



# Michael W. Frerichs

ILLINOIS STATE TREASURER

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Treasurer's Note

## Teaching for a Lifetime



Courtesy of Retired Teachers Association of Chicago

Much of what I have accomplished in life is due to great teachers. I am not alone. Each of us has a story about how a teacher greatly influenced our lives. I enjoy hearing these stories as much as I do sharing them.

The latest story to cross my desk is that of Grace Scipio, an elementary school for 39 years. I can only imagine what her students would say about her great career.

In retirement, Mrs. Scipio offered good cheer to her fellow retirees for another 30 years. She enjoyed volunteering through the Retired Teachers Association of Chicago until shortly before her passing in 2019. She was 94.

Today, thousands of others will benefit from her generosity through her donation of \$250,000 to her alma mater, Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia.

Mrs. Scipio's story crossed my desk because her donation did not get to the historically black college for women. A savings account languished after her death and only recently was given to the state treasurer's office as unclaimed property. We were fortunate to fulfill Mrs. Scipio's wishes and deliver the money to Spelman.

In Illinois, returning unclaimed property is the responsibility of the state treasurer's office. Often referred to as I-Cash, it is one of the state's oldest consumer protection initiatives. Examples of unclaimed property include forgotten bank accounts, unpaid life insurance benefits, and unused rebate cards. We are legally required to return the money no matter how long it takes.

Since taking office in 2015, we have returned a record-shattering \$1.3 Billion worth of unclaimed property. One-in-four individuals who [search our website](#) find something that belongs to them.

Mrs. Scipio was born in Atlanta, Georgia, on June 20, 1925. She earned her bachelor's degree from Spelman College and her master's degree from the University of Chicago.

Scipio began her teaching career in 1948 at Doolittle Elementary in Chicago. She also served at Burke Elementary and Tanner Elementary, both in Chicago. She retired in 1987. She was married to Wilber Scipio Sr., and they had a son, Wilber Scipio, Jr. Both preceded her in death.

This is not a sad story. In fact, just the opposite. It is a story of a young lady who smashed barriers and worked hard to achieve a college education. It is a story of a young woman who had a family and enjoyed a fulfilling career teaching our precious children. It is a tale of retiring with dignity and volunteering to help others. Finally, it is inspiring that through it all, she was able to save money in the hopes that it would help others achieve their own dreams.

I am very grateful for the small role we played in fulfilling her final wishes. For the Mrs. Scipios and teachers everywhere, thank you for all that you do.

Sincerely,

Michael W. Frerichs

Illinois State Treasurer

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Your Money

### Tax Refund Time

This year, for most people, April 18 is the deadline to file federal and state income taxes.

Individuals who expect a refund should not wait until the deadline. In fact, federal officials began accepting tax forms on Jan. 24. The average federal tax refund last year was \$2,800, according to the IRS.

What to do with your tax refund? The possibilities are endless. However, sound financial examples include:

#### Pay Your Bills

Start with the basics. Catch-up on rent, utilities and loans. Attack credit card debt, starting with the highest interest rate. Focus on progress: to eliminate debt, you first must reduce it.

#### Create an Emergency Fund

In a perfect world, a family has an emergency fund equal to six months of living expenses.

However, not many people live in a perfect world. That is why we should not let perfect be the enemy of good. Use your tax refund, at least part of it, to start that emergency fund in a low-risk account to which you have easy access (often called liquidity). As the old saying goes, "Pay yourself first."

#### Open a Bright Start College Savings Account

This savings plan often is called a 529 account. An account can be opened by an individual. The account grows tax free when used for approved college expenses, such as tuition, room and board, books, or a computer. A child is three times more likely to attend college when they know they have a dedicated savings account for higher education. A 529 plan also can be used for qualified vocational training expenses. In Illinois, some contributions also qualify for a tax deduction. (More information on this is below in Making College Affordable.)

#### Contribute to Your IRA

Social Security alone will not provide enough income when your working days are over. To retire with dignity, you need to save today. April 18 is the deadline to fully fund an IRA for the 2021 tax year. If your return comes after the deadline, set it aside for next year.

#### Donate to Charity

Take a portion of your tax return and donate it to a charity you support. Every bit helps. No tax return this year? You still can donate your time.



529 College Savings Plans

### Making College Affordable

There are many strategies a family can take to make college more affordable.

Financial aid and locally sourced scholarships certainly top the list. Other avenues include enrolling in dual placement courses, where a high school class also satisfies a college requirement, or the ability to test out of a college course, thus saving money for other instruction.

The heart of any strategy, however, must include a 529 college savings account. Bright Start is an account that can be started by an individual. Bright Directions can be started through a financial advisor. Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs serves as trustee to each plan.

Since taking office in 2015, Frerichs' team has worked each year to make college savings more affordable by eliminating or lowering fees while offering the highest-quality investment options at the lowest possible price. These changes have saved Illinois families more than \$120 million and have made [Bright Start](#) and [Bright Directions](#) among the best 529 college savings plans in the United States, according to independent analyst Morningstar.



### Did You Know?

The Illinois State Treasurer's Office predates Illinois' incorporation in 1818. Voters in 1848 chose to make it an elected office. Today, the investment approach is cautious to ensure the preservation of capital.



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1 East Old State Capitol Plaza

Springfield, IL 62701

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