

ILLINOIS TURNAROUND PLAN

A project of the Illinois Policy Institute

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The Illinois Policy Institute is a nonpartisan research organization dedicated to supporting free market principles and liberty-based public policy initiatives for a better Illinois. As a leading voice for economic liberty and government accountability, we engage policy makers, opinion leaders, and citizens on the state and local level.

We invite you to join with us for better opportunities for all citizens across the state. To learn more about how you can help in Illinois, visit **www.IllinoisPolicy.org**.

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LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear Friend,

For years, the state of Illinois has been driven in the wrong direction. Some would say we are headed toward a fiscal and economic cliff—and too many who hold office believe that our path cannot be changed.

We disagree. We believe it is time to turn the state around. The people of Illinois are ready for a new direction, and that's what the Illinois Turnaround Plan is all about.

Illinois was once an economic powerhouse, known throughout the nation as a beacon of opportunity and prosperity. Today, Illinois is showing an alarming pattern of continually slipping behind other states in major national rankings of economic health (see page 7 for more details). Decade after decade, Illinois leaders and legislators have put us on the wrong track—defined by the state's out-of-control growth in government spending, prevailing corruption, and delay and denial by politicians who avoid solving our real problems.

Putting our state back on the path to prosperity requires a new set of guiding principles, and policies, to govern our state. We can turn this state around. This booklet outlines the specific policies that will do just that.

Illinois Turnaround Plan

We hope you can join our effort to transform Illinois for the better. Want to get involved to make our state a better place for all citizens? Visit www.illinoisturnaround.com.

Best wishes,



John Tillman
CEO, Illinois Policy Institute

P.S. Together, we *can* make Illinois an economic powerhouse once again. I hope you'll use this handy booklet as a reference guide for making positive change in your backyard and beyond.



CEO John Tillman and Executive Vice President Kristina Rasmussen of the Illinois Policy Institute

THE NEED FOR A TURNAROUND

In June 2010, the Illinois Policy Institute commissioned a poll among 600 likely voters in Illinois. Here are some of the noteworthy findings:

76%

feel Illinois is on the wrong track.

61%

support fiscal responsibility for the Illinois budget.

60%

say state government is spending too much money.

70%

favor amending the state constitution to limit state spending growth.

To see the complete results of the poll, visit www.illinoispolicy.org/voterpoll.

FAST FACTS ABOUT ILLINOIS

The Problem

Out of the 50 states, Illinois ranks 48th in economic performance. According to the ALEC-Laffer State Competitiveness Index, Illinois is doing better than only two states: Michigan and Ohio.

According to this report, as well as government data, Illinois also ranks:

- **47th in economic outlook.** Neighboring Missouri and Indiana rank well ahead in terms of future opportunity, at 15th and 20th respectively.
- **44th in GDP growth**, averaging only 4.95% per year from 1998–2008 while the U.S. average is 6.59%. Illinois GDP growth has declined since 1977—from 7.6% to 5.9%.



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- **38th in personal income growth per capita**, averaging at 4.5% in 1998-2008 while the U.S. average is 5.0%.
- **48th in employment growth** from 1998 till 2008, ranking ahead of only Michigan and Ohio.
- **48th in net out-migration**, with 637,979 people leaving the state from 1999-2008. Only two states—California and New York—lost more people.
- **7th highest in median property taxes paid.**
- **14th highest in number of days spent working each year** to pay federal, state, and local government taxes.
- **14th highest in state and local tax burden on a per-capita basis**, at \$4,346.
- **10th highest in property tax burden per capita.**
- **5th highest gas tax burden**—approximately 39 cents per gallon.
- **1st in sales tax burden** (Chicago & Cook County) of any large

At present, of the 50 states, Illinois ranks:

47th

in economic outlook

44th

in GDP growth

38th

in personal income growth per capita

48th

in employment growth

48th

in net out-migration

- U.S. city.
- **8th highest combined state and average local sales tax rate**, at 8.22 percent.
- **Illinois is shrinking in wealth**, once ranking as high as 6th in per capita personal income and dropping to 12th in 2008.
- **The growth of the Illinois economy has lagged the rest of the country** for the past three decades.

Our Solution

The solution: lower taxes; responsible spending; transparent, accountable government; and a business-friendly environment that empowers entrepreneurs, investors and workers.

Policy *changes lives.*

When Eddie Metz and his siblings took over their family's business in 2000, they knew there would be challenges. However, the challenges for Joseph Metz and Son, Inc. in Lyons, IL, have proved daunting. As the construction and housing boom ended, demand for the concrete material they sell collapsed. Amidst this change in business conditions, their property taxes have gone up. Eddie says, "With the property taxes, and no business, we have had to lay off all our employees." Unless the climate for business changes, Eddie will be forced to close the 103-year-old family business next year.

THE ILLINOIS TURNAROUND PLAN

Is Illinois a lost cause? Unfortunately, many politicians and community leaders seem to have resigned themselves to the status quo—a culture of corruption, overspending, and repeatedly kicking the can of responsibility down the road.

Currently, our state faces \$4.7 billion in unpaid bills and an unfunded pension liability that is over \$80 billion. Our economy, meanwhile, is stagnant, with high unemployment, low job growth, and families struggling to make ends meet.

We cannot tax our way out of this problem—even with a giant income tax hike of 66 percent, as Governor Pat Quinn has proposed.

We cannot borrow our way out of this problem. Eventually, the bill will come due.



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And we cannot simply cut our way out of this problem. Structural reforms must take place.

We can only solve Illinois's massive problems by addressing their root causes—and reversing them, step by step.

Turnaround Step One: Stop the out-of-control spending

Over the years, government spending has skyrocketed, and it continues to grow at an incredible rate. Quite simply, we spend more than we take in. This must stop. Step One of the Illinois Turnaround Plan is a government spending brake that will let government grow, but in a moderate, predictable way: at the rate of inflation plus population growth. This will put Springfield on a clear path to fiscal sustainability while funding core programs (see page 13 for details).

Turnaround Step Two: Encourage job-friendly policies that increase household incomes

For years, the Illinois economy has been choked by unfriendly government policy. We rank near the bottom of all states in economic growth. We rank near the bottom (48th in the nation) in creating jobs. We are falling in household income. Slow growth and fewer jobs means people are leaving our state in record numbers to seek economic

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opportunity elsewhere. Step Two of the Illinois Turnaround calls for policies that will reverse this trend (see page 13 for details).

The path to prosperity is clear. So how do we start the journey? If we want to turn this state around, **every single policy proposal must go through this three-question filter:**

- 1. Will this policy proposal reduce the burden on taxpayers?**
- 2. Will this policy proposal stop the unsustainable growth in government spending?**
- 3. Will this policy proposal make Illinois #1 in job creation and increase household incomes?**

Two steps. Three simple questions. As you'll see in the pages that follow, the Illinois Turnaround Plan offers the detailed policy prescriptions needed to get Illinois on the right track.

Cynics will tell you it can't be done. We're going to show them otherwise. Turning Illinois around won't require a miracle. It will just require citizens from across the state getting together to demand the right policies for the future. You can learn more in the pages that follow.

Real change starts here...and real change starts with you.

Join the turnaround today. To learn what you can do to help, see page 20 or visit www.illinoisturnaround.com.

THE ILLINOIS TURNAROUND PLAN: POLICY DETAILS

**Real change starts here...
and real change starts with you.**

For years, Illinois politicians have driven our state in the wrong direction—a direction that's leading us to financial ruin. That's why we're launching the Illinois Turnaround Plan, focused on practical, common-sense solutions to our state's problems. We propose the following four policy solutions to turn Illinois around.

1. **Stopping out-of-control state spending**

Did you know that...

- State spending is up 26 percent after inflation from 2000 to 2009. Your tax dollars are flying out the door faster than they're coming into state coffers. Our proposed spending growth index would ensure reasonable government growth—tied to the rate of inflation plus population—while stopping out-of-control spending. Find out more at **www.illinoispolicy.org/missionpossible**.
- More often than not, our legislators are shopping without looking at the price tags. Fiscal note reform,

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which was proposed by the Illinois Policy Institute and endorsed by Governor Quinn, would require the legislature to consider exactly how much a proposed bill would cost or save the state. Learn more at www.illinoispolicy.org/fiscalnote.

- Illinois legislators earn a base salary of \$67,836—the fifth-highest legislator salary in the country. Only California, Michigan, New York and Pennsylvania pay their legislators more. Read the Institute's suggestions for reforming legislator pay at www.illinoispolicy.org/legislatorpay.

POLICY PRESCRIPTION

Stop spending beyond our means. When a new spending program is added, lawmakers must offset the expense by eliminating an existing program that is outdated or ineffective. Freeze all new expenditures and limit state spending growth to the rate of inflation plus population growth. Require a three-fifths supermajority vote on any legislation that would raise taxes or fees on Illinois families or businesses.



2. Expanding government transparency

Did you know that...

- All too often, the state is spending your money on wasteful items. The Illinois Policy Institute's transparency website (illinoisopengov.org) gives Illinois taxpayers an online X-ray machine into the details of state spending—and provides an unbiased look into raw state government spending data.

- Few Illinois citizens know the state government spent **\$7,875** on “bird testing,” **\$20,692** on “subscriptions” for the Governor’s office, or that the Department of Commerce spent **\$3,770** for golf carts, **\$2,822** on hot sauce, and **\$280** on soy crayons—all funded by Illinois taxpayers. Learn more at **www.illinoisopengov.org**.

“Our representatives are using our money in the wrong way...we’re in debt and it keeps going higher and they spend our money behind closed doors, the transparency needs to be there and we need to know what’s going on.”

-Joanna, Chicago suburbs

- The first step to true government reform is greater transparency. The Illinois Policy Institute's Liberty Leaders volunteer program works with citizens across the state to make their communities more open and transparent. So far, our 1,056 Liberty Leaders have made

over \$1.496 billion in taxpayer dollars open to the public. Get involved at illinoispolicy.org.

POLICY PRESCRIPTION

Make every penny of state spending easily accessible and understandable by taxpayers. Require that legislators read the budgets and bills they're passing before voting on them. Give the public seven days to review the budget online before it is voted upon in the House and Senate, thereby providing additional time for the media and public to review and provide input. Require agencies to show real results from any spending and sunset the non-performing programs.

3. Reforming our bankrupt state pension system

Did you know that...

- Our state pension system is more than \$83 billion in the hole. For years, the General Assembly and successive governors have failed to fully fund the annual pension payment. Instead, officials have gone on an all-out spending spree. Today, every Illinois household is now burdened with \$4,423 in state government debt.
- The state offers retirement benefits that are more generous than those commonly offered in the private sector. In 2009, 536 Illinois public employee retirees earned a pension of more than \$100,000. State retirees

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with 20 or more years of service pay no health insurance premiums. These perks are no longer sustainable. The General Assembly must implement salaries, benefits, and pensions that do not create inequity between those who pay for these benefits and those who receive them.

- The state's pension contribution—more than \$4 billion in 2010 and growing every year—is squeezing out spending on other core government operations. Until a mechanism that prevents irresponsible spending while protecting pension payments is put into place, Illinois will continue the long, slow economic decline that has been underway for over 30 years.
- The Illinois Policy Institute put together a plan that fixes the pension problem while respecting both taxpayers and the promises made to public employees. The Pension Funding & Fairness Act would require state leaders to set priorities while allocating finite taxpayer resources. Read our updated Pension Funding & Fairness Act at www.illinoispolicy.org/missionpossible.

POLICY PRESCRIPTION

Transition the state pension system to a defined-contribution plan. Pass the Pension Funding & Fairness Act in order to control spending excesses, budget responsibly, and fully fund the annual required pension payment.



4. Removing government roadblocks to prosperity

Did you know that...

- Illinois's maze of regulations has the effect of sending a "KEEP OUT" message to would-be entrepreneurs. Not only do Illinoisans battle against the general tide of a struggling economy, they must also confront costly barriers to doing business, which come in the form of state laws and regulations, licensing requirements, and fees.
- Many unnecessary government regulations stifle would-be entrepreneurs. Until recently, for example, hair braiders in Illinois needed 1,500 hours of training in order to get a license—a regulation that stopped many would-be entrepreneurs in their tracks. Thanks to the hard work of the Illinois Policy Institute and allies across the state, a new law has passed that loosens unnecessary restrictions on hair braiders...and opens the door for new jobs.
- Illinois's remaining licensing requirements create one of the most discouraging obstacles entrepreneurs face in Illinois. Even with the best of intentions, fees and license requirements establish barriers to success for entrepreneurs seeking to expand a business in Illinois. In Chicago, for example, there is no way to escape a fee if you want to start a business. For more information, visit **www.illinoispolicy.org/roadblocks**.

POLICY PRESCRIPTION

Create the Illinois Enterprise Commission to review and determine which Illinois regulations have a negative impact on job creation and economic productivity. The Commission would recommend repealing, abolishing, or amending these regulations, and the General Assembly would take an up-or-down vote on removing job-killing regulations and laws.

With your help, we can make these positive policy changes happen.

If we can change Illinois, we can change the nation. **Join our e-list today**—you can sign up by going to www.illinoisturnaround.com or www.illinoispolicy.org. We'll keep you posted on the next steps to making our state a better place for all citizens.



HOW CAN I HELP?

Get on board: Seven simple things you can do to turn this state around.

You know Illinois is in trouble. Big trouble. Now what are you going to do about it?

- 1. Sign up.** Visit www.illinoisturnaround.com and sign up for important e-mail updates on the Illinois Turnaround Plan.
- 2. Attend an event.** Over the next few months, we'll be touring the state, hosting town hall events dedicated to hearing the views of local candidates and discussing the reforms proposed in the Turnaround Plan. This is a chance for you to make your voice heard on the most important issues facing Illinois.
- 3. Host an event.** Want to host an event in your town? E-mail us at turnaround@illinoispolicy.org.
- 4. Spread the word.** Tell your friends about the Turnaround Plan, and send them to www.illinoisturnaround.com to get connected!
- 5. Volunteer.** Our network of Liberty Leaders, more than 1,000 strong, is changing policy for the better around Illinois! To get involved, contact Brian Costin at bcostin@illinoispolicy.org.

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6. Tell your story.

To share your story of how entrepreneurs and small businesses make a difference—and how they could be better encouraged in Illinois—contact us.

7. Support our work.

The Illinois Policy Institute, which is the lead sponsor of the Illinois Turnaround Plan, relies on the support of donors like you. To support our work to turn Illinois around, visit www.illinoisturnaround.com.

“My son works for a small company in Champaign/ Urbana. I see him having to leave the state for business more and more, and he doesn’t want to leave...and I want him to stay. I do not like what’s happening in Illinois, and I really feel like we’re going to be like Michigan if we don’t start turning it around.”

-Jan, Rolling Meadows



IT'S TIME FOR A TURNAROUND!

We're making progress...and with your help, we can transform our state.

Illinois is not, as many people would tell you, a lost cause. Here are just a few of the reforms we have helped make happen in recent years:

- **Successfully blocked a massive state income tax hike in 2009 and 2010.**
- **Challenged spending boondoggles at the state, local, and federal levels.**
- **Our Liberty Leaders have made over \$1.4 billion in taxpayer money transparent and open to the public.**
- **Worked for Medicaid and education reforms in Illinois.**
- **Spread the word about common-sense budget reforms that have saved local communities millions.**

With your help, there's no limit to what we can do. Together, we can turn Illinois around, restoring our state's place as an economic powerhouse and a land of opportunity for all citizens.

Will you join us?

Visit **www.illinoisturnaround.com** to get started.

APPENDIX: FISCAL FOLLIES

Why Illinois's budget is broken and what to do about it.

Illinois's budget is broken—that's a fact accepted by almost all Prairie State policy analysts. The state has more than \$4 billion in accumulated operating debt, to say nothing of the \$83 billion in unfunded public employee pension liabilities.

How did Illinois get into this mess—and more importantly, how do we get out of it?

Until recently, the narrative in Springfield has been “Illinois state government isn't spending enough; families and businesses should swallow a tax hike to make more funds available for government.”

This perspective is reflective of the same backward thinking that put Illinois in a fiscal pickle in the first place. If we could truly tax, spend, and borrow our way into prosperity, Illinois would be a job creation powerhouse. Hundreds of thousands of Americans would be pouring into our borders instead of heading to low-tax, high-growth states like Texas, Arizona, and Florida. Distressingly, Illinois had a net out migration of 637,979 people from 1999-2008, putting us at 48th in the nation for attracting newcomers to call our state home.

It's time to take a clear-eyed look at the myths that have propelled Illinois down a path of economic decline. Illinois can once again stand as an economic powerhouse and a beacon of prosperity, provided it sheds the misguided policy prescriptions of the past.

Fact: Illinois state government has spent more in real terms over time.

Overall state spending in Illinois has gone up significantly over the past decade, increasing 26 percent after inflation from 2000 to 2009. In 2000, state spending per resident was \$3,983 (inflation adjusted). Ten years later, state spending per resident was \$4,730.

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Spending on major programs is up. For example, government health care—namely Medicaid—is one of the big drivers

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of Illinois's budget growth. From 1993 to 1999, Illinois's Medicaid liabilities grew at a rate of 1.4 percent; over the last 10 years, state Medicaid liabilities grew at a rate of 6.9 percent a year.

Education spending has also been on an upward trend. During the 2008-09 school year, real inflation-adjusted per pupil spending in Illinois schools was at an all-time high. According to the State Board of Education, combined spending in Illinois public schools totaled \$12,363 per pupil.

State government debt and tough economic conditions now make high levels of spending unsustainable. Instead of spending more for the sake of spending more, Illinois state government should be pursuing innovative ways to achieve more efficiency in service delivery.



Fact: Illinois has a spending problem.

The fundamental problem in Illinois state government is a lack of spending discipline. For years the taxpayers provided Illinois government with record revenues. In 2008, state government received a record amount of revenues—\$29.7 billion—from the tax-paying families and businesses of Illinois. State leaders spent every dime and borrowed billions more.

Illinois's total debt per capita has risen from \$676 in 2001 to \$1,682 in 2010. Total general obligation and capital debt grew from \$8.4 billion in fiscal year 2001 to fiscal year \$25.4 billion in 2011. Illinois now ranks 37th in debt service as a share of revenue; only 13 states have worse burdens than Illinois.

In 2008, state government received a record amount of revenues—\$29.7 billion—from the tax-paying families and businesses of Illinois. State leaders spent every dime and borrowed billions more.

At its core, Illinois has an overspending problem, not a revenue problem. Future reforms must focus on the spending side of the state's ledger.

Fact: State spending goes far beyond covering the essentials.

“Needs” are unlimited, while resources are not. Budgeting is always a balancing act of priorities, but unfortunately Illinois has too often allocated resources toward non-core spending and above-market public employee compensation rates.

The Illinois Policy Institute’s 2010 Piglet Book identified hundreds of thousands of dollars in questionable state government spending. Via our transparency website at illinoisopengov.org, we’ve discovered even more examples of non-essential spending by the State of Illinois, including:

- Department of Commerce: \$2,520 on “promotional” hot sauce;
- Statewide: \$574,759 on registration fees and other conference expenses;
- Department of Commerce: \$10,000 on “Dark Knight” Batman movie gala; and
- Department of Transportation: \$5,398 on XM Satellite Radio.

High labor costs detract from the amount of resources available for grant and program spending. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, private-sector workers in Illinois earned an average annual wage of \$48,981 in 2008. Illinois state workers earned an average wage of \$56,682—15.7

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percent more. Comparing 2008 Illinois state government payroll data with statewide Bureau of Labor Statistics income numbers, state government cooks earned an average of \$42,348 while the income of all Illinois “cooks, institution and cafeteria” averaged just \$23,480. State government auto mechanics earned an average of \$55,555; auto mechanics statewide only \$40,600. State government non-supervisory janitors earned an average of \$41,965; the statewide average is only \$25,510.

The problem isn't just above-market wages. Generous pensions and benefits also add up. In 2009, 536 Illinois public employee retirees earned a pension of more than \$100,000. State retirees with 20 or more years of service pay no health insurance premiums.

State government needs to prioritize spending on core needs over discretionary “wants.” Further, the General Assembly must implement salaries, benefits and pensions that do not create inequity between those who pay for these benefits and those who receive them.

Fact: Illinois cannot continue on a path of spending more than it collects.

Leaders of the General Assembly and successive governors have demonstrated year after year that they lack the discipline to set priorities and rein in spending. Each year they have


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expanded government obligations to unsustainable levels. These expansions of state government obligations create structural overspending, in turn leading to so-called structural deficits.

Certainly, the state's accumulated budget deficit is not the product of one year's overspending. It is the result of many years of spending beyond our means. The state ended 2009 with a deficit of \$4.3 billion, and it closed 2010 still billions in the hole. The budget for fiscal year 2011 remains unbalanced by billions of dollars, with past due debt totaling over \$4 billion.

It is the rapid, excessive growth in spending during the good times that builds in spending levels that become unsustainable when the inevitable economic slowdowns occur. The state needs structural reforms, together with targeted spending reforms, to move out of today's fiscal morass.

**Illinoisans spend on average 101 days—
January 1 through April 11—working to pay
their combined tax burden, making Illinois
the 14th highest in number of days spent
working each year to pay federal, state, and
local government taxes.**



Fact: Illinois already takes a lot in taxes from families and businesses.

Illinoisans spend on average 101 days—January 1 through April 11—working to pay their combined tax burden, making Illinois the 14th highest in number of days spent working each year to pay federal, state, and local government taxes. Illinois is also 14th highest in state and local tax burden on a per-capita basis, at \$4,346.

Illinois has high sales taxes. Illinois has the 8th-highest combined state and average local sales tax rate at 8.22 percent. Even with a rate reduction to “just” 9.75 percent, Chicago is still known as a sales tax sinkhole.

Illinois has high property taxes. Illinois ranked 7th highest in median real estate taxes paid in 2008, at \$3,384. Illinois has the 6th-highest property taxes as a percentage of median home value. Illinois has the 5th-highest property taxes as a percentage of homeowner income. Seventeen out of the top 100 counties on a national list of property taxes paid on owner-occupied housing (as a percentage of home value) are in Illinois.

Illinois has high excise taxes. Illinois has the 5th-highest state gas tax at 39 cents per gallon. Illinois has high taxes on beer, wine, and spirits compared to nearby states. With a \$1-per-pack tobacco tax increase, we'd have a higher rate than four of our neighboring states.

Fact: A massive income tax increase is economically harmful to Illinois's families and businesses.

Illinois's moderate income tax rate is the best competitive advantage in our state's tax code. We should not forfeit one of the best incentives for people to live and work in Illinois by increasing the state's income tax rate.

An income tax hike would hit family budgets hard. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics data, the average Midwestern household is made up of 2.4 persons and has a before-tax income of \$61,063. A family with taxable income of \$50,000 would pay an additional \$500 in taxes under Governor Quinn's 2010 tax hike plan, on top of the \$1,500 they're already paying in state income taxes, for a total state income tax bill of \$2,000. What should families cut from their household budgets to make room for higher tax bills?

Income tax increases will also hurt job creation in Illinois. Scott Moody, a tax-policy economist, calculated that Governor Quinn's 2009 proposal to hike income taxes by 50 percent would cost the Illinois economy \$8.6 billion in lost economic output. According to Moody, "this is equivalent to taking the state's 2008 revenue from its sales, cigarette, liquor, inheritance, corporate franchise, and insurance taxes and dumping that money into Lake Michigan."

Hiking taxes will kill jobs—something that Illinois can ill afford to do right now with an unemployment rate above 10 percent.

State leaders need to have the courage to level with voters about the need for government spending reform before asking taxpayers to bail out state government with another tax hike.

Get on Board & Share the Turnaround

Become a Liberty Leader!

The Illinois Policy Institute's Liberty Leaders program consists of a diverse group of volunteers who are dedicated to promoting the principles of accountability, transparency and better government in Illinois. Individually and as a team, Liberty Leaders are revitalizing citizen participation in local and state government, effectively reforming the public sector.

Sign up to be a Liberty Leader today! Contact Brian Costin at:

[**bcostin@illinoispolicy.org**](mailto:bcostin@illinoispolicy.org)

Share the Turnaround Plan!

Request more copies of this booklet for you or your friends! Email us and we'll ship some out:

[**turnaround@illinoispolicy.org**](mailto:turnaround@illinoispolicy.org)

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