



## State of Illinois Upward Mobility Program

*Funding a union perk at taxpayer expense*

### The Problem

Wish someone would pay for your continuing education so you could get a higher paying job? If you are a unionized Illinois state government employee, you're in luck. The State of Illinois runs the Upward Mobility Program, which is "a career mobility program designed to give state employees an opportunity to advance to more challenging, higher paying positions."<sup>1</sup> Illinois taxpayers pick up the program's costs:

- Illinois state government employees who are union members represented by AF-SCME can register for the Upward Mobility Program.<sup>2</sup> Selection for the program is based upon seniority. Once selected, participants enroll in continuing education and training classes necessary to qualify for their target job title.<sup>3</sup>
- The Upward Mobility Program pays 100 percent of participants' tuition costs at public institutions. At approved private schools, the program pays as much as \$400/credit hour for undergraduate courses and \$450 for master's courses.<sup>4</sup>
- When class time and work hours conflict, state employees in the program can qualify for paid time off for half of the time that classes interfere with their work hours.<sup>5</sup>
- State employees enrolled in the program are allowed to take up to eight hours off per week to attend classes, and management can only disapprove of such time off requests because of "unusual operational needs, class availability or untimely submission."<sup>6</sup>
- Participants may appeal to the Upward Mobility Advisory Committee for additional financial assistance to help pay for items the program does not cover, such as textbooks and non-mandatory fees, if "payment of such costs would impose a

**Annual State Expenditure for the Upward Mobility Program, Fiscal Year 2007 to 2011**

Fiscal Year	2007	2008	2009	2010 (estimated)	2011 (proposed)
State expenditure for expenses of the Upward Mobility Program	\$4,156,900.00	\$4,226,300.00	\$4,420,700.00	\$4,500,000.00	\$4,750,000.00

Source: Illinois State Budget

*This is part 3 of the Illinois Policy Institute's weekly Spotlight on Spending series, highlighting wasteful or inefficient programs and spending with the goal of bringing more responsible spending and accountable government to Illinois. For additional information on state spending, visit [www.IllinoisOpenGov.org](http://www.IllinoisOpenGov.org).*

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serious financial hardship on the employee.”<sup>7</sup>

- The program pays for all required college proficiency tests and remedial classes.<sup>8</sup>
- Upward Mobility pays for “required qualifying and licensure examinations, and for any review classes which prepare a participant to take such examinations.”<sup>9</sup>
- Participants receive “paid time off to meet with their Upward Mobility counselor or take a proficiency test.”<sup>10</sup>
- Participants pursue continuing education related to a list of more than 50 job titles, including: accountant, cook, chemist, psychologist, and social worker.<sup>11</sup>
- Upon completion of the program, state employees are given “special consideration in the filling of vacancies” of targeted state job titles.<sup>12</sup>
- Participants who seek titles that require degrees or licenses must fulfill a two-year work commitment with the state. Those who leave before fulfilling the commitment must repay the cost of tuition and fees on a prorated basis.<sup>13</sup>

How much does the Upward Mobility Program cost taxpayers? According to Illinois state budget books, taxpayers spend over \$4 million per year on this program. Governor Pat Quinn has proposed raising the program’s fiscal year 2011 funding to \$4,750,000—\$250,000 more than fiscal year 2010 funding levels.

**The Solution**

The Upward Mobility Program should be eliminated. Illinois taxpayers often struggle to fund higher education costs for their own families; they should not be funding higher education for state employees as well.

**Why This Works**

Illinois is in the midst of a massive budget crisis. State government jobs in Illinois are already well paid, offer generous benefits, and come with high job security. Illinois needs to prioritize spending on core government services over union perks.

**Endnotes**

1 *Illinois Department of Central Management Services, “Upward Mobility Program,”* [http://www.state.il.us/cms/2\\_servicese\\_educ/umprgm.htm](http://www.state.il.us/cms/2_servicese_educ/umprgm.htm).

2 *Illinois Department of Central Management Services, “Upward Mobility Program Eligibility & Enrollment,”* [http://www.cms.illinois.gov/2\\_servicese\\_educ/umpenrol.htm?url=\\$url](http://www.cms.illinois.gov/2_servicese_educ/umpenrol.htm?url=$url).

3 *Upward Mobility Program Policy Guidelines,”* pp. 2-6, [http://www.state.il.us/cms/download/pdfs/ump\\_policy.pdf](http://www.state.il.us/cms/download/pdfs/ump_policy.pdf).

4 *Illinois Department of Central Management Services, “Upward Mobility Program,”* [http://www.state.il.us/cms/2\\_servicese\\_educ/umprgm.htm](http://www.state.il.us/cms/2_servicese_educ/umprgm.htm).

5 *“Upward Mobility Program Policy Guidelines,”* pp. 8, [http://www.state.il.us/cms/download/pdfs/ump\\_policy.pdf](http://www.state.il.us/cms/download/pdfs/ump_policy.pdf).

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid*, pp. 10.

8 *Ibid*, pp. 10.

9 *Ibid*, pp. 12.

10 *Illinois Department of Central Management Services, “Upward Mobility Program Eligibility & Enrollment,”* [http://www.cms.illinois.gov/2\\_servicese\\_educ/umpenrol.htm?url=\\$url](http://www.cms.illinois.gov/2_servicese_educ/umpenrol.htm?url=$url).

11 *Illinois Department of Central Management Services, “Upward Mobility Program Targeted Job Titles,”* [http://www.state.il.us/cms/2\\_servicese\\_educ/umptitle.htm?url=\\$url](http://www.state.il.us/cms/2_servicese_educ/umptitle.htm?url=$url).

12 *Illinois Department of Central Management Services, “Upward Mobility Program Eligibility & Enrollment,”* [http://www.cms.illinois.gov/2\\_servicese\\_educ/umpenrol.htm?url=\\$url](http://www.cms.illinois.gov/2_servicese_educ/umpenrol.htm?url=$url).

13 *Upward Mobility Program Policy Guidelines,”* pp. 10, [http://www.state.il.us/cms/download/pdfs/ump\\_policy.pdf](http://www.state.il.us/cms/download/pdfs/ump_policy.pdf).