



July 21, 2023

Dear Institution Leaders and Financial Aid Officers,

The recent opinion by the Supreme Court of the United States narrowing universities' ability to consider race in their *admissions* decisions has understandably created angst among students, families, and the higher education community about the immediate implications for admissions and potential future implications beyond admissions into financial aid and other program areas. Furthermore, potential future effects or subsequent rulings make it pertinent to all of higher education. A feeling of uncertainty is expected when something that was settled law for decades is overturned. Now is the time to ask questions, seek counsel, assess our current practices and plan for action; it is not the time for hasty reaction.

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), and the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) are committed to working with Illinois public and private colleges and universities, highly selective and open enrollment community colleges alike, to ensure racial and ethnic diversity on our campuses and to promote inclusive learning environments. We all agree that diversity, equity, and inclusion in our higher education system are essential to building a thriving Illinois economy. Diverse and inclusive academic communities where everyone feels a sense of belonging are essential to all students' personal and professional growth and success.

It is particularly important to note that while the ruling upends decades of precedent, it did leave space for universities to consider how an individual applicant's lived experiences, including experiences related to their race, inform their ability to contribute to the university community.

In our efforts to comply with the law, it is important that we safeguard all tools that are available to us to help advance equity at our institutions and in our system of higher education. We must be diligent and careful when making decisions that impact our equity efforts. We are confident that, together, we will continue to make our state's higher education system the most equitable in the nation.

In mid-August, the United States Department of Education plans to issue guidance resulting from the impact of the Court's rulings on affirmative action in college admissions. While we wait for guidance from the federal government, please employ caution in your actions to alter programs as you consider the implications of the decision. Illinois' higher education agencies are committed to working with institutions to address the challenges as we collectively assess our ecosystem in the wake of the SFFA ruling.

To the extent there are questions about existing state financial aid, we can share at this time that ISAC expects to continue to administer these programs as usual for the 2023-24 academic year, as required by Illinois statute and concurrent rules. If any changes to these programs are needed in the future, ISAC would

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advocate for an approach that takes into consideration the challenges for students and schools in changing scholarship requirements for those students already enrolled in school – including the risk of creating funding delays and gaps that could interrupt a student’s studies, perhaps permanently.

Thank you for your partnership as we navigate toward a common goal. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us with any questions or concerns.

In service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "GO", positioned above the name and title of Ginger Ostro.

Ginger Ostro
IBHE Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "BD", positioned above the name and title of Brian Durham.

Brian Durham
ICCB Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "EZ", positioned above the name and title of Eric Zarnikow.

Eric Zarnikow
ISAC Executive Director