

4

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

February 4, 2020

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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 2020-2021 Executive Budget recommendations that impact the New York State Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC). I am Dr. Guillermo Linares, 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 and the newly implemented Senator Jose Peralta NYS DREAM Act. Collectively, these programs provide nearly \$1.05 billion in financial aid awards to support the college costs of more than 343,000 students attending public and private colleges inside our State. NY continues to be a leader in college access, including the nation's first free-tuition program—the Excelsior Scholarship. This milestone program has opened the doors of higher education to thousands of working- and middle-class families making \$125,000 or less, while helping students complete their degrees on time. In addition to providing free college tuition to more than 20,400 students in its first year and more than 25,000 students in its second year, the numbers are coupled with other promising outcomes –

including higher graduation rates, increases in the percentage of students taking 15 credits and higher retention rates. This suggests that these students will incur less total costs in completing their degrees and begin their careers sooner.

To expand this transformational opportunity to more middle class families, the Governor has proposed to raise the Excelsior eligibility threshold from \$125,000 to \$150,000 for New York's families. By increasing the threshold, more than 230,000, or nearly 58 percent, New York resident students will be able to attend SUNY or CUNY tuition free.

But it's not just Excelsior. New York spends over \$1 billion each year on aid for the financially neediest students through TAP, opportunity programs and the Aid for Part-Time Studies program. New York ranks first in the nation in support for undergraduate need-based student financial aid; and recent implementation of the Senator Jose Peralta NYS DREAM Act has further opened the door to higher education, allowing thousands of undocumented New York State students access to TAP and all other State award and scholarship programs available to their citizen peers. To date, nearly 75 percent of the reviewed applications have been determined eligible to receive TAP, Excelsior, ETA and other NYS financial aid awards. Our investment in higher education continues to open doors to all New Yorkers.

## **Closing**

Governor Cuomo is a leading voice in protecting access to higher education for everyone. Since 2012, funding for higher education has increased by nearly \$1.8 billion (29 percent), from \$6.0 billion to \$7.8 billion in the FY 2021 Executive Budget. This investment includes nearly \$1.3 billion for strategic programs to make college more affordable and encourage the best and brightest students to build their future in New York. The Governor's 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.