

Testimony of George Cushman

Chair of the New York Community College Trustees (NYCCT)

Before the New York State Senate and Assembly Joint Higher Education Committee
Hearing

February 25, 2025

Chairwoman Stavisky, Chairwoman Hyndman, and distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly Higher Education Committees:

As Chair of the New York Community College Trustees, I represent institutions that transform the lives of more than 145,000 New Yorkers annually. While we've made significant progress together in supporting SUNY community colleges, we stand at a critical juncture where increased investment will determine whether we can meet the rapidly evolving educational and workforce needs of our state.

Governor Hochul's Opportunity Promise: Free Community College

The Governor's Opportunity Promise proposal represents a transformative investment in New York's future. This initiative will provide tuition-free access to higher education for an estimated 35,000 additional New Yorkers annually. Our data shows that removing financial barriers increases completion rates by 47%, directly contributing to workforce development and regional economic growth across all 30 SUNY community college service areas. **As one college president said to me before I came before you: "The Governor hit the ball out of the park with this initiative, but I am really concerned that we don't have sufficient resources to achieve her vision."**

Critical Operating Support: \$100 Million Investment

To fully realize the Governor's vision and expand New York's workforce, we require an additional \$100 million in operational funding, divided across four essential components:

Faculty and Staff Stabilization: \$30 Million

- Current nursing faculty salaries lag hospital wages by 32%, causing critical instructor shortages
- Similar wage gaps exist for advanced manufacturing instructors compared to industry positions

- Investment will ensure competitive salaries to retain top talent in these specialized fields

High-Cost Programs Support: \$30 Million

- Each student in healthcare and advanced manufacturing programs creates a \$7,500-\$10,000 annual funding gap
- This deficit results from essential smaller class sizes and higher faculty-to-student ratios
- Healthcare programs require 1:8 faculty-to-student ratios versus 1:30 in traditional programs
- Similar specialized ratios are necessary for advanced manufacturing lab safety and instruction
- Without additional support, colleges must either limit enrollment or risk financial instability

Workforce Program Expansion: \$30 Million

- Start-up costs require significant upfront investment before reaching full enrollment
- Each new cohort generates the same \$7,500-\$10,000 per-student funding gap
- Investment would support expansion of healthcare programs and expand advanced manufacturing training
- Programs would create 5,000 new seats in these high-demand fields
- Without this funding, colleges cannot responsibly expand despite strong employer demand

Student Support Services: \$10 Million

- Expand mental health services to meet 40% increased demand
- Address food insecurity affecting 35% of our students

Maintaining Critical Foundations

We strongly support maintaining both the current funding floor and the \$8 million in additional operating aid secured last year. These provisions ensure stability while addressing emerging costs.

Conclusion

Every dollar invested in SUNY community colleges returns \$3.80 to New York's economy. As we face unprecedented workforce challenges, our 30 community colleges stand ready to transform lives and power economic growth across every region of our state. But we can only fulfill this vital mission, and to reach the Governor's vision, with your continued support and the critical investments I've outlined today.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

George Cushman

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