

NYPIRG BUDGET REVIEW: REACTIONS TO THE EXECUTIVE'S HIGHER EDUCATION BUDGET PLANS

Below is a summary of NYPIRG's views on the executive budget. *A more detailed reaction is contained in our testimony delivered to the Legislative Fiscal Committees.* The SFY 2022-2023 Executive Budget contains myriad proposals for strengthening higher education but falls short of the revitalization necessary to turn around the sector. We urge a *significant* increase in support as part of the final budget agreement.

ADD ADDITIONAL STATE SUPPORT FOR SUNY, CUNY, AND THE INDEPENDENT SECTOR: The governor's budget has a lot to support. What's missing is the boost in state support that will New York's higher educational system after a decade of disinvestment and enrollment dives. SUNY has seen dramatic enrollment declines (outside of its university centers) during the pre-pandemic period. The pandemic has accelerated that decline and CUNY has seen a dropoff too. The smaller, independent colleges have also seen enrollment declines. Enrollment declines result in revenue shortfalls that can result in reduced services and/or workforce reductions. Both of these outcomes make those colleges less attractive to potential students.

Yet, New York needs a growing higher education sector to also bolster its economic growth. In addition to boosting racial and economic equity, public higher education helps to strengthen the state's economy. The research into the economic benefits of investing in higher education have been overwhelmingly positive.

Not only that, but college has benefits that extend well beyond individual economic returns. A primary function of postsecondary education is to develop college students' involvement in the nation's civic life and democratic processes, engender a sense of social responsibility, and develop an appreciation and respect for difference across cultures and peoples. College students are more likely to vote and volunteer, in addition to paying more in taxes upon graduation.

While the governor's budget increases the pool of potential college applicants and eliminates the "TAP Gap" which helps stabilize public colleges' finances, it does little to reverse the sector's downward financial trends. We urge that you boost state support by \$800 million to offset the loss in public college revenues resulting from enrollment declines, and restore the state's funding of the Bundy Aid program to help stabilize the finances of New York's independent college sector.

SUPPORT THE FREEZE IN PUBLIC COLLEGE TUITION AND MOVE TO FREE: Public policy should be making it easier to afford college. New York's automatic tuition increases for public colleges undermines that goal. NYPIRG applauds the Legislature's decision to freeze public college tuition – and Governor Hochul's support for that policy. But the road to recoup full funding to CUNY and SUNY is much longer. Beginning in 2011, nearly constant hikes have raised tuition rates by more than 42%. When factoring inflation, the automatic tuition hikes at both SUNY and CUNY have far exceeded the growth in the economy. These significant

POSITIONS

ADD \$800 million in additional state support for SUNY, CUNY, and the independent sector by returning Bundy Aid to 1990 levels.

SUPPORT continued freeze on public college tuition and move to tuition-free CUNY and SUNY.

SUPPORT the Governor's plan to eliminate the "TAP Gap."

SUPPORT Governor's childcare funding plan.

SUPPORT and EXPAND Governor's TAP expansion.

SUPPORT Governor's opportunity programs' funding increase.

INCLUDE new funding for the Hunger Free Campus Act.



increases in tuition have resulted in students shouldering more and more of the costs of running NY's public college institutions. While New York's substantial financial aid and opportunity programs have shielded some students from these hikes, there are many who fall through the eligibility cracks or who cannot apply for reasons outside of their control.

"New Deal for CUNY" legislation (S.4461/A.5843) would support CUNY students by phasing out tuition, setting better student-to-teacher ratios, and increasing the ratio of students-to-mental health counselors. The need for added mental health resources at college campuses could not be clearer. With limited counselors on campus, students may experience long wait-times for services or difficulty being connected to other resources. Analogous funding for SUNY campuses is also needed to reduce the tuition burden and support student services like more class offerings, better advisement, and more mental health services.

SUPPORT THE GOVERNOR'S PLAN TO ELIMINATE THE "TAP GAP": In addition to increasing public college tuition, New York higher education policy *NYSUNY2020* forced more and more financial aid costs from the state treasury onto the books of public colleges. This shift was pegged to the stagnating maximum TAP award while at the same time increasing tuition. Public colleges were forced to cover the needs of the most economically needy students. As tuition went up, this gap increased and added financial stress to an already-stressed system. The governor proposes to use state revenues to cover that gap. NYPIRG urges your support.

SUPPORT AND EXPAND THE GOVERNOR'S TAP PROPOSAL: The governor correctly identifies that New York's colleges need to broaden eligibility in order to boost enrollments, including expanding eligibility to more part-time students and individuals who are incarcerated. In our written testimony, we add to the governor's proposals to modernize the TAP system to better reflect the needs of college students in the 21st Century.

SUPPORT THE GOVERNOR'S PLAN TO EXPAND CHILDCARE FOR PUBLIC COLLEGES: NYPIRG urges your support of the governor's proposal to provide \$15.6 million to expand childcare to all SUNY and CUNY campuses that do not have on-site centers. The cost of child care can be a significant barrier to a college degree, and CUNY and SUNY child care centers are a unique and powerful tool for socio-economic mobility.

INCREASE SUPPORT FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND ADVISEMENT SERVICES: The pandemic has not only affected students financially but also physically and mentally. Students are also struggling receiving proper advisement to be able to graduate on time. NYPIRG urges your support for the New Deal for CUNY legislation (S.4461/A.5843) and analogous funding to SUNY to, among other things, fund enough mental health counselors to meet the ratio recommended by the International Accreditation of Counseling Services of one counselor for every 1000 full time students.

SUPPORT THE PLAN TO INCREASE FUNDING TO "OPPORTUNITY" PROGRAMS: Opportunity programs, which are designed for educationally and economically disadvantaged students, have a steady track record of success in increasing retention and graduation rates among the most at-risk students. NYPIRG urges your support of the governor's proposal to provide \$24 million, or a 10 percent increase, to fund higher education opportunity programs and training centers administered by CUNY, SUNY and independent colleges.

INCLUDE SUPPORT TO ADDRESS HUNGER ON CAMPUS: NYPIRG urges the Legislature to support the Hunger Free Campus Act to include \$20 million over two years to support the operating expenses of food pantries across campuses at SUNY and CUNY.

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