



OFFICE OF ILLINOIS STATE TREASURER

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Treasurer Frerichs Announces Fifth Gold Rating for Illinois' Bright Start 529 College Savings Plan

*Morningstar: Illinois' Bright Start 529 College Savings Program
"Best and Brightest" and "Superb Offering"*

CHICAGO – Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs announced today that Illinois' Bright Start 529 College Savings Plans has earned a Gold rating from Morningstar, keeping the plan among the best in the nation for the fifth consecutive year.

"To be touted as the 'best and brightest' by Morningstar is the ultimate compliment and confirms from an independent source that Illinois' 529 College Savings plans are a great investment for Illinois families," Frerichs said. "Since taking office, my priority has been to ensure Illinois families have access to the highest quality savings plans in the nation. We are proud to earn this honor and help parents save for their children's future."

A child is three times more likely to attend college if they have a dedicated college savings account, according to research from the Center of Social Development at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. Ensuring top quality 529 programs is one of several initiatives by Frerichs' office to make college more accessible.

Each year, [Morningstar](#) independently evaluates and rates college savings plans, assigning each a Morningstar Analyst Rating of Negative, Not Rated, Bronze, Silver, or Gold. Bright Start has won a Gold medal every year since Frerichs revamped the plans in 2017. In Morningstar's latest rankings, Bright Start is 1 of only 3 Gold-rated 529 plans in the country. In their review, Morningstar identified Bright Start as "Summa Cum Laude" setting it as a "top notch plan" which "set the curve for their peers, offering exceptional investments while emulating savvy stewardship."

Morningstar's medal ratings represent composite scores of each plan's performance across four key pillars - Process, People, Parent, and Price. Morningstar awarded Bright Start positive ratings across all four categories. Morningstar applauded the Illinois State Treasurer's Office's investment team, "Illinois touts a strong investment team that has an impactful voice in the construction of this plan and supports our positive view."

Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs serves as Trustee and Administrator of the Illinois 529 College Savings Programs. Since 2015, Frerichs has worked with Union Bank & Trust, the program manager, to reduce fees and ensure more investment dollars go directly to college savings. These changes have helped the Illinois 529 College Savings Pool to grow by more than double from \$7 billion to \$17 billion in assets with approximately 750,000 accounts.

Money in a 529 college savings account can be used at eligible educational institutions, including public and private, two-year, four-year colleges and universities and certain technical and vocational schools. The investment grows tax-free when spent on qualified expenses.

For more information about the Treasurer's Office 529 College Savings programs, visit www.illinoistreasurer.gov. To read Morningstar's report, click [here](#).

About the Illinois Treasurer

As Illinois State Treasurer, Michael Frerichs is the state's Chief Investment and Banking Officer and actively manages approximately \$52 billion. The portfolio includes \$27 billion in state funds, \$16 billion in retirement and college savings plans and \$9 billion on behalf of local and state governments. Frerichs' office protects consumers by safeguarding more than \$3.5 billion in unclaimed property, encouraging savings plans for college or trade school, increasing financial education among all ages, assisting people with disabilities save without losing government benefits, and removing barriers to a secure retirement. The Treasurer's Office predates Illinois incorporation in 1818. Voters in 1848 chose to make it an elected office.

The Bright Start Direct-Sold College Savings Program ("Bright Start") and the Bright Directions Advisor-Guided 529 College Savings Program ("Bright Directions") are part of the Illinois College Savings Pool and are designed to qualify as qualified tuition programs under the provisions of Section 529 of the Internal Revenue Code. Bright Start and Bright Directions are sponsored by the State of Illinois and administered by the Illinois State Treasurer, as Trustee. Union Bank & Trust Company serves as Program Manager, and Northern Trust Securities, Inc. acts as Distributor of the advisor-sold plan. Investments in Bright Start and Bright Directions are not guaranteed or insured by the State of Illinois, the Illinois State Treasurer, Union Bank & Trust Company, Northern Trust Securities, Inc., the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, or any other entity.

An investor should consider the investment objectives, risks, and charges and expenses associated with municipal fund securities before investing. This and other important information is contained in the fund prospectuses and the Bright Start Program Disclosure Statement and Bright Directions Program Disclosure Statement (issuer's official statement), which can be obtained from your financial professional, on BrightStart.com, and BrightDirections.com and should be read carefully before investing. You can lose money by investing in a portfolio. Each of the portfolios involves investment risks, which are described in the Program Disclosure Statement.

An investor should consider, before investing, whether the investor's or designated beneficiary's home state offers any state tax or other benefits such as financial aid, scholarship funds, and protection from creditors that are only available for investments in such state's 529 plan. Investors should consult a tax advisor.

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