



**STATEMENT
Of
LUIS GUTIERREZ
UNIVERSITY STUDENT SENATE VICE CHAIR OF GRADUATE AFFAIRS
BEFORE THE
STATE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION, STATE ASSEMBLY
COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS,
STATE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION, & STATE SENATE COMMITTEE
ON FINANCE
February 6, 2014
ALBANY, NEW YORK**

Good afternoon. My name is Luis Gutierrez and I am a graduate student at Hunter College. Moreover, I serve as vice chair of graduate student affairs for the University Student Senate (USS), the official governance organization for students at the City University of New York (CUNY), and as chair of the CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities (CCSD), a CUNY-wide organization representing the University's more than 9,000 students with disabilities.

Speaking on behalf of CUNY's more than 30,000 graduate students, I am here today to urge you to consider providing a financial aid safety net for New York State students seeking advanced degrees.

I would like to take a moment to display—with assistance from my colleague: USS Vice Chair Cynthia Roldan-- a list of all student financial aid programs, other than the Veterans Tuition Award, that New York State currently offers for graduate study. As you can see the chart is blank. It would certainly appear that the State of New York doesn't believe that having a well-trained workforce with advanced degrees is a good investment.

However, according to the Council of Graduate Schools, it is estimated that by 2018, 2.5 million new jobs will require advanced degrees (http://www.fgereport.org/rsc/pdf/ExecSum_PathForward.pdf). Moreover, The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that jobs requiring master's degrees and professional degrees will grow by 22% and 20%, respectively, from 2010 to 2020 – faster than any other level of education (<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/about/projections-overview.htm>).

At CUNY, tuition & fees for a number of graduate programs has skyrocketed. At a number of our institutions, graduate enrollment is down. USS is working with Chancellor Kelly and Vice Chancellors Sapienza & Sanchez in exploring ways to provide a wider financial aid safety net for our graduate students. However, no matter what resources that our University is able to provide our graduate students, it will not be an adequate substitute for a comprehensive State program.

USS, working in coalition with NYPIRG and others, recommends that the state legislature expand the State's tuition tax credit/deduction program to include matriculated graduate students. The tax credit or deduction, which is currently only offered to undergraduates at New York colleges & universities, is equal to the amount of qualified tuition expenses paid, up to a maximum deduction of \$10,000 for each eligible student (http://www.hesc.ny.gov/content.nsf/SFC/NYS_College_Tuition_Tax_Credit/Deduction).

Expanding the State tuition tax credit/deduction to include graduate students would be a great first step in addressing the needs of our State's graduate student population.

Finally, I would like to shift gears slightly & take a moment to thank the members of the state legislature for including a line for CUNY LEADS in the CUNY operating budget. However, I urge you to support the University's request for an increase of \$1.5 million in FY 2014-15.

CUNY LEADS, an academic development, job training & placement program, is perhaps the nation's preeminent program of its kind for college and university students with disabilities. As you are probably aware, participants in the program who are job-ready have a 70 percent employment rate, compared to the 56 percent national employment rate for people with disabilities. Moreover, it is estimated that a modest investment of \$10,000 to develop and place a CUNY LEADS student in competitive employment saves New York State more than \$14,000 per year in disability benefits alone.

The increase of \$1.5 million would allow the program to be fully funded & serve the maximum number of eligible students.

Thank you.