



AND AFFILIATES

March 24, 2015

The Honorable Deborah Conroy
Illinois Representative (D-46)
244-W Stratton Office Building
Springfield, Illinois 62706

RE: Bringing Civics Back to Illinois Schools

Dear Representative Conroy:

Thank you for your leadership in restoring the civic mission of our schools in preparing the next generation to be educated and engaged citizens. This is critical to our future as a state and nation. Illinois is currently one of only ten states that does not require a civics course for graduation from high school, and as a result nearly 50 percent of students in Illinois leave high school without a required civics or government course. As you stated in sponsoring the legislation, "Many students graduate without even basic knowledge of current events and how to become active members of their communities." Your proposed legislation will help fill this civic education gap and bring civics back to all our schools.

In order to support statewide implementation of a new high school civics course, there is a need for teacher professional development serving all regions of Illinois. Teachers, schools, and districts in some areas outside of the Chicago metropolitan area are underserved when it comes to professional development opportunities, and resources are required to expand training in the state. Fortunately, Illinois has a very robust community of corporations, foundations, and non-profit organizations that actively support civic education and youth civic engagement. Nearly 60 organizations are already active statewide and are poised to assist with training efforts to ensure all areas of Illinois are covered. This work is supported by significant philanthropic contributions from corporations and foundations in Illinois. These current efforts will be extremely helpful in supporting implementation of the civics course requirement. However, there may still be unmet needs for professional development in some parts of the state.

To ensure adequate support for professional development activities, the corporate and foundation communities are committed to supporting a public-private partnership to provide needed professional development with funding of at least \$500,000 annually for a three-year transition period. Together with existing programs, there will be well over \$1 million annually invested in quality civic education professional development during the implementation period. Funding

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commitments include the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, The Chicago Community Trust, and other partners.

The fund will be coordinated by the McCormick Foundation, in collaboration with other funders, and the Illinois State Board of Education and its regional offices. Potential professional development providers include non-profit organizations specializing in civic education, university partners, and regional offices of education. Grants will focus on programs that are aligned with best practices in civic learning and will include related program evaluation.

We are pleased to join in your very important efforts to bring quality civic learning back to our schools. We look forward to working with you in the enactment of this historic legislation and its effective implementation.

Very truly yours,



David D. Hiller
President and CEO
Robert R. McCormick Foundation



Terry Mazany
President and CEO
Chicago Community Trust