

Testimony by
SUNY Westchester Community College President Belinda Miles

on the FY 2024 New York State Budget

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SUNY Westchester Community College values its strong partnerships with the Executive Office, NYS Senate, NYS Assembly, and State University of New York system and especially appreciates their collective support for public higher education in New York State.

This testimony is offered on behalf of SUNY's 30 community colleges, which serve about half of all SUNY undergraduate students, and on behalf of SUNY Westchester, which is in proximity of most NYS people of color. We strongly advocate for the following budget measures for the FY 2024 budget.

- **FUND THE FLOOR.** Fund SUNY community colleges at 100% allocated in 2022-2023 (the floor) and make this model permanent.
- **ADD 4%.** Add 4% to the base amount for offsetting enrollment shortfalls, inflationary impacts, and escalating costs vital to delivering high quality workforce programs and essential student support services.
- **REMOVE LANGUAGE PROPOSING TO “HOLD BACK” 20% OF STATE AID TO COMMUNITY COLLEGES.** This appears in the Executive Budget Aid to Localities Bill, page 899, lines 20-43.
- **SUPPORT THE \$75 MILLION “TRANSFORMATIONAL INITIATIVES” FUND.** This helps meet workforce needs of the future, support innovation, enhance student support services, improve academic programs, and increase enrollment investments.

Without these resources, we will face reductions in critically needed services and staffing at SUNY Westchester and across the SUNY system. Services like student mental health support, veteran's services, academic tutoring, employment readiness, and access via extension centers will be limited or jeopardized.

Data showing a drop in full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment, common among community colleges nationally and heightened during the pandemic, fails to convey the fact that more of our students attend part-time. We provide academic and student support services to a similar number of people as in the past. This is happening while our tuition has been held steady for seven of the last 10 years, a practice that has made SUNY Westchester an outlier and that is not sustainable in the future.

We constantly seek and deploy innovative practices to continually improve programs and services to meet workforce needs. For example, SUNY Westchester Community College supports Senate Bill S447A and Assembly Bill A3076, which would allow nursing students to complete 30% of their clinical

requirements in a high-tech simulated nursing environment. This coincides with our impending facility renovation for a state-of-the-art health sciences simulation lab in Valhalla and the pressing need for more healthcare workers in NYS.

We applaud our students and their faculty advisors for taking on the various challenges affecting us all, especially as they grapple with their own studies, employment ambitions, financial situations, and other personal circumstances. Likewise, we applaud our state elected leaders who are preserving our public higher education systems and expanding pathways to civic engagement, higher learning, and the workforce.

Thank you for receiving our testimony.

Dr. Belinda S. Miles

President. SUNY Westchester