

## MAP grant threat brings college students to Springfield

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The threat of losing a key piece of financial aid next semester spurred thousands of Illinois college students to rally Thursday in Springfield and pressure lawmakers to replenish funding for the Monetary Award Program.

"We need MAP!" they chanted as they converged on a parking lot about a block south of the State Capitol.

By the end of the day, the students seemed to have gotten their wish. The Illinois House of Representatives and the state Senate approved legislation that expands spending authority for MAP.

It remains unclear, though, exactly how the state will find the extra money to fill MAP's estimated \$200 million funding shortfall for the spring 2010 semester. The need-based grant program helps about 138,000 Illinois college students pay for their education.

Some of them are still worried about getting grants next semester.

"How do we know for sure this is a secure thing?" asked Keala Thomas, a sophomore at Southern Illinois University and a MAP grant recipient.

The longer-term future of MAP grant funding also is murky.

"It's not just this semester that we're fighting for," said Kyle Malinowski, student body president at Bradley University and the rally's master of ceremonies. "It's the next semester and the next semester after that."

He joined two busloads of Bradley students who journeyed from Peoria to attend the rally and meet with lawmakers. The rally also attracted students from numerous other Illinois colleges and universities.

Quinn spoke at the mid-day rally and was greeted with cheers when he told students the Illinois House of Representatives had just passed legislation allowing the state to spend more money for MAP. The Senate followed suit later in the day.

"I think it went amazingly. It really just showed the power of the student voice," Malinowski said just after the rally ended.

Jaime Casinova, a University of Illinois Springfield junior, said he depends entirely on financial aid -- including MAP grants -- to attend college.

Casinova said he used to live at a mission. He fears that the loss of the MAP money would throw him back into homelessness.

"It's a little nerve-wracking," he said. "I'm almost to the finish line, and I'm in danger of losing it all."

MAP grant recipient Charles Olivier, a junior at UIS, said education should be one of the state's top funding priorities, he said.

"Giving money to students is essentially putting money right back into the state," he said. "We are the people who are going to help the economy revive."

David Tretter, president of the Federation of Independent Illinois Colleges & Universities, said MAP grants often tip the scale so that students can manage to attend college.

"This is one piece of that financial aid patchwork. When one piece falls out, it all comes apart," Tretter said.

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