

Statement by Dr. Guillermo Linares  
President  
New York State Higher Education Services Corporation

To the  
New York State Senate Finance Committee  
and  
New York State Assembly Ways and Means Committee

February 4, 2021

New York State Higher Education Services Corporation  
99 Washington Avenue  
Albany, NY 12255

[www.HESC.ny.gov](http://www.HESC.ny.gov)

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Good afternoon 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 2021-2022 Executive Budget recommendations that impact the New York State Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC). I am Dr. Guillermo Linares, President of HESC, and I'm joined this afternoon by my Executive Vice President, Elsa Magee.

Before I begin, I would like to say that this time last year, we had no sense of the turmoil that was before us as a State and a nation. It is good to see each of you in good health, and while we know that challenges remain, we have reason to be hopeful, as more than 2 million New Yorkers have received the vaccine and we move towards getting a majority of New Yorkers fully vaccinated.

Through 2020, New York State continued its steadfast support for higher education programs. HESC continued to administer more than two dozen student financial aid and college access programs that enabled New Yorkers to reach their higher educational goals, including the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), one of the nation's largest need-based student financial aid grant programs and the Excelsior Scholarship, which enabled nearly 230,000 New York resident SUNY and CUNY students to attend college tuition free.

HESC annually receives more than a half million applications for grants, scholarships and loan forgiveness programs and annually awards more than \$1 billion in financial aid to help over 330,000 college-going students and college graduates pay for college. In its 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Survey Report on State-Sponsored Student Financial Aid, the National Association of State Student Grant Aid Programs (NASSGAP) cites New York State's need-based financial aid expenditures exceeded that of every other state in the nation.

The 2022 Executive Budget preserves access to an affordable college degree and protects this opportunity for students who faced challenges presented by the pandemic. The Budget proposes to maintain student financial aid and opportunity programs that serve our neediest students and includes legislation to hold harmless students who were unable to complete academic requirements needed to maintain financial aid eligibility due to the coronavirus pandemic. The Budget extends financial aid award duration limits for students who were unable to maintain satisfactory academic progress requirements due to the pandemic and releases previously withheld payments to colleges.

## **Closing**

Under Governor Cuomo's leadership, New York continues to lead the nation in expanding access to a quality and affordable college education. Funding for higher education has increased by \$1.5 billion (25 percent) since 2012, from \$6 billion to \$7.5 billion in the FY 2022 Executive Budget.

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This investment includes nearly \$1.3 billion in FY 2022 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 continue to fund programs that enable the neediest of New York's students to pursue their educational goals regardless of financial situation. HESC is pleased to be an integral player in helping New York's students, and our future leaders, attain the economic and social benefits that accompany a college degree.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present our testimony today. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

