

Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Higher Education
On Point for College, Inc.
February 7, 2022

Testimony by Samuel Rowser, Executive Director of On Point for College, Inc.

Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you about transforming lives and communities in the face of the pandemic by investing \$500,000 in New York's future work force.

Education is an effective pathway out of poverty – 90% of students who earn a bachelor's degree are lifted out of poverty according to a Pew Charitable Trust study.

Since On Point for College was founded in 1999, we have helped more than 3,000 students graduate from college. These graduates now earn more than they would have with only a high school diploma. Over the course of their working lifetimes, they will earn over \$3 billion, which will be spent in their communities. We are rising to the challenge of preparing lower-income, first-generation students to contribute to the local economies in Onondaga, Madison, Cayuga, Cortland, Oswego, Oneida and Herkimer Counties—and beyond, through our partner organizations in Manhattan and the Bronx.

On Point provides College Access, College Success, and Career Services to help young adults, ages 17 to 29, to apply to, enroll in, and persist at college through graduation, while building skills and pre-professional experiences to help launch their careers. We help to level the playing field for our students. Lower-income, first-generation students face many challenges on their higher-education journeys. Without assistance, these challenges can turn into barriers that lead students to stop out, or to never attend college. On Point helps students develop plans to address challenges before they become stumbling blocks. We provide a broad range of services that we can tailor to meet the needs of each individual.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has created additional challenges for students-- including attempting to finish coursework entirely online, losing income from Work-Study jobs on campus, and a summer full of uncertainty about whether they could attend school in person in the Fall semester. In the Spring 2020 semester, many of On Point's students lacked resources that other students take for granted, including owning a laptop computer, and access to the internet from home. On Point's advisors pivoted their program offerings to assist students in their new circumstances—phoning, texting, and using social media to replace in-person visits; providing “loaner” laptops to students who did not have one; delivering care packages of food to students in need. On Point also piloted “remote” summer internships for students, allowing them to work on projects for employers from home, and gaining skills and experience through enrichment classes offered through webinar platforms.

Continuing to serve students from vulnerable backgrounds will require innovation in the years ahead, as the predictions about the pandemic's duration vary, and as colleges shift how they can afford to deliver course content. On Point is well-positioned to address the new needs that have arisen for lower-income students as they pursue post-secondary opportunities to position themselves for well-paying careers.

On Point is unique in the nation for the holistic approach we take to helping students. We offer services that other organizations do not: On Point is an open enrollment program and does not turn students away, regardless of grade-point average. On Point takes hundreds of students each year to visit 70 colleges throughout the state. On Point helps with the financial aid process; provides some college supplies to students who complete our college orientation sessions; and provides transportation to any college in New York State using a corps of dedicated volunteers or bus tickets. On Point partners with two dentists who do pro bono dental work. We provide winter coats and eyeglasses. On Point even partners with a local college and a housing agency so that students at risk of homelessness have a safe place to stay during the summer and winter breaks when the dorms close. We help students pay for textbooks, summer courses, outstanding bills that prevent re-enrollment, housing deposits, and fees when financial aid is unavailable, or has run out.

An investment in On Point is also an investment in New York's higher education institutions. Seventy percent of the more than 2,400 enrolled students we are serving this semester attend public colleges across New York State. These students are contributing \$23,284,970 in tuition, fees and room and board to community colleges and the SUNY and CUNY systems. We have a great deal of experience in helping students navigate the SUNY system. On Point's advisors visit students on campus frequently during the school year—once per semester at SUNY's 4-year colleges and university centers, and once per month at community colleges and technology colleges. We have a large number of students attending local community colleges, so we are there more often: once per week at Mohawk Valley Community College and Herkimer Community College; and twice per week at Onondaga Community College. These visits give our students the opportunity to receive advice; assistance with finding resources on campus; and tangible assistance, such as paying for textbooks, fees, or figuring out how to pay for supplies not carried by the campus book store.

On Point students persist, even in the face of COVID and other challenges, at a higher rate—74.3%--in the face of COVID and other challenges than the average at community colleges—60%. Our students bring their TAP and Pell awards, as well as their student loan dollars, as well as last dollar assistance grants from On Point's generous donors, to these campuses. If these students had not had On Point's support, they would not have attempted to go to college at all—these funds flow to campuses across New York State because On Point helps these students go to and remain in college.

We believe that providing \$500,000 in state funding for On Point's programs will have an impact on thousands of lower-income, first-generation students each year—helping people consider going to college who might otherwise not have thought college was possible, and providing wrap-around services to support students on every step of their journeys toward their degrees, especially vital in the face of COVID. Investments in these young people will immediately support colleges across the state, and will bear long-term fruit as our graduates bring their degrees and skills to the state's work force.

Thank you.