



Testimony Josh Slaughter, Laborers Local 66
Hearing FY24 Higher Education Budget Hearing
Topic SUNY Funding and Construction
Date February 27, 2023

Hello, my name is Josh Slaughter. I'm the Long Island Political Coordinator and a proud member of Laborers Local 66, also serving on their executive board. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today on behalf of 17,000 hardworking members of the Mason Tenders District Council of Greater New York – including Laborers Local 66's 1,000 members in Nassau and Suffolk Counties on Long Island - 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 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 also 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.

Laborers Local 66 is pleased to see an additional \$200 million investment in SUNY facilities included in the FY24 budget. We agree the state must invest in the infrastructure and digital technology of our higher education system to meet the needs of students in the 21st century. However, we want to be sure these investments also lead to high quality employment for local construction workers and contractors through a Project Labor Agreement.

The current SUNY procurement process for construction gives us great concern with how and to whom these funds will be awarded. Throughout New York State 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, it doesn't guarantee these jobs go to local contractors and workers - or that contractors even follow the most basic insurance and workers' compensation laws. On Long Island, we've repeatedly had to call local Department of Labor about prevailing wage violations and worker misclassification on jobs like these but dwindling agency resources has led to a drastic decrease in labor law enforcement - allowing for a publicly subsidized race-to-the-bottom in higher education construction.



Examples of SUNY's flawed procurement can be seen in recent projects at Stony Brook University and SUNY Albany. At Stony Brook, a New Jersey-based construction firm, Niram Construction, was awarded \$37 million of our public taxpayer dollars to build the new Javits Lecture Hall. Niram had 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. For that project, Niram also brought in their own out-of-state workforce. At SUNY Albany, J.R.N Construction was awarded a multi-million-dollar rehab/construction project regardless of the company's owner being convicted of not having workers' compensation insurance as recent as 2019.

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. The best solution to accomplish our shared goal for a state-of-the art SUNY system is by establishing a Project Labor Agreement (PLA) that covers all SUNY campuses. Enacting a PLA will ensure our tax dollars fund middle class jobs for New York workers and contractors, while also building our universities professionally and safely.

On behalf of the hardworking members of Laborers Local 66 and the Mason Tenders District Council, we appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony 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.