



*Joint Legislative Budget Hearing Oral Testimony
Giovanni Harvey, President of the SUNY Student Assembly & SUNY Student Trustee
February 25th, 2025*

Good afternoon, Chairs Kruger, Pretlow, Hyndman, Stavisky, and esteemed members of the legislature.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Giovanni Harvey, and I have the privilege of serving as President of the SUNY Student Assembly, representing over 1.3 million students across all 64 SUNY campuses. I also serve as the SUNY Student Trustee while pursuing my Master's degree at the University at Albany.

First, I want to express my sincere gratitude to Governor Hochul and the legislature for your ongoing investment in SUNY Students. Your commitment has been transformative, strengthening our campuses and enhancing the student experience.

Governor Hochul's proposed increase in operating aid for fiscal year 2026 is critical to maintaining the quality of education and essential student services. We strongly urge the legislature to support this increase. Our campuses require significant capital investment to address aging infrastructure. Investing in modern, accessible, and sustainable learning environments will enhance student success, foster innovation, and ensure our campuses remain competitive.

Affordability remains a top priority for students and families. To improve the Excelsior Scholarship, we propose reducing the credit hour requirement from 30 to 24 annually, eliminating the continuous enrollment requirement, expanding the award to cover student fees, and increasing the income eligibility threshold to \$180,000. These changes will ensure more students can benefit from this program without barriers that disproportionately impact part-time and working students.

To promote equity and opportunity, we advocate for a 50% increase in funding for the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), totaling \$20 million. As a proud EOP alum, I know firsthand the life-changing impact of this program. The support I received through EOP made my degrees possible, and I stand here today because of the investment made in students like me. Expanding EOP to all 64 SUNY campuses will ensure that many more New Yorkers can access this invaluable opportunity.

Additionally, we request a \$5 million investment to strengthen Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts across SUNY, ensuring every student—regardless of background—has the support they need to thrive.

We also call for increased investment in student well-being. Nearly a quarter of college students face food insecurity, and SUNY's campus food pantries provide a vital safety net. We propose a \$500,000 investment to enhance and expand these efforts.

Additionally, as the demand for mental health services continues to rise, we request a \$10 million investment to increase staffing and improve access to these critical resources. These investments are essential to maintaining SUNY's excellence and ensuring that higher education in New York remains affordable, accessible, and high-quality.

Thank you for your time and your unwavering commitment to SUNY students.

I look forward to any questions you may have.

THE STUDENTS' AGENDA

FY26 BUDGET PRIORITIES



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Meet the Needs of a Growing SUNY System

Capital Funding & Operating Aid: We urge legislators to support the proposed \$114 million increase in operating aid to maintain the quality of our education and essential campus services. We also call for a substantial increase in capital funding to address critical infrastructure needs across SUNY campuses. Aging infrastructure significantly impacts education quality, student experience, accessibility, and safety. Investing in SUNY's infrastructure will provide modern, well-equipped learning and research spaces that enhance our ability to innovate, collaborate, and prepare for the workforce, while simultaneously supporting the State's sustainability goals and SUNY's research objectives.

Community College Funding: The Student Assembly enthusiastically supports Governor Hochul's historic NYS Opportunity Promise proposal, set to expand community college access for countless New Yorkers. To support the resulting growth of our community colleges, we call for an additional investment of \$30 million to strengthen critical student support services, including advising, tutoring, career development, and bridge programs at community colleges.

Keep Cost of Attendance Low

A Fix for the Broken Excelsior Scholarship: Important changes should be made to the Excelsior Scholarship, including reducing the annual credit hour requirement from 30 to 24, eliminating the continuous enrollment requirement, expanding the award to cover student fees, and increasing the income eligibility threshold to \$180,000.

FAFSA Completion Support: The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) has become increasingly complex, causing widespread confusion and concern among students and families. To address these challenges and ensure that New York students can access vital financial aid, we urge the legislature to allocate an additional \$500,000 to expand the Chancellor's FAFSA completion initiative. This funding will provide crucial resources to help students navigate the application process successfully.

Invest in Student Resources

Food Pantries: With nearly a quarter of college students facing food insecurity, we propose a \$500,000 allocation to enhance campus food pantries. This funding would enable the acquisition of freezers and local produce, ensuring students have access to nutritious food options to support their well-being.

Mental Health & Well-Being: We urge the New York State Legislature to invest \$10 million in expanding mental health and well-being services across SUNY. This funding would increase staffing, enhance crisis response, and improve access to critical support for students system-wide.

Support Equity and Opportunity

EOP Expansion: SUNY SA supports expanding the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) to all 64 SUNY campuses to ensure equitable access to higher education across the State. With 85,000 alumni, EOP has proven invaluable to the SUNY system and New York State. We call for a 50% increase in funding for this important program, totaling ~\$20 million, to ensure that more New Yorkers can succeed in their pursuit of higher education.

DEI Offices: In response to shifting federal and private sector priorities, we call on the State to invest \$5 million to sustain and strengthen DEI efforts across SUNY. This funding would help offset the loss of external grants and ensure continued opportunities for students, including internships and professional development within DEI offices, reinforcing SUNY's commitment to fostering an inclusive environment.

THE STUDENTS' AGENDA

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES



STUDENT
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College Student Suicide Prevention Act

SUNY SA strongly advocates for passage of the College Student Suicide Prevention Act (sponsored in 23-24 by Senator Webb and Assemblymember Gunther), which mandates suicide prevention training for campus staff, crisis response protocols, and mental health resource accessibility. This bill is critical for standardizing life-saving interventions across campuses, reducing stigma around mental health struggles, and addressing rising suicide rates among college students through evidence-based prevention strategies

Emergency Contraception Legislation

SUNY SA urges lawmakers to pass the previously introduced emergency contraceptive legislation (sponsored in 23-24 by Senator Webb and Assemblymember González-Rojas), requiring vending machines with affordable emergency contraception on all SUNY & CUNY campuses. Expanding access to emergency contraception ensures reproductive autonomy for students and removes financial and logistical barriers that disproportionately impact low-income and marginalized communities.

Sustainability Staffing Legislation (S1421/A2603)

SUNY SA endorses the sustainability staffing legislation (sponsored by Senator Liu and Assemblymember Kelles) to require that SUNY & CUNY campuses have staff dedicated to green infrastructure and climate resilience. Dedicated staff are vital for implementing SUNY's sustainability goals.

Student Journalist Free Speech Act (S68)

SUNY SA supports the Student Journalist Free Speech Act (sponsored by Senator Kavanagh), protecting student journalists from administrative censorship and retaliation. This key legislation would safeguard First Amendment rights on campus and enable accountability reporting on institutional issues.

ABOUT SUNY SA

The Student Assembly of the State University of New York (SUNY SA) is the official student government organization representing the 1.3 million students of SUNY across all 64 campuses. As the official university and system-wide student governance organization, SUNY students can participate in university and system-wide governance. We provide a forum for consultation and the exchange of information between students, the Chancellor and the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York.

Under the leadership of President Gio Harvey, who also serves as a SUNY Trustee, SUNY SA functions as a powerful voice for student interests, advocating for policies that enhance the quality and affordability of higher education within the SUNY system. Our organization is committed to fostering student success, improving the student experience, promoting diversity and inclusion, and supporting research and scholarship across all SUNY institutions.

For questions about our agenda, or to schedule a meeting, contact:
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Giovanni Harvey

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“An Agenda for Students, by Students”