

# Fifth Annual "Glow Bingo" at the Philo Gym



THE UNITY WEST PTO Glow Bingo committee pulled together all the details and donations for the fundraising event. Submitted photo.



EVERY SPRING, Unity West PTO hosts a fundraiser to support the school. The 5th Annual "Glow Bingo" at the Philo Gym on Saturday, February 28th raised thousands of dollars for classroom supplies for teachers and students, playground equipment and other resources to help everyone in the building (1035 County Road 600 N. Tolono) thrive. The dedicated committee are grateful for the participants and volunteers who brought in donations from supportive businesses contributing to another successful event. Submitted photo.

## U of I still concerned about higher ed funding overhaul proposal

By Peter Hancock, Nikoel Hytrek, UIS Public Affairs Reporting (PAR)

The president of the University of Illinois System said Wednesday that negotiations are continuing over legislation to overhaul the way the state funds higher education, but the state's flagship university remains opposed to the legislation in its current form.

"Our calculations have demonstrated that the bill, as it stands, would disfavor us, and it would lead to rises in tuition for Illinois families that we don't think is the right answer to the kind of problem sets that are being looked at," Tim Killeen said in an interview with Capitol News Illinois.

The proposed legislation, House Bill 1581 and Senate Bill 13, calls for adding about \$1.7 billion in new higher education funding over the next 10 years. That money would be distributed under a formula similar to the Evidence-Based funding formula used for K-12 education that would prioritize the schools that are currently the most underfunded.

Under the proposed formula, the neediest schools would include Western Illinois University, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, and Eastern Illinois University.

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the state's largest university campus, currently ranks as the most adequately funded school and thus would be last on the priority list for new funding.

"We support all public universities," Killeen said. "We

think they play a really important role in the local communities and in the innovation agenda for the whole state, and it's painful to see some of those universities struggling with their budget. So we would be much in favor of enhanced resources. The specifics of this formula, it siphons resources from the flagship ... and we educate 53% of the undergraduates."

Supporters of the proposal have said they will push for it again this year and that they are continuing to negotiate with U of I on a compromise.

"We look forward to bringing the University of Illinois on board so that we can adopt a more fair and equitable process to prevent the closure of our other institutions around the state of Illinois, so that we can meet the needs of all of our students in this state," Rep. Carol Ammons, D-Urbana, a lead sponsor of the House bill, said at a Feb. 17 news conference.

**Amid federal cuts, education groups hope state will serve as a backstop**

Illinois lawmakers are fielding multiple requests for state funding this year from education advocacy groups that either have, or fear that they soon will, see cuts in their federal funding.

A House committee that oversees the state's K-12 education budget held hearings Tuesday on two such requests.

House Bill 4521, sponsored by Rep. Laura Faver Dias, D-Grayslake, calls for \$5 million in funding for services that tar-



TIMOTHY KILLEEN, president of the University of Illinois System, speaks to reporters outside of the Illinois State Capitol in Springfield. (Capitol News Illinois photo by Andrew Campbell)

get homeless students.

"The state has historically received \$5 million in federal funding through the McKinney Vento Act," Dias said, referring to a federal program under the U.S. Department of Education, which President Donald Trump has proposed eliminating. "However, there is now a possibility of uncertainty, given the current federal dynamics. Additionally, these funds are much more restricted in their use and do not provide the flexibility that is required to fully support a homeless student."

The committee also heard a request for \$5.5 million in state funding for YouthBuild Illinois, a network of local job training programs that serve young adults, including those who haven't finished high school.

YouthBuild currently receives both state and federal funding. But Tamika Wilson, president of the Illinois Youth-Build Coalition, said the federal funding has become increasingly unreliable.

"In this environment, Illinois State Board of Education support is not supplemental," she said. "It is foundational to sustaining equitable access to YouthBuild across our state."

Meanwhile, organizations that provide federally funded after-school programs and other social services in schools are asking lawmakers for \$20 million in state funding to replace funds they lost when the Trump administration abruptly canceled several federal grants for those programs in Illinois last year.

ACT Now, a nonprofit advocacy group that represents those service providers, has challenged those cancellations in federal court.

"Nationally, more than \$380 million in promised aid to Full Service Community Schools will disappear by 2028," Rep. Maura Hirschauer, D-Batavia, the lead sponsor of the funding bill, said during a news conference Wednesday. "And the justification (is) that these programs allegedly foster DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) principles."

Lawmakers, advocates seek \$2M to sustain prison anti-recidivism program

To support people returning from prison and prevent recidivism, the Supportive Reentry Network Collaborative urged

Illinois lawmakers Wednesday to include a \$2.1 million appropriation for fiscal year 2027 to sustain services.

State Sen. Lakesia Collins and State Rep. Michael Crawford are leading the effort.

The money would go to Safer Foundation, which leads SRNC. The collaborative currently is funded by the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services through the end of 2026.

Since 2022, SRNC has helped people returning from prison get access to health care and counseling, housing assistance, job training applications for public benefits and more.

The risk of recidivism is highest in the first few years after release, and SRNC says its model provides resources so those individuals have the support they need to avoid more criminal offenses. Since 2022, rates of return to prison have decreased from 32% to 21% in Illinois, according to SRNC.

"SRNC delivers measurable reductions in recidivism, stronger health care access and workforce stability," Crawford said at a Wednesday news conference. "Sustaining funding protects public safety and fiscal responsibility."

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## Rocket Nation

Continued from page 2

kids involved in music compared to those who go without tapping into those opportunities. Found-

ers of this All Out Acappella event, Cary and Bonnie Woolard were fans of the acappella show at Foellinger Auditorium on campus that had various U of I groups singing without accompaniment. After asking them for their contact information to

see if they minded performing in front of an audience at Unity High School to brush up on their show before competing with other college singing groups, our fundraiser began to take shape!

As Unit 7 music directors face rising costs for costumes,

uniforms, copy-writing fees, choreography, instruments/repairs and the students getting a chance to go to expensive summer camps to enhance their skills and meet other people with the same interests as our Rockets are given a chance to

apply for scholarships: this is what the \$15 ticket (\$10 for seniors/students) goes for when the Friday, March 6th concert takes place, starting at 6:30pm. Bringing extra cash is encouraged for some sweet treats and auction baskets with tickets and

experiences to bid on! Consider yourself invited to come out with a friend and enjoy this wonderful show featuring groups from the University of Illinois, Illinois State University and Unity! Find out details, or give online at UnityMusicBoosters.org

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