



Testimony Vincent Alu, Field Representative of GNY LECET & Executive Board Member of Laborers Local 66
Hearing Higher Education Budget Hearing
Topic FY23 Executive Budget SUNY Funding and Construction
Date February 7, 2022

Hello, my name is Vincent Alu. I'm the Long Island Field Representative for the Greater New York Laborers-Employers Cooperation & Education Trust (GNY LECET) and a proud member of Laborers Local 66 serving on their executive board. I'm here today on behalf of 17,000 hardworking members and 1,500 signatory contractors of the Mason Tenders District Council of Greater New York – including Laborers Local 66 on Long Island - to testify regarding the State University of New York (SUNY) system and funding proposed in the Governor's budget.

Historically New York State construction trade unions and their members – including the members of Laborers Local 66 – have built and maintained our SUNY campuses. Through the State's commitment and collective work of Laborers and other Building Trades members, we've created a public higher education system with state-of-the-art facilities and top-quality education. Many of our members and their children have attended these institutions, for example, and we take great pride in ensuring that Long Island and the State continues to provide the best higher education possible.

GNY LECET and Laborers Local 66 are pleased to see additional investments in SUNY facilities included in the Governor's Executive Budget. We agree the State must redesign our higher education system to fit the needs of students in the 21st century and support the plans to make Stony Brook University one of SUNY's Flagship Institutions with global, national, and regional research capabilities. However, we want to be sure these investments also lead to high quality employment for local construction workers and contractors.

The current SUNY procurement process for construction gives us great concern with how these new school-based projects and funds will be awarded. On Long Island we have seen a decline in the quality of contractors and workers being used to build and maintain SUNY facilities and campuses. Often these contracts are awarded to out-of-state companies that lack necessary NYS-based workers' compensation and insurance policies, and have histories of unsafe building practices and wage theft. While the public funding for this work comes with prevailing wage requirements as well, we've repeatedly had to call local Department of Labor investigators about prevailing wage violations and worker misclassification.

Right now, at Stony Brook University, for example, a New Jersey-based construction firm, Niram Construction, is using an out-of-state workforce and \$37 million of our public taxpayer dollars to build the new Javits Lecture Hall. Niram has a history of Occupational Health & Safety Administration violations - including willful negligence as it relates to construction safety – but was still awarded the contract for the work. Violations like theirs are sadly common in the



contractors we've found working on SUNY campuses and gives us great concern for the safety of construction for both workers and the university community at large.

It also gives us great concern for how our taxpayer-funded subsidies can be better used to help communities and workers throughout New York State. One of the best solutions to accomplish our shared goal with the Governor for a state-of-the art SUNY system is by establishing a Project Labor Agreement (PLA) for all SUNY campuses in New York State. Enacting a PLA will ensure our tax dollars fund middle class jobs while building our universities professionally and safely.

On behalf of the hardworking members and responsible contractors of Laborers Local 66 and the Mason Tenders District Council, I appreciate the opportunity to testify today and shine a light on these procurement issues we're experiencing in the SUNY system. It is our hope that hearings like today's can help create the lasting change our public universities need for both workers and students through a statewide SUNY Project Labor Agreement. Thank you.