



**TESTIMONY OF DESTINY CACCIUTTO  
NEW YORK POLICY FELLOW**

**uAspire**

**Submitted to the New York Assembly**

**Committee on Higher Education**

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uAspire would like to thank Chair Fahy, and members of the Committee for Higher Education for the opportunity to submit this written testimony.

At uAspire, our mission has been improving postsecondary outcomes for students of color, first-generation students, and students from low-income backgrounds. As a first-generation college student, I know exactly what this means. My name is Destiny Cacciutto and I am a senior at John Jay College of Criminal Justice who has the privilege of graduating with my bachelor's debt free because of New York State's Tuition Assistance Program and Federal Pell Grant. I have been able to be a full-time student without the burdensome debt and it is imperative that we ensure more students like me can have this opportunity.

**Tuition Assistance Program**

I am calling on the legislature to expand the income eligibility for the Tuition Assistance Program. The expansion of TAP ensures that New York students obtain college degrees without the burden of debt. The income eligibility should be reflective of the everyday lives of New Yorkers. The 20-year lag on this effort should be addressed so that more students can benefit from the financial relief this program provides.





As a student of the City University of New York (CUNY) a new deal for CUNY is long overdue. We must invest in the institutions that allow our state to be the great state that it is. CUNY has allowed low-income, minority, and first-generation students to attend college and change their life trajectories. An investment in CUNY is an investment that must happen in this legislative session.

### **Universal FAFSA**

Lastly, I am calling on the legislature to pass universal FAFSA in the state of New York. In the 2018-2019 academic year New York's students left \$152 million dollars on the table by not completing FAFSA forms. We must close the opportunity gap and ensure that every student who graduates from a New York High School is maximizing their financial aid opportunities. Especially for students who identify as low-income or students of color. College affordability is vital and it is your job to ensure students like me are not limiting our potential due to the cost of college. We must also provide our schools with the necessary funding, training, and resources required for their success. I humbly request that the legislature keep the importance of affordable and accessible education for low-income students, first-generation students, and students of color at the forefront of your decision-making process.

I want to thank you for your leadership and consideration of this testimony. If you have any questions concerning this testimony, please contact Melissa Clarke, New York Policy Director, at [melissac@uaspire.org](mailto:melissac@uaspire.org).

