

Honorable Kimberly A. Lightford

Illinois State Senator Senate Majority Leader 4th Senate District



In January 2019, Kimberly A. Lightford made history when she became the first Black woman to serve as Illinois' Senate Majority Leader. This 104rd General Assembly marks 27 years of her continued dedication to her career of championing her passion for education and youth development. As the youngest person elected to the Illinois Senate in 1998, Lightford emerged as a leading voice in Illinois on education issues that increase access to an excellent education for every child in Illinois.

As the former Chair of the Senate Education Committee for 25 years as either a sitting member, Vice Chair, or Chair, Lightford passed notable education reform legislation recognized as a national model. This legislation led to the establishment of stronger methods of evaluating teachers and tracking student progress. Lightford started the state's universal preschool for all program, established no-bullying zones on school playgrounds, and reformed disciplinary practices that were disproportionately affecting at-risk and minority students in 2016. In 2000, Leader Lightford ensured that students could have access to breakfast at school by requiring the State Board of Education to establish the school breakfast incentive program. In 2001, Leader Lightford increased the MAP grant for full-time undergraduate students and for part-time undergraduate students, providing aid for underprivileged students. Leader Lightford also helped to re-enroll high school dropouts by establishing the Illinois Hope and Opportunity Pathways through Education Program in 2009. In 2023, Leader Lightford passed legislation for to ensure every student in the state has access to full-day kindergarten, and implemented proposals brought forth by the Whole Child Task Force to make certain we continue to meet the need of a every child's development.

Former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan hailed the Senator's landmark education reform law, Senate Bill 7, as "a national model" which aimed at boosting student performance through accountability for schools, administrators, and teachers. The legislation, approved in 2011, was the most significant education reform in 30 years, with the hope to ensure every child in Illinois public schools has a quality teacher. Leader Lightford also sponsored Senate Bill 100, which was created to address the issue of Black students being expelled disproportionately more than their peers. Effective 2016, the bill created a set of criteria that mandates that all other appropriate interventions have been exhausted and that out-of-school suspensions longer than three days, expulsions and disciplinary removals to alternative schools are reserved for situations when a student's presence is a safety threat or substantial disruption to the learning environment.

In 2017, a measure aimed at reducing teen suicide and the stigma of mental health issues was signed into law. Leader Lightford led the effort that requires social and emotional screenings for children as a part of their school entry examinations to promote life-altering early detection. And, after finding that cursive was becoming lost in younger generations, Leader Lightford brought back a requirement for students to receive cursive writing instruction in elementary school. Understanding the important role recreation centers play in communities, Leader Lightford secured nearly \$3 million for the project, which was named the Lightford Recreation Center on Dec. 1, 2018, by the Maywood Park District upon its completion. In 2021, Lightford spearheaded the first in the nation state-funded network, establishing the statewide Phillip Jackson Freedom Schools program.

Prioritizing workers, Lightford passed her first piece of legislation in 1999 that provides worker protection and transitional assistance for persons targeted for layoff. Her support for minority businesses has also led to several legislative changes, starting with another 1999 proposal extending the date of the Business Enterprise Program for Minorities, Females, and Persons with Disabilities Act. Leader Lightford was the lead sponsor in passing legislation that established Illinois' Equal Pay Act in 2003. Leader Lightford strengthened the act in 2010 by allowing women who have been discriminated against more time to file an action against an employer, and in 2018, Lightford passed the African American Equal Pay Act to help combat the wage gap for African Americans. In 2005 and again in 2010, Leader Lightford fought to reform the Payday Loan industry and is responsible for raising the minimum wage in Illinois three times, including a 2019 measure that gradually increases it to \$15 per hour by 2025. In 2023, Leader Lightford sponsored legislation that will guarantee paid leave for all Illinois workers employed by businesses of any size.

Leader Lightford served as the Joint Chairman of the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus from January 2015 to January 2021. While serving as Joint Chairman, her vision created and she led the effort in crafting the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus' four-pillar agenda to rid Illinois of systemic racism. The passing of this historic legislation created a more equitable Illinois in; I. Criminal Justice Reform, Violence Reduction and Police Accountability, II. Education and Workforce Development (Lightford wants this pillar to indicate she carried this bill), III. Economic Access, Equity and Opportunity, and IV. Health Care and Human Services. Leader Lightford passed HB2170, School Code Seal of Biliteracy, which created the Education and Workforce Development Pillar." Leader Lightford continued to strengthen Black history in Illinois, by establishing June 19th as a state holiday for Juneteenth National Freedom Day in 2022 and by declaring February 28th as Black Women's History Day in 2023.

Since 1998, Leader Lightford has represented the 4th Senate District, which includes more than a dozen suburban communities in western Cook County and the Austin community area on Chicago's West Side. Leader Lightford is committed to community pride. Lightford created the Uplift Our Future youth programs: the KAL Saturday University offers free supplemental services in reading, math, and writing for middle school students, an annual college fair, a back-to-school event, and mentoring for 8th-grade students. She also hosts an annual Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Hall of Fame Award Celebration, We Adore Our Women Breast Cancer Awareness, and We Love Our Men Prostate Awareness Events.

As a life-long resident of her district, Leader Lightford was born in Chicago, raised in Maywood, and resides in Westchester. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Public Communications from Western Illinois University and a Master of Public Administration degree from the University of Illinois at Springfield. She is a Hunt-Kean Leadership Fellow and Erikson Institute Fellow. She gained extensive management experience working at the Illinois Department of Central Management Services, the Illinois Department of Corrections, and the Illinois Secretary of State.

Leader Lightford serves on eight statewide Taskforce and Commissions dedicated to improving education, ending poverty, and enhancing the quality of life for Illinois. During the 104th Illinois General Assembly, Leader Lightford serves on the following committees as Chair of Assignments, Cannabis, End of Life Issues, and Special Issues, in addition to Education, Executive, Health and Human Services, and Higher Education.

Lightford is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and The Chicago Network. She has received numerous awards and serves as the Vice Chairman of The State Legislative Leaders Foundation and Loretto Hospital, and is on the Board of Directors for Proviso-Leyden Council for Community Action, Inc., The West Cook County Youth Club, and Sustaining Our World.