverty directly by prioritizing work and dignity over dependency, and are already seeing people reenter the workforce and dollars return to the productive economy instead of disappearing into open-ended programs with little accountability.

We sent a clear and measurable signal to legislators and union leadership statewide that we are a durable counterweight to entrenched power, capable of shaping outcomes, not just debates.

I've learned an important lesson: scale matters, but discipline and focus matter more. And when those all align, even a relatively small organization can produce outsized returns.

Here is what I am proud of: We have built one of the largest audiences in the state of Illinois, and we have used it to produce a real impact in a way that delivers measurable results.

As we look ahead to 2026, our goal is simple. Not easy, but simple.

We are determined to continue expanding our impact, to remain focused on a return on your investment and to help transform the state of Illinois.

Every step along the way, we will measure. We will iterate. And we will stay disciplined in pursuit of our goal.

I am grateful for your partnership and your investment in our work. And I am excited about the impact we will have in the year ahead.

Because when we achieve this goal, our kids and grandkids can continue to call this land, which we have fought for, home.



Matthew T. Paprocki

Matt Paprocki
President and CEO

ACTING AS THE *Strongest* *Voice* FOR TAXPAYERS IN 2025

ILLINOIS POLICY'S megaphone is one of the most powerful tools for positive change in our state. For more than a decade we've built an engaged and informed audience that rivals legacy news media. But reach alone isn't enough. What sets us apart is how we turn readers into participants in the policymaking process.

An audience of our size and caliber can be an effective force in stopping bad policies pushed by special interests and in advancing commonsense free market legislation. And that's exactly what happened in 2025.

Over the course of the year, we mobilized our community 17 different times to defeat onerous tax hikes and burdensome government regulations. We also appealed to our audience to build support for important reforms. More Illinoisans contacted their lawmakers through our efforts than at any point during the past five years – three times the engagement seen in 2022, 2023 and 2024.

When lawmakers moved to impose new reporting requirements on homeschooling families, Illinois Policy led the effort to call out and defeat the attempted government overreach. By sharing real family stories and encouraging direct outreach, more than 3,800 homeschoolers and supporters contacted their lawmakers. Later, when state leaders proposed funding new infrastructure through \$1.5 billion in new taxes - on food deliveries, real estate transfer taxes, a

sales tax expansion or toll hikes – over 8,000 Illinoisans spoke up and flooded lawmakers' inboxes.

And our work has extended beyond the statehouse. In Chicago City Hall, our robust network helped stop a grocery tax, prevent a head tax and slow down a junk loan. Our audience made their voices heard again in the win to legalize granny flats, helping open the door to lowering rents.

At the federal level, we successfully activated our audience to engage members of Congress in support of a federal tax credit scholarship program. With the program's inclusion in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, we plan to continue that outreach in 2026 to ensure Illinois opts in to the program.

Because of supporters like you, our platform has become one of the largest and most influential voices for taxpayers in Illinois. We drive narratives that shape debates and ensure everyday Illinoisans are heard.

OUTLET	FOLLOWERS
Facebook	367,000
X/Twitter	46,500
Instagram	63,700
TikTok	11,300
YouTube	17,300

How we grew **OUR MEGAPHONE**

Newsletters

The Morning Briefing, Weekly Briefing and Policy Shop email newsletters were joined by new entrants: Illinois Policy graphics and Students First bi-weekly publications. Our content was viewed over 84 million times and readers turned to us to curate the news important to Illinois' liberty and prosperity.

A growing number of people are relying on our publications to stay in touch with current events and to dig deeper on policy issues affecting taxpayers. This has led to a rise in clicks on our links, which has delivered more readers.

Digital media

We saw a significant increase in views of our website, illinoispolicy.org, which garnered over 13 million visits in 2025, and on our social media channels, which recorded over 13 million video views. Tally it up and our messages reached people well over 110 million times last year – or about 301,000 views a day.

By focusing on younger and older audiences alike, we're building a serious competitor to legacy TV news in the No. 3 market in America.

Earned media

We ensured our research translated into compelling narratives that shaped coverage in legacy media across Chicago, Illinois and the nation – highlighting the need for policy change.

In 2025, the institute placed a record-setting 73 op-eds in targeted newspapers, including the Chicago Tribune, Chicago Sun-Times, RealClearPolitics and, for the first time, the Wall Street Journal. This level of placement exceeded that of our top competitors and ensured our ideas reached more readers, more often, than any other public policy voice in the state.

By consistently appearing in outlets read by both center-right and center-left audiences, we broadened

the conversation around Illinois' biggest challenges and positioned Illinois Policy as a trusted, influential leader.

Our research also resonated directly with editorial boards. The Chicago Tribune, Washington Post and Wall Street Journal cited our work and echoed our messages more than 30 times. Our expertise was featured 10 times on Fox Business and Fox News on issues including guaranteed income pilots in Cook County, rising property taxes and chronic absenteeism in Chicago Public Schools.

When our polling revealed Gov. J.B. Pritzker faced negative favorability for the first time in his tenure, we capitalized on the governor's increased national attention to share our findings with a much wider audience. Media outlets, including Politico, the Megyn Kelly podcast and other prominent outlets, held him accountable for unpopular policy choices.

Altogether, we secured more than 350 top-tier media placements in 2025. These television, radio, print and digital appearances - spanning national and local outlets - strengthened our credibility as policy experts while persuading millions of Illinois residents and like-minded Americans to consider practical, commonsense solutions.

Your role

Your investment has helped us grow into an influential free-market think tank that is making life better for Illinoisans. With your continued support, we will further expand our reach and lead Illinois' comeback.



Looking Ahead

FROM CHICAGO MAYOR Brandon Johnson's job-killing budget proposal, to legislators' plans for an unaffordable pension "fix" and \$1.5 billion in tax hikes to pay for Chicago-area transit, 2025 brought challenges to Illinois.

But Illinois Policy Institute was ready. We seized the opportunity to expose the flaws of these plans, and point to real solutions that don't hit job creators or burden taxpayers. Our advocacy organization, Illinois Policy, activated our audience to thwart some of the most damaging proposals.

As we look ahead to 2026, we see more opportunities to share commonsense solutions to some of our state's most serious problems and to engage our audience to make their voices heard and change our state for the better.

A SECOND CHANCE FOR SCHOOL CHOICE IN ILLINOIS

The expiration of the Invest in Kids program at the end of 2023 left 15,000 low-income Illinois students without their private school scholarships.

Now, thanks in part to Illinois Policy's successful lobbying efforts, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act passed by Congress in 2025 included a federal tax credit scholarship program, available to kids in all 50 states.

But there's a catch: Each state must elect to participate in the federal program, which begins in 2027.

That's why we are working with elected officials on both sides of the aisle, as well as with a coalition of proponents of public education options and private school choice to get Illinois leaders to opt our state into the program. Illinois students deserve the opportunity to attend the schools where they can learn best, and Illinois Policy is at the forefront of the effort to bring school choice back to Illinois.

GET OUT THE VOTE

In recent midterm and municipal elections, millions of Illinois residents have shown interest in engaging with the issues that shape their communities. Yet hundreds of thousands of eligible voters who share that interest do not participate in these elections. In 2026, Illinois Policy is continuing its nonpartisan voter

registration and engagement initiative to help close this gap and build lasting civic participation in Illinois.

We are engaging our audience through educational tools and outreach to get 250,000 previously underrepresented voters to vote in municipal and state elections, compared to the 2021–2022 cycle.

Through this effort we will reduce the turnout falloff of nearly 20% that exists between presidential and gubernatorial elections. Our paltry municipal voting rate – there are some Chicago wards where only 1 in 4 registered voters participate in municipal elections – will also improve through these efforts.

We are proposing ways to simplify the voting process, encouraging early voting, and creating clear, accessible pathways to registration.

Among other initiatives, in 2025 our staff headed out to McHenry County to offer fairgoers a chance to register to vote. We plan to broaden this outreach effort in 2026, connecting with fairgoers in multiple counties, increasing our audience, and promoting engaged citizenship.

The detrimental policies that drive people and businesses away from our state will only change when active and informed citizens participate in the democratic process and demand the solutions that can turn our state around.

FIGHTING POVERTY WITH OPPORTUNITY

Our Center for Poverty Solutions will continue to bring free-market policies to bear on the problems of poverty. In 2026 we will expand our neighborhood employment co-ops with block clubs, community-based organizations and employers.

Through this effort, we are helping bring job preparedness training and hiring opportunities to some of Chicago's most economically disadvantaged neighborhoods.



Our research shows that only 2.3% of Chicagoans who work full time, year round fall below the poverty line. By contrast, more than one-third of Chicagoans who do not work and nearly 40% of the unemployed are poor. With this research in mind, we are exchanging ideas with partners who are closest to the problems and seeking new information about what keeps people from accessing opportunity and achieving self-sufficiency.

Through the neighborhood employment co-ops and ongoing research and community partnerships, we are bringing a fresh perspective and innovative approaches to Chicago's most challenging issues.

ARMING ILLINOISANS WITH THE TRUTH

Making Illinois a destination for people seeking opportunity requires identifying the problems that repel families and businesses. In 2026, we will continue to provide our analysis of how the state is faring, and the fixes required to keep and attract residents and jobs.

Gov. J.B. Pritzker's rising national profile provides us an expanded audience as we counter overly rosy accounts of the state's fiscal condition. We will continue to inform our audience about the fiscal and economic problems that result from the policies pursued by Pritzker, and offer our own solutions to put Illinois on sounder footing.

And we will keep sounding the alarm on the disastrous effects of the policies advocated by public sector unions such as the Chicago Teachers Union, whose radicalism is spreading beyond the Windy City, with its president, Stacy Davis Gates, at the helm of the Illinois Federation of Teachers.

Chicago's need for sane, pro-growth economic and fiscal policies as well as a foundation for good governance through a city charter, will drive much of our research and outreach in 2026.

We look forward to seizing opportunities to not only spotlight problems in our state but also to point out viable solutions and advocate for sound policies that will help us move beyond them.



FREE MARKET INNOVATION *in Practice*

THE ILLINOIS POLICY Institute established the Center for Poverty Solutions in 2023 to provide innovative, free-market answers to the problem of poverty, a problem well-meaning government interventions have actually perpetuated as a sustainable, minimal lifestyle. The center set out to provide an alternative to decades of policy failure and civic stagnation. Rather than demand more resources from above, the center sought to mobilize local energies to confront poverty on the ground. The center would do this by working to encourage and expand upon the untapped resourcefulness that lies hidden within some of Chicago's most neglected neighborhoods.

The center's executive director, Dr. Eddie Kornegay, sought out partnerships with direct service providers working in some of the poorest areas of Chicago. The aim was not to impose solutions from above, but to assess conditions on the ground by listening to those closest to the problem and hearing from them what kinds of challenges they faced and what kinds of obstacles they encountered. Together with our partners, we worked to identify how the application of free market principles could ease their good work and help eradicate poverty. From the beginning, our focus was to connect people in need to opportunities to advance in their lives through work. The center

maintains stable employment is about much more than a paycheck, it's an essential expression of human dignity.

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The center's second year of operation saw our partnerships mature, grow and expand in unexpected ways. Our outreach went deeper into the community as we became acquainted with local block clubs. We learned these small organizations, often staffed by resident volunteers, act as informal job placement services, linking people in need of employment with people in need of hired help. We recognized that, if better supported, the block clubs' informal networking practices could be enhanced and professionalized so as to better connect people in need of work with employers. This aspiration would form the basis of the center's most ambitious institutional innovation: the neighborhood employment co-op.

Our meetings came to include a broad array of stakeholders, including trade associations, employers and employer groups. We brought them together to explore establishing a formal framework for making employment opportunities more available to communities in need. This grassroots initiative is ultimately intended to establish a block-to-business pipeline matching job seekers with employers. The center will hold business information sessions where community members can get a firsthand account of what employers are looking for and how they can help potential job candidates prepare for seeking employment. Neighborhood career fairs where employers recruit and hire from a pool of local candidates will follow. These activities will be led by block club leaders and supported by the center.

Our work with the block clubs reached a new level when the institute found itself in a position to award microgrants to select block clubs. By early October 2025, the center had identified 13 block clubs and community organizations that would be eligible for one of six neighborhood employment planning grants to support our neighborhood employment co-op pilot. The identification of this group of potential grant recipients was the result of nearly two years of first-hand on-the-ground discussions in scores of meetings with block clubs, hyper-local community leaders, faith-based organizations, community-based organizations and civic organizations. Our candidate pool came directly from our interactions with our partners and with related groups.

As of January 2026, four of six micro grants had been awarded and two of four planned employer/ community career information sessions had been booked for Q1 2026. In the center's third year, we look forward to holding career fairs where candidates will meet with employers for interviews and hires.

The Center for Poverty Solutions began with a vision: to invite those whose minimal standard of living had been subsidized by well-meaning - but misguided - welfare policies to stand up and claim for themselves a share in the prosperity the free market makes possible.

In its second year, the center has begun to put into place the structures needed to support these efforts. Thanks to the good work of our partners and the generosity of our supporters, we are working to make widespread, government-subsidized poverty a thing of the past.



COMBATTING *the corrupting influence* OF GOVERNMENT UNIONS

For decades, government unions have held the upper hand over the people of Illinois in everything from contract negotiations to state legislation. But thanks to us, that's starting to change.

When the so-called "workers' rights amendment," or Amendment 1, passed by a narrow margin in 2022, it looked like "game over" for the people of Illinois. Government unions had succeeded in codifying their political dominance in the Illinois Constitution itself.

Unions such as the Chicago Teachers Union had long stood as the biggest barrier to free market reforms in Illinois. The passage of Amendment 1 threatened to make this barrier permanent.

But CTU and its government union allies hadn't counted on the scrappy perseverance and strategic initiative of the Illinois Policy Institute. We recognized if CTU could be exposed and discredited, that could change the balance of power not just in Chicago, but in the Statehouse.

That's exactly what the institute set out to do – and we delivered.

But CTU and its government union allies hadn't counted on the scrappy perseverance and strategic initiative of the Illinois Policy Institute.

Throughout 2024 and 2025, the institute exposed the corruption and hypocrisy of CTU and its parent affiliate, the Illinois Federation of Teachers, through a flurry of articles, social media posts and media appearances. In 2025 alone, the institute published 78 articles. These have garnered 1,048,628 pageviews to date. The institute's 2025 social media content on CTU has drawn an additional 1.3 million views. Our coverage also secured more than 100 external media hits throughout the year, including Fox News appearances and a Wall Street Journal opinion editorial.



That effort is delivering results. CTU's influence demonstrably suffered in 2025. Polling showed Chicagoans themselves really don't like CTU, and its power in Chicago is fading. The union even failed to get the "transformative contract" its president, Stacy Davis Gates, had promised, despite having its own hand-picked, former lobbyist sitting across the negotiating table as mayor. The union's influence over lawmakers in Springfield and with Gov. J.B. Pritzker also appeared to be waning.

And now the U.S. Congress is investigating CTU's financial practices.

The scrutiny and skepticism now hitting CTU reflects a seismic shift in the political climate. It bodes well for the people of Illinois, and it would not have happened without your support for the institute.

CTU'S INFLUENCE IN CHICAGO IS WANING

During the entirety of Rahm Emanuel's tenure as mayor, CTU enjoyed a 60% approval rating among the people of Chicago. When the institute started polling in January 2023, 57% of voters still had a favorable opinion of the union versus just 40% with an unfavorable opinion.

The scrutiny and skepticism now hitting CTU reflects a seismic shift in the political climate. It bodes well for the people of Illinois, and it would not have happened without your support for the institute.

But following the institute's investigations and reporting, the union's reputation has flipped. Just 29% of Chicagoans had a favorable opinion of the union in 2025, with 60% unfavorable.

That's a very dramatic fall for a political machine that could once claim to have had a lock on the good will of the Second City. In 2024 and 2025, the union suffered several blows to its political agenda:

- **CTU pushed hard in 2025 for Johnson's proposed corporate head tax** in the Chicago budget, labeling aldermen who voted against it the "Corporate Caucus." Despite CTU's lobbying, the head tax was stripped from the final budget.
- **The CPS school board** – which was controlled by Johnson appointees and CTU endorsed candidates – **rejected a \$200 million high-interest loan** pushed by CTU and Johnson in 2025.
- Despite boasting \$50 billion in demands in negotiations for a new CTU contract in 2024, **the union couldn't land the final contract until 2025**, and even then its terms were mostly in line with usual expectations.
- **CTU didn't get much return on its investment in school board races in 2024.** Despite spending more than \$2.8 million, its endorsed school board candidates won only three of nine contested races.
- **The union spent at least \$400,000 in 2024** to secure passage of the "Bring Chicago Home" tax hike ballot initiative, which was then rejected at the polls.

The last real "win" for CTU was getting Mayor Brandon Johnson elected in 2023. But Johnson's own tenure has been an abject failure, with his approval ranking sinking as low as 14% in 2025 and barely nudging 30% since.

CTU FAILED TO GET A “TRANSFORMATIVE CONTRACT”

After spending \$2.3 million to get its own lobbyist, Brandon Johnson, elected mayor of Chicago, CTU harbored big expectations for what it could achieve next. Indeed, everything must have seemed theirs for the asking. The union set out to obtain a “transformative contract” in its negotiations with the mayor’s office – a contract loaded with lavish provisions including demands devoted to mandating and funding “climate justice” and “social justice” agendas.

“Most of us remember past contract negotiations in 2012, 2016, and 2019. They weren’t just contract campaigns, they were battles. . . . This time, CTU’s contract demands are aligned with the Mayor’s education transition report,” CTU told members at the beginning of negotiations.

In making its demands for taxpayer funding, the union made one thing clear: money was no object. Davis Gates boasted in a speech before the Chicago City Club that the new contract would “cost \$50 billion and 3 cents. And so what? That’s audacity. That’s Chicago.”

The union looked forward to a “negotiation” between allies leading to a transformative contract. But the process the union expected didn’t go to plan after the institute obtained a leaked copy of the union’s outrageous demands and began exposing them to the people of Chicago throughout 2024 and into 2025.

In all, the union presented more than 700 demands, which the institute estimated would cost between \$10 billion and nearly \$14 billion – and that was only for the demands whose cost could be calculated. The union also presented an array of social justice, climate justice and other politically motivated demands that don’t appear in other large school district contracts.

It would have been the first contract of its kind and the most expensive teacher’s contract in the district’s history.

But after months of extended negotiations, what CTU got was mostly status quo. The four-year deal is estimated to cost \$1.5 billion, similar to its previous five-year

contract. While it secured 4-5% annual raises and just 800-900 new employees, the union had demanded 9% raises and 13,900 new employees. Many of the union’s “social justice” demands, such as police-free schools, are wholly absent from the new contract.

While the final contract is still costly for the people of Chicago, it was no slam dunk for CTU. It took nearly a year to achieve and gave the union just a fraction of its agenda.

CTU’S INFLUENCE IN SPRINGFIELD IS WANING

CTU’s influence is a statewide problem. The union has used its financial and political leverage to wield influence well beyond Chicago. CTU’s lobbying extends well beyond matters of education and has affected people throughout Illinois. Nearly half of the Illinois General Assembly’s members have taken money from the union, and many of these recipients reside well outside the city of Chicago.

As of fall 2025, the union had funneled nearly \$1.8 million into the campaign coffers of 84 of the 177 lawmakers seated in the Illinois General Assembly, according to Illinois Board of Elections data. Of those,

Nearly half of the Illinois General Assembly’s members have taken money from the union, and many of these recipients reside well outside the city of Chicago.

at least 36 weren’t even in Chicago.

The union’s political giving, along with its track record of getting what it wants in the legislature, attests to its outsized political influence on state lawmakers. But there are signs CTU’s days as an unstoppable political powerhouse are coming to an end.

In the 103rd Illinois General Assembly, which ran 2023-2024, CTU told lawmakers what to do on 59

bills. Lawmakers followed CTU's bidding on 60% of those bills.

In the first half of current 104th General Assembly, which runs 2025-2026, CTU told lawmakers what to do on 20 bills. It got the outcome it wanted on six, or 30%. While there is more to come in the second half of the session, this could be an early indicator lawmakers are growing more wary of CTU's antics and less responsive to its demands.

Gov. J.B. Pritzker has also signaled he won't go along with CTU's demands for more money from the state.

"What CTU and the [Chicago] mayor are talking about, which is providing another \$1 billion, another \$1.6 billion for Chicago Public Schools, that's just not gonna happen," he recently said.

A U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE IS INVESTIGATING CTU

CTU failed to disclose its audits to its own members in violation of its own internal rules for more than five years. We've worked to make sure this lapse did not go unnoticed. The U.S. House Education and Workforce Committee sent a letter on Nov. 20 to CTU President Davis Gates, demanding the union's financial audits from 2019-2024.

"The Committee is concerned that CTU has undertaken a half-decade long, concerted effort to deny its members the complete audit information to which they are entitled under the union's bylaws."

The Committee's demand wasn't made in an information vacuum. The demand was made because of the work the institute has done to expose the union's questionable financial practices and hold its leadership accountable.

In May 2025, the committee began a comprehensive review of the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act, the federal law aimed at ensuring union democracy and transparency through mandated reporting. The committee announced a Request for Information inviting employers, employees, labor-management experts and other interested stakeholders

CTU is not a teachers union. CTU is not an education advocacy group. CTU is a political machine, and with your help its power is waning.

to submit information on union fiscal transparency, member governance and other related matters.

In July, the institute filed a comment recommending needed changes to the LMRDA to ensure transparency for union members, using CTU as an example. Our 15-page response noted, "CTU is the poster child for reneging on its own internal rules to keep financial information from its members. It is supposed to provide an annual audit to members yet has failed to do so for over four years, leading its members to file a lawsuit."

Clearly the institute's response hit a nerve. The Committee's demand letter included citations to the work of the institute's Vice President of Labor And Policy Mailee Smith and the Chicago Policy Center's Executive Director Austin Berg.

It is unclear whether the union ever directly provided the audits to the committee. But a D.C.-based attorney handled the union's communication on the issue, indicative of the seriousness of the situation for CTU. And in January 2026, the union finally posted audits on its member platform – a win for union transparency.

There's certainly more to come in 2026, as the union once again attempts to capture the Chicago Public Schools board in the upcoming November election. But as our work goes forward, the people of Illinois are realizing the truth: CTU is not a teachers union. CTU is not an education advocacy group. CTU is a political machine, and with your help its power is waning.

THE STRONGEST TAXPAYER ADVOCATE IN ILLINOIS

Protecting Illinois families and businesses from billions of dollars in tax increases.

ILLINOIS LAWMAKERS TOO often take the easy way out rather than pursuing reforms. Which is why our team constantly monitors, researches and effectively blocks ruinous tax hikes at the city and state level.

Defeating these tax hikes isn't just a matter of saving money. It's about creating a hospitable environment in our state for people to plant roots to start a family, grow a business and pursue the American dream.



Defeating Johnson's "Capital Head Tax"

THE THREAT

Mayor Brandon Johnson proposed a new "head tax" as part of his budget — a per-employee levy that would have raised costs on employers and threatened jobs across Chicago.

WHAT THE CHICAGO POLICY CENTER DID

- **First to break news** of the proposal and its per-employee rates
- **Published the first city-by-city comparison** of head taxes
- **Briefed major media outlets**, including the Wall Street Journal
- **Mobilized Chicagoans** to contact their elected officials



THE RESULT

- **300+ constituent contacts** delivered to City Council offices
- **3 million+ organic views** of head-tax content across platforms
- **City Council passed a budget ordinance without the head tax**

OTHER 2025 TAXPAYER WINS

Blocking a major borrowing scheme

The Chicago Policy Center helped block a proposed \$830 million city borrowing plan that would have increased long-term debt while obscuring how bond proceeds could be used. After Chicago Policy Center analysis highlighted risks tied to pension-related language, generating media coverage and hundreds of constituent contacts to aldermen in less than 24 hours, the proposal stalled and the language allowing for Chicago Teachers Union bailout was removed.

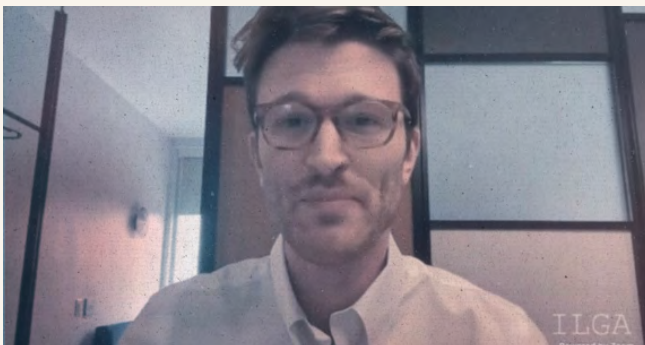
Stopping revenue-driven enforcement changes

The center also opposed a proposal to reduce Chicago's speed limit from 30 to 25 miles per hour – a change projected to generate millions of dollars annually through increased ticketing. More than 250 constituents contacted city council offices, and the ordinance was rejected.

GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY PROGRESS

Election timing reform

Beyond fiscal fights, the Chicago Policy Center advanced reforms aimed at improving accountability. In 2025, center research showing how Chicago's off-cycle municipal elections suppress voter participation led directly to a hearing before the City Council's Ethics and Elections Committee. As a result of that work, center leadership testified on election-timing reform, elevating the issue from academic concern to active policy debate at City Hall.



Chicago Policy Center Executive Director Austin Berg testifying before the Illinois House Ethics and Elections Committee on how municipal election timing suppresses the vote.

Laying the groundwork for a city charter

The Chicago Policy Center also continued building the case for a modern city charter – a structural reform that would give Chicago voters greater control over taxes, debt and governance. In 2025, center research and public education efforts highlighted how Chicago's lack of a charter leaves taxpayers uniquely exposed to arbitrary impositions compared to other major U.S. cities, positioning the center to advance charter reform as public awareness and political conditions evolve. The results were unprecedented:

1. **House Majority Leader Kam Buckner introduced House Bill 3656** – the first legislation allowing for a Chicago city charter in modern state history. This represents a watershed moment in Chicago governance reform.
2. **24 of 50 Chicago aldermen have signed on to pro-charter resolutions**, which has never happened before in city history.



Chicago Policy Center held a symposium on city charters featuring experts from across the country at Northwestern University's Pritzker School of Law

WHY IT MATTERS

Standing with taxpayers isn't just about stopping individual proposals. It's about restoring accountability in a city where residents too often pay the price for decisions made without their consent. Through fiscal vigilance, governance reform and sustained civic engagement, the Chicago Policy Center is working to ensure Chicago's future is shaped by its residents – not by those exercising unchecked political power.

ACHIEVING POLICY *Impact*

TESTIFYING BEFORE POLICYMAKERS:

OUR EXPERTS WERE OUT in the field on a regular basis in 2025, 13 times in total, testifying in front of local governments and connecting with policymakers where they work. We offered testimony in the following areas:



Our testimony covered fundamental issues affecting Illinoisans such as housing regulations and grocery taxes. Policy researcher LyLena Estabine testified in Skokie encouraging expanded property rights for homeowners through accessible dwelling units. The Skokie committee was engaged throughout her presentation, taking notes and thanking her afterwards. Because of housing restrictions, simply converting your garage into a home office or extra bedroom in

Skokie is illegal. Meetings like these get little to no input from outsiders, meaning our participation pushes decision makers in the right direction.



Getting out in front of policymakers and growing our brand awareness with local governments is key to playing the long game. Local politics is a training ground for future state lawmakers.

REVIVING SCHOOL CHOICE IN ILLINOIS:

The passage of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act into law established a federal scholarship tax credit program designed to support school choice for students in all 50 states. Each state must, however, opt in to the program in order for funding to be made available to residents of the state.

CTU and its political cronies can be expected to resist this process. Illinois Policy Institute and our C4, Illinois Policy, are dedicated to restoring school choice in Illinois. Our plan is to provide a means for voters to

express their support for Illinois' participation in the federal scholarship tax credit program through ballot initiatives calling for it.

*Illinois Policy Institute and our
CA, Illinois Policy, are dedicated to
restoring school choice in Illinois.*

Illinois Policy Government Affairs moved to gain adoption of an advisory referendum in 34 counties and townships, representing nearly 2 million residents. We are also working with other counties to pass their own resolutions to show support for the program.

In our advocacy, we pursued a strategy that involved:

- **Identifying an impactful policy** (having Illinois opt in to the federal scholarship tax credit program).
- **Drafting a compelling and legally solid referendum** question ready to file and pass.
- **Developing a list of the most favorable boards** representing the largest populations.
- **Contacting all targeted county and township board members** via phone, email and text messages.
- **Utilizing General Assembly members** to support our initiative lending their relationships and credibility to the campaign.
- **Relentlessly following up with the elected officials** to make sure they place the question on their agendas and for a vote.

Thanks to our efforts, Illinoisans across the state will have an opportunity in 2026 to deliver a message to lawmakers and to the governor: Illinois children deserve to be allowed to take part in the federal school choice tax credit program.



Cultivating EMERGING LEADERS

THE LINCOLN FELLOWSHIP

THE ILLINOIS POLICY Institute's Lincoln Fellowship program provides internship opportunities for highly qualified university students who display a dedication to free-market principles and who wish to acquire hands-on experience in crafting and promoting pro-liberty approaches to policy problems. Internship experience is designed to provide participants with a solid introduction to free-market philosophy and policy, as well as giving them work experience.

Interns assist the institute with research tasks and contribute to the completion of special projects, such as our initial work showing red-light cameras had taken \$1 billion from Illinois drivers in a decade. In many cases, interns make significant contributions to our efforts and earn author credits on publications. Our interns have come from such schools as the University of Chicago, University of Illinois, University of Notre Dame, Hillsdale College, University of Michigan, College of the Holy Cross, Georgetown University, Indiana University, Baylor University and Harvard Law School.

Interns gain experience, and sometimes the institute gains valued employees. Seven full-time staffers were formerly interns.

Beyond the typical hands-on experience that interns gained crafting and promoting pro-liberty approaches to policy problems, Lincoln Fellows had the opportunity to participate in extensive professional development programming including:

- **Public speaker training** with our in-house persuasion expert Joshua Bandoch.
- **Weekly reading group** on texts related to American government and liberty such as Lincoln's writings, George Washington's "Farewell Address", selections from Plato's "Republic", essays by Milton Friedman, and more.
- **Weekly lunch-and-learn opportunities** with guest speakers such as former state representatives Mark Batinick and Tom Demmer, Chicago Tribune editorial board member Hilary Gowins and Liberty Justice Center attorney Jeff Schwab.

Here are the reflections from some of our past interns

"The Lincoln Fellows experience was the key to unlocking pivotal professional and personal growth. The principles of Illinois Policy Institute continue to motivate my work as I am eager to make a change. Through lunches with guests from various areas of the policy world to discussions with my peers, my foundation in curiosity has been set."

— Lilly Rossi, now a full-time research assistant at Illinois Policy Institute, Labor & Litigation Intern

“The Lincoln Fellowship changed the way I think about America and its founding principles. Exploring the ideological origins of our nation helped me see how my own beliefs fit into a much older and richer tradition. It reminded me that the ideas at the heart of America are not only worth studying but worth protecting, and that I have a role to play in carrying them forward.”

– *Cameron Williams, Columbia University,
Center for Poverty Solutions Intern*



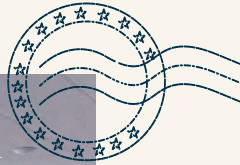
“Throughout my time at Illinois Policy Institute, I grew tremendously both professionally and personally. I gained extensive knowledge of property tax policy in Illinois, which furthered my interest in law and fueled my aspiration to attend law school. Through the Lincoln Fellowship, I expanded my previous background in political science while learning about professionalism through discussions with our guest speakers and my IPI colleagues. Additionally, through the speaker training sessions with Josh, I developed more confidence speaking publicly. This experience was invaluable, and the IPI staff made me feel welcome every day, which significantly enhanced my overall internship experience.”

– *Cameron Jasper, University of Chicago, Policy Intern*

“My internship experience with the data team helped me quickly build confidence in data cleaning and interpreting - I learned so much in just three months. I was lucky to work closely with the data team, yet also connect with other policy interns through intern programming. The internship was also a great opportunity to learn more about the liberty movement, which gave context for the work we were doing.”

– *Jordan Carlson, University of Minnesota-Duluth,
Data Team Intern*





SHARING OUR EXPERTISE

The Illinois Policy Institute's impact goes beyond our day-to-day work. Our leaders can't be everywhere at once, so in order to share their expertise with the broader community, they are writing and publishing books.



Austin Jack:
Funding Freedom

Austin Jack is one of the nation's most effective strategic fundraisers in the freedom movement and serves as the vice president of external relations at the Illinois Policy Institute.

This year, he published "Funding Freedom: A Tactical Guide to Crafting a Winning Ask, Story, and Strategy." The book provides fundraisers, nonprofit executives, and movement leaders with the practical frameworks and emotional clarity required to raise transformational gifts and build enduring donor partnerships.

Austin is able to draw from years on the frontlines with major donors, think tanks, and political campaigns to share real lessons that every fundraiser needs to hear. He demonstrates why fundraisers aren't just shaping causes, they're shaping the future of freedom itself.



Joshua Bandoch, PhD:
How to Get What You Want

Josh Bandoch is the head of policy at the Illinois Policy Institute.

His research focuses on empowering people to rise out of poverty, increasing social mobility, improving housing affordability, and removing barriers to opportunity (e.g., burdensome regulations).

He has spent over a decade uncovering the secrets of persuasion from psychology, neuroscience, economics, public policy, and history. Before using them in his work at Illinois Policy Institute he was using them to write speeches for senior government officials, national leaders, business executives, and dozens of his own talks to audiences around the world.

Now, in his book "How to Get What you Want" – being published by Simon & Schuster in April – Joshua Bandoch is sharing this research with a wider audience. The book offers simple approaches to adopting a persuader's mindset, techniques for making persuasive emotional and logical appeals, the formula for memorable and motivating stories, and tapping into the power of tone, body language, and other subconscious signals. The book will teach readers how to navigate any political, professional, or personal situation more effectively to get optimal results each and every day.

THE 1818 Society

THE 1818 SOCIETY honors those who have chosen to invest in the long-term strength and permanence of the Illinois Policy Institute through a planned or legacy gift.

Members of the 1818 Society understand that the most important battles for freedom are rarely won in a single election cycle, legislative session or court case. They are won over time – through persistence, principle and institutions strong enough to endure pressure, opposition and change. A legacy gift is an act of foresight. *It says: this work matters not just today, but tomorrow - and long after I'm gone.*

Planned gifts provide stability when it matters most. They allow the institute to think generationally rather than seasonally, to invest in talent, research, litigation and ideas that may take years to bear fruit but ultimately shape the future of our state. In moments

of uncertainty, legacy gifts ensure that the mission does not waver, slow or retreat.

Just as importantly, these gifts reflect something deeply personal. They represent a donor's values, life experiences and belief that Illinois can – and must – be better for the next generation. Every legacy commitment tells a story of courage, conviction and hope: hope that free markets, personal responsibility and opportunity will remain guiding principles in Illinois long after today's headlines have faded away.

The 1818 Society is not about recognition; it is about stewardship. It is a quiet but powerful commitment to the idea that ideas matter, institutions matter, and the future is worth defending.

We are profoundly grateful to the members of the 1818 Society who have chosen to stand with us – today, tomorrow and for generations to come.



Join the 1818 Society

If the mission of the Illinois Policy Institute has shaped your thinking, strengthened your convictions or given you hope for Illinois' future, we invite you to consider making a legacy commitment through the 1818 Society.

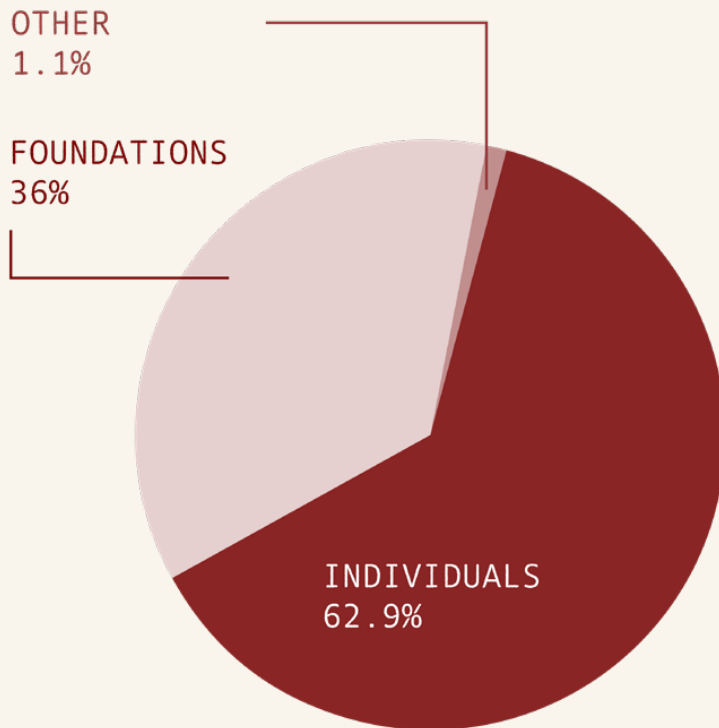
By including Illinois Policy in your estate plans, you help ensure that the fight for opportunity, accountability and freedom continues – regardless of political winds or passing trends. Your legacy

gift is a statement of trust in this institution and a lasting investment in the principles that make Illinois worth fighting for.

To learn more about the 1818 Society or to have a confidential conversation about legacy giving, please contact our development team or visit illinoispolicy.org/legacy.

Your values can live on. Your impact can endure.

FINANCES

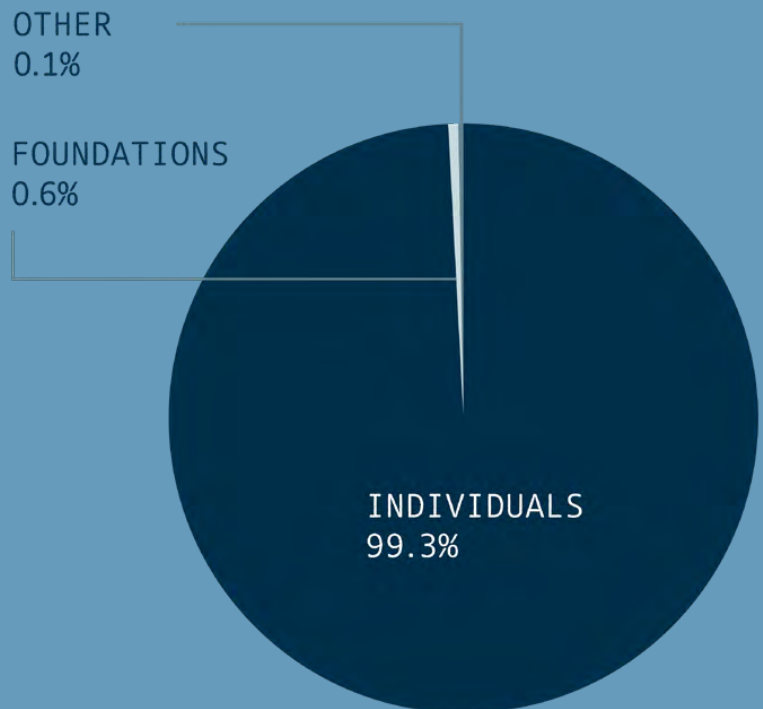


ILLINOIS
POLICY
INSTITUTE'S
REVENUE

TOTAL
8,636,681

ILLINOIS
POLICY'S (GAA)
REVENUE

TOTAL
\$3,550,121



Our Leaders



Matt Paprocki

President and CEO

Matt Paprocki is president and CEO of the Illinois Policy Institute. He lives in Chicago with his wife, Anna, and their daughter, Fiona, and son, Rocky. Paprocki earned a degree in business administration from the University of Notre Dame.

Paprocki is an appointed member of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Illinois Advisory Committee. In addition to leading the Illinois Policy Institute, Paprocki is also the chairman of the Illinois Policy PAC, an advocacy group that gives taxpayers a stronger voice in Springfield. He has consulted for nonprofits around the country, advising leaders on how to grow, recruit talent and work strategically. He started his career as a legislative staffer in Springfield, where he focused on budget and pension issues. Several decades later, these issues remain top of mind for Paprocki, who is committed to solving Illinois' biggest policy crises.



Amy Korte

Executive Vice President

Amy Korte is the executive vice president of the Illinois Policy Institute. She lives in Chicago with her husband and three children. During her time at the institute, she has worked as an editor, led the policy team, and researched and written on topics such as property taxes, education opportunity, and issues affecting jobs and growth in Illinois.

Prior to joining the institute, Korte worked for several years as a bankruptcy attorney at a major law firm in Chicago. Amy Korte earned her bachelor's degree from the College of William and Mary and her law degree from Washington University.

OUR DIRECTORS

Ed Bachrach

Retired Chairman and CEO, Bachrach Clothing Inc., Coauthor of "The New Chicago Way: Lessons from Other Big Cities"
Chicago, Ill.

David Chaimovitz

Founder and CEO, Setna IO
Glencoe, Ill.

Vince Kolber

Founder and Owner, Residco
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Assistant General Counsel, Syngenta
Chicago, Ill.

Richard T. Weiss

Retired Managing Director, Wells
Capital Management
Hinsdale, Ill.

Closing REMARKS

2025 MARKED A defining chapter for the Illinois Policy Institute.

This was a year when long-standing fights delivered real results and new efforts proved their staying power. From advancing school choice to exposing government union corruption, our core work produced tangible wins. At the same time, emerging initiatives like the Chicago Policy Center gained momentum, demonstrating that serious, structural reform is possible even in the most challenging political environments. Together, these efforts reinforced a simple truth: good governance does not happen by accident. It must be built, defended and sustained.

Supporting the Illinois Policy Institute is an investment in Illinois' future. The work you fuel today is designed to safeguard opportunity and deliver lasting prosperity for generations to come.

Our role as a watchdog never slowed. With the backing of a deeply engaged audience, we moved quickly and decisively to stop bad policy before it could take hold. Harmful tax hikes were challenged. Overreaching legislation, including the so-called "homeschool act," was confronted head-on. Time and again, when we sounded the alarm, our supporters responded. Their voices helped force bad ideas off the table and ensured that common sense prevailed over entrenched special interests, even when the odds were stacked against it.

We are proud of what was accomplished this year, and we are clear-eyed about why it was possible. Partnering foundations, individual donors and our 1818 Society members stood with us. Their confidence made this work real. Together, we advanced policies that protect freedom, expand opportunity and point Illinois toward greater prosperity. In a state that urgently needs a revival of the American Dream, removing barriers and unleashing free markets is not abstract theory. It's a necessity. Supporting the Illinois Policy Institute is an investment in Illinois' future. The work you fuel today is designed to safeguard opportunity and deliver lasting prosperity for generations to come.

Our mission does not change with election cycles or headlines out of Springfield. We stay. We fight. We press forward to limit government overreach and expand economic freedom. The challenges ahead are real, but so is our resolve. With the strength of our partners and supporters, we are positioned to lead in Springfield while expanding our reach into cities and townships across the state.

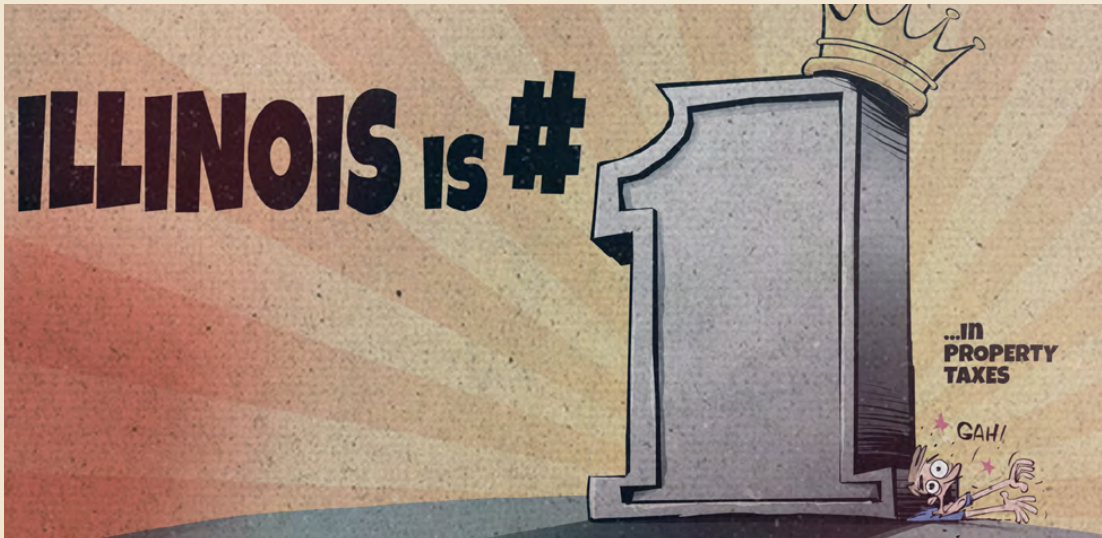
Thank you for making this work possible. The future of Illinois is worth fighting for, and we are honored to do it alongside you.



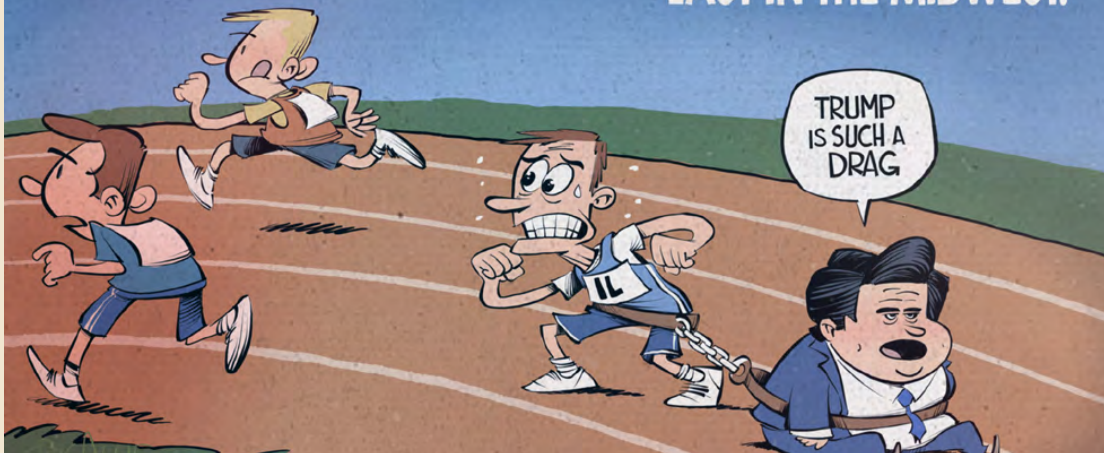
Yours truly,

The Illinois Policy Institute

Having a laugh

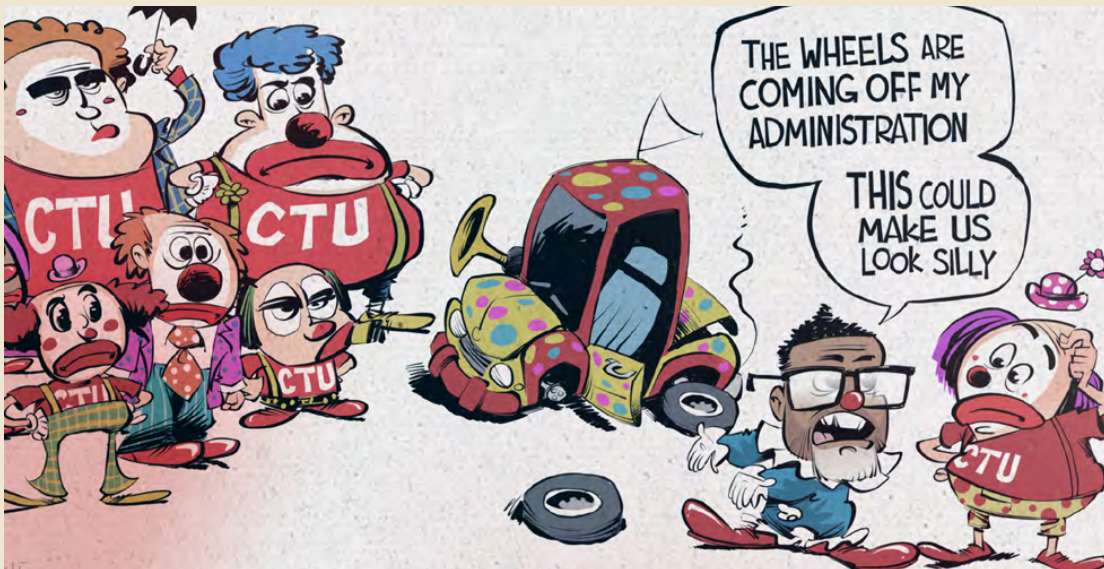


**ILLINOIS' TAX COMPETITIVENESS RANKING DROPPED SIX SPOTS.
LAST IN THE MIDWEST.**



**Some of Brandon's hand picked
school board members voted
against his loan plan.**







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info@illinoispolicy.org

FOR ILLINOIS POLICY CONTENT:

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TO MAKE A DONATION:



TO LEARN MORE ABOUT PLANNED GIVING:

illinoispolicy.giftlegacy.com