



CCSD

CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities

Lennyn Jacob
Chairperson, CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities (CCSD)
Testimony at 2023 Higher Education Joint Legislative Budget Hearing.
February 27, 2023

Good evening, distinguished members of the state legislature.

My name is Lennyn Jacob, and I serve as Chair of the CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities (CCSD), a group that represents the interests of about 10 thousand students with disabilities at the City University of New York.

In addition to being a student leader, I am most proud of being a loving mother of a neurodiverse son with autism.

For 12 years, I served as a Teaching Assistant for children with disabilities at the New York City Department of Education; and then chose to further my education at Bronx Community College, where I am a recent graduate. I am attending the CUNY School of Professional Studies, pursuing a bachelor's degree in Disability Studies, and working at Hostos Community College as a Disability Accommodation Specialist.

The last three years have been difficult for all of us. The pandemic has caused hardships for millions of New Yorkers, not to mention for people all across the globe.

However, the pandemic has been particularly challenging for many people with disabilities. Students with disabilities are no exception.

Many students with disabilities have taken a break from their studies during this time.

Additional supports and services are required in order to help retain and recruit students with disabilities at CUNY, and other institutions of higher education throughout New York State.

CCSD therefore urges the state legislature to pursue the following investments in college and university students with disabilities:

First, CCSD supports the State Education Department's operating budget request for a \$13 million increase for enhancing supports and services for postsecondary students with disabilities.

However, a \$1 million increase for our CUNY disability services budget line would make a huge difference for our students.

Thanks to your efforts during the 2021 legislative session, and again last year, SED finally has a line in its base budget dedicated to enhancing services for college and university students with disabilities.

\$2 million was far from our goal, but the support came during two very difficult budget years... and we are extremely grateful!

However, based upon the current breakdown, for every \$9 million that this program receives from the State, only about \$1 million is invested in CUNY students with disabilities.

Perhaps a combination of support for the SED initiative, and an increase in the existing budget line for CUNY disability services is a viable solution.

The CUNY operating budget line has not had an increase in decades.

SUNY students should also receive direct funding for services, in addition to support from the SED program.

We also believe that Syracuse University's Inclusive U should receive continued State support.

Second, students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID), who are enrolled in Federally recognized Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary (CTP) programs are eligible to apply for Pell Grants and College Work Study, but not TAP.

It's time to correct this error.

CCSD urges the passage of A2341 and S1880, so that students with I.D. can apply for TAP.

There are currently nine active CTPs in New York State. Last fall, according to the U.S. DOE, there were fewer than three dozen CTP students in New York State who received Pell Grants.

Even if that number were to double, the fiscal implications would be minimal.

Please pass this important legislation, this legislative session. There should be no reason for delay.

Third, CCSD opposes proposed tuition hikes at CUNY and SUNY.

Tuition hikes translate into enrollment decreases; and our University has not recovered from enrollment losses during the pandemic. We need to advance strategies for student recruitment and retention. Tuition hikes have the opposite effect.

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't thank the governor and our many allies in the state legislature for your continued support for CUNY LEADS. Our students are deeply appreciative.

We look forward to working with the members of the state legislature in addressing the needs of college and university students with disabilities.

Thank you.