

Statement by Dr. Guillermo Linares  
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To the  
New York State Senate Finance Committee  
and  
New York State Assembly Ways and Means Committee

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Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Stavisky, Glick, and to all my former colleagues in the Senate and Assembly, thank you for the opportunity to speak today about the Governor's 2019-2020 Executive Budget recommendations that impact the New York State Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC). I am Dr. Guillermo Linares, Acting President of HESC; and this morning I am joined by my Executive Vice President, Elsa Magee.

HESC is responsible for administering more than two dozen New York State student financial aid and college access programs that help to ease college costs for New York State students and families including the first-in-the-nation Excelsior Scholarship. Collectively, these programs provide nearly \$1.2 billion in financial aid awards to support the college costs of approximately 400,000 students attending public and private colleges inside our State. NY continues to be a leader in college access. The Excelsior Scholarship provided more than 20,000 students with free college tuition in its first year. This is a great number. But it is not about just the ability to go to college tuition-free, it is the other promising outcomes: Student retention is higher among Excelsior students than Non-Excelsior students. This suggests that these students will incur less total costs in completing their degrees and begin their careers sooner. As stated earlier, the number of students taking 15 credits in the first semester at our public university systems is increasing.

That is a key indicator of college success and completion. These are positive developments resulting from Excelsior.

Getting back to the numbers; Excelsior, with TAP, and other scholarships is enabling more than half of all resident full-time students going to a public university or college in NYS to attend tuition free. That is over 200,000 students attending tuition free, and when Excelsior is fully implemented, 55% of resident full-time students will be attending college tuition free. A remarkable achievement.

But it's not just Excelsior. New York has one of the most robust and generous financial aid programs of any other state, providing nearly \$1 billion in grants; TAP is the largest need-based student financial aid program in the country.

Governor Cuomo's 2019-20 Executive Budget continues to make college more accessible for all New Yorkers and provide opportunities that prepare all students to thrive in the twenty-first century.

From launching the Excelsior Scholarship and Enhanced Tuition Awards programs to the pioneering Get On Your Feet Loan Forgiveness Program and the New York State Standard Financial Aid Award Letter, the Governor has led the way in making college affordable for all New York State students. This leadership is apparent in the Governor's higher education proposals which year after year pushed for funding for the DREAM Act, an issue that has been near and dear to

me. Approval of legislation allowing undocumented New York State students – who are deserving of the same advantages our great State gives to their citizen peers – access to TAP and all other State award and scholarship programs through the Senator Jose R. Peralta DREAM Act has been a cornerstone of the Governor’s higher education proposals. While the DREAM Act has been a long-awaited step forward, the Governor’s Budget also proposes to: expand New York’s Excelsior free college scholarship for middle-class families to incorporate those making up to \$125,000 a year—ensuring that nearly 55% of full-time SUNY and CUNY in-state students can earn a college degree tuition free; ensure that for-profit schools are not overly reliant on public support by placing a threshold on their taxpayer-based revenues, and requiring that for-profit schools spend at least 50 percent of their revenues on instruction and learning resources; and require the licensure of student loan servicers and take steps to ensure that these companies cannot mislead borrowers or engage in practices that may harm student loan borrowers.

### **Closing**

Governor Cuomo is a leading voice in protecting access to higher education for everyone. The 2019-20 Executive Budget increases State support for higher education to \$7.6 billion - an increase of \$1.6 billion or 27 percent since FY 2012. Under his leadership, New York has implemented an unprecedented number of new and strategic student financial aid programs and initiatives to make college

more accessible and encourage the best and brightest students to build their future in New York. His recommendations for higher education programs continue to pave a path to an affordable and high-quality college education, and HESC is pleased to play a vital role in providing New York State's students with a gateway to a successful academic and professional career.

Thank you and I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

