



Illinois State Treasurer

**MICHAEL FRERICHs**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

February 4, 2026

## **State Treasurer Michael Frerichs Presents Awards to Chicago Leaders in Honor of Black History Month**

*MacArthur "Genius Grant" Recipient Tonika Lewis Johnson, Illinois Economic Development CEO Christy George, Chicago Hope Football Coach Christopher Mallette Among Those Honored*

Video will be posted here: <https://cms.illinois.gov/agency/media/video/videos.html>

**CHICAGO** – Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs today hosted a celebration to commemorate Black History Month and honor leaders in the African American community.

The event, held in the Illinois Room at 555 W. Monroe St., was an opportunity to reflect on the great achievements of Black leaders. The eight Chicago-area honorees included a MacArthur "genius grant" recipient and artist who cofounded a neighborhood association, the CEO and president of a statewide economic development group, a longtime pastor, a college president, a state senator, a labor leader, a high school football coach, and the executive director of a leadership development organization.

"We celebrate and acknowledge the great achievements and contributions of African Americans every day, not just in February," Frerichs said. "Today, we make a special point of honoring eight leaders who are dedicated to making our communities better places to live, work, and raise a family. These individuals make a difference by strengthening our state and our neighborhoods, educating and mentoring students, and developing future leaders who someday will follow in their footsteps."

Former Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White was on hand to help Treasurer Frerichs present the Jesse White Leadership Award. Frerichs renamed the award as a tribute to Secretary White's decades of distinguished public service.

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Black History Month is a national effort started 100 years ago — in 1926 — by University of Chicago graduate, author and educator Carter G. Woodson. In 1976, the annual celebration was expanded to a month.

Treasurer Frerichs honored the following individuals for their outstanding commitment to the community:

**Outstanding Service in Business**

**Christy George**

President & CEO | Illinois Economic Development Corporation

**Outstanding Commitment to Community Service**

**Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III**

Senior Pastor | Trinity United Church of Christ

**Outstanding Commitment to Education**

**Dr. Katonja Webb-Walker**

President | Kennedy-King College, City Colleges of Chicago

**Outstanding Commitment as an Elected Official**

**Hon. Adriane Johnson**

Illinois State Senator | 30th District

**Outstanding Achievement in Workforce and Labor**

**Debra Simmons-Peterson**

President | Teamsters Local 743

**Outstanding Achievement in Sportsmanship**

**Christopher Mallette**

Director of Community Relations & Outreach and Head Football Coach | Chicago Hope Academy

**Outstanding Achievement in Arts and Humanities**

**Tonika Lewis Johnson**

Artist and Photographer | Cofounder, Resident Association of Greater Englewood

**Jesse White Leadership Award**

**Mark Payne**

Executive Director | Public Allies

**-MORE-**



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Later in February, Treasurer Frerichs will hold a celebration in Springfield honoring Downstate Black leaders.

### **About the Treasurer**

The Illinois State Treasurer's Office is a powerful economic engine that invests in people to drive prosperity, development and growth throughout the state. As State Treasurer, Michael Frerichs (FRAIR'iks) is the state's Chief Investment and Banking Officer and actively manages approximately \$60 billion. The investments help families pay for college and trade school; workers save for a dignified retirement; and local governments process bill payments more efficiently so they can pass along the savings to taxpayers. The office provides financial institutions with money to loan to farmers, small business owners, and qualified individuals at below-market rates because better jobs create stronger communities. The office operates the state's largest consumer-protection initiative, the missing money ICash program, which has returned a record-breaking \$2.4 billion since Frerichs was elected.

For more news about the State Treasurer's Office, please sign up for our [newsletter](#) and follow Treasurer Frerichs on Instagram at [IL Treasurer](#), Threads [@iltreasurer](#), [LinkedIn](#) and on Facebook at [Invested in You – Treasurer Michael Frerichs](#).

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