We all benefit from a better-educated Illinois: from workers who can earn more, to businesses who can find better-trained employees, to our state, which benefits from higher tax revenues.

Illinois has a laudable goal: that 60 percent of Illinoisans will have a college degree by 2025. Meeting that goal would go a long way toward improving the future of our state.

But without increasing our financial aid investment in low-income adult students, we cannot expect them to complete college. Students consistently rank college and living costs as top reasons for dropping out of school.

That makes sense! About 75 percent of independent students eligible for Illinois’ need-based financial aid grant, the Monetary Award Program (MAP), cannot afford to contribute anything out of pocket toward their college costs. The average annual income of MAP-eligible students is just $14,682. How do we expect them to make ends meet and pay for college at the same time without financial aid?
We need to change the policy.

1. **Set real deadlines** instead of relying on ever changing dates that are based on forecasting when the money will run out.
2. **Extend or expand the deadlines** to include more adult students who apply later.
3. **Focus our resources** on the lowest income students who cannot afford college—any college—without financial aid.

Only then will Illinois be able to meet the 60x25 challenge, and compete in a global economy.