

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1304

June 15, 2020

Dear President:

I write to you today to encourage your institution to help your communities and Illinois address the need for trained contact tracers to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This pandemic has, no doubt, put great strain on your institution as you work to continue to meet your mission of serving your communities. It has challenged and changed so many parts of our daily lives—highlighting inequalities and leaving many struggling due to lost jobs.

As Illinois and our country take the first steps to safely reopen, it is apparent that contact tracing is an essential part of identifying and isolating patients and mitigating the potential for additional spikes of this deadly virus until we find a vaccine. Until a few months ago, the concept of contact tracing was confined to epidemiological experts more focused on public health efforts around the world. Now, it has become a household term—with these positions holding the key to our public health and safety and presenting an opportunity to provide jobs to those out of work. Illinois, alone, is looking to hire nearly 4,000 contact tracers to serve with local health departments after undergoing training.

As a well-established educational institution, you have successfully responded to the urgent needs of your community before. I hope you will do so again when it comes to meeting Illinois' need for well-trained contact tracers. I urge you to work with the State of Illinois and your local health departments to partner in this endeavor. If the training needs are not met by reputable institutions, I am concerned that predatory for-profit colleges could take advantage of this crisis to exploit Illinois students by promoting unnecessary and expensive courses that do not meet our public health needs and will only saddle students with debt. We must not let that happen.

Illinois community colleges, like yours, are a valuable asset to our communities and state. Now is your time to shine in our national moment of need. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Cc: Dr. Brian Durham, Executive Director, Illinois Community College Board