



**Southern Illinois University System**

ONE SYSTEM | MANY LOCATIONS | STATEWIDE IMPACT

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

April 11, 2025

**Contact:** Catie Sheehan, 217-220-1717

[catie.sheehan@siu.edu](mailto:catie.sheehan@siu.edu)

### **PRESS RELEASE**

## **SIU Carbondale Alum Tonnelle “Toni” Williams Joins SIU Board of Trustees**

**Springfield, Ill.**—The SIU System is pleased to share that Toni Williams was recently appointed to the SIU Board of Trustees by Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker on March 28, 2025. She is also on the SIU Carbondale Foundation Board of Directors.

Williams is an accomplished SIU Carbondale alumna who earned her BS in Elementary Education in 1991, followed by her MS from Chicago State University and M.Ed from University of Illinois Chicago.

She started her professional career as an educator, dedicating 10 years to teaching in the Chicago Public Schools system before transitioning into entrepreneurship. For more than two decades, Williams has successfully established and operated childcare centers. She opened the Children's Center, providing a nurturing and creative environment for children ages 6 months to 6 years. She is also a licensed real estate broker and investor. In 2019, Williams expanded her entrepreneurial endeavors by becoming a McDonald's owner-operator. She now owns and operates five McDonald's franchises in Chicago.

“SIU's commitment to access, opportunity, and inclusive excellence has been invaluable to me,” said Williams. “The great sense of community and ingenuity has been extremely influential in my personal and professional journey. SIU's ability to prioritize and nurture-yet empower student success while simultaneously fostering a diverse community has always been a vital and instrumental piece in my foundation for growth.”

Williams currently serves as treasurer of the Chicago and Northwest Indiana Chapter of the Black McDonald's Operators Association, and holds advisory roles on several boards, including the National Women Operators Board as a Future Franchisee Advisor, the US Bank Franchisee Advisory Board and the iHeart Radio Advisory Board. She received the [SIU Carbondale Saluki Lifetime Achievement Award in 2024](#). Williams has also been honored with the Chicago Defender Women of Excellence Award and with the McDonald's Chicago Field Office Inclusion Award.

As a trustee, Williams' goal is to uphold and advance SIU's mission by ensuring the continuation of high-quality programs in instruction, research and public service. She is dedicated to promoting equitable and transformative initiatives that enhance student success and community engagement.

###