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**TESTIMONY OF THE ASSOCIATION OF PRIVATE COLLEGES**

**FOR THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC HEARING  
ON THE EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL FOR  
SFY 2025 – 2026**

**February 25,2025**

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## Testimony Provided by the Association of Private Colleges (APC)

Assemblywoman Hyndman, Senator Stavisky, Assemblyman Pretlow, Senator Krueger and members of the Legislature, thank you for giving the Association of Private Colleges (APC) the opportunity to present testimony regarding this year's budget.

### About the Association of Private Colleges (APC)

Founded in 1978, the Association of Private Colleges (APC) represents 12 privately owned, predominantly family-founded institutions with 19 campuses across New York State. APC member institutions are integral to their local communities, fostering strong partnerships with businesses and industries to drive economic growth and meet the workforce needs of New York State. These institutions are particularly adept at aligning their curricula with industry standards, ensuring they address the needs of diverse students, including first-generation college attendees, non-traditional learners, and working parents.

APC has a proven track record of collaborating with state and federal policymakers to advocate for legislation and policies that safeguard and enhance opportunities for its members' students. The Association is committed to promoting transparency, accountability, and positive student outcomes across the board.

To learn more about APC, its member institutions, and their impact, visit [www.apc-colleges.org](http://www.apc-colleges.org).

### Thank you for your continued support!

First, I sincerely thank you and your fellow legislators for your support in expanding the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) last year. It was truly a great way to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of TAP!

Making higher education more affordable for students is essential. Whether expanding TAP to part-time students attending proprietary colleges or increasing the income threshold to participate, we appreciate the support for initiatives that will help open doors for students who may not have pursued their higher education because of financial barriers. These changes benefited approximately 93,000 students in both public and private colleges and universities, including 48,000 students newly eligible for TAP this academic year, which is great progress given the challenges with the FAFSA last year. We look forward to seeing how these changes benefit more students and families this upcoming academic year now that FAFSA processing has improved.

APC also greatly appreciates the collaborative efforts noted over the past year, between the Governor's Office, HESC, SUNY, CUNY, and private non-profit colleges and universities. APC institutions were invited to participate in College Access Month, waiving application fees in October 2024 and we partnered with HESC to offer several virtual FAFSA completion events. During these events, students and their families were partnered with Financial Aid Advisors from APC member institutions and sent to a private breakout room for one-on-one guidance enabling them to complete their FAFSA and TAP applications.

As we look toward 2025, the Association of Private Colleges remains committed to working with the Governor and the Legislature to champion policies that prioritize the needs and aspirations of all New York students.

## APC Legislative Priorities

### The Future of the TAP Program

I sincerely thank the legislature for their continued support for our members' students, especially those who come from backgrounds often under-represented on college campuses and students who are the first in their family to attend college. For over fifty years, the Legislature has been a true champion for TAP, State-supported financial aid, and other opportunity programs. New York has one of the largest and most generous state sponsored aid programs in the country. The commitment to maintaining financial aid, is needed now more than ever, and ensures that a college education remains an affordable option for New Yorkers that are struggling to meet basic needs such as feeding their family, housing and childcare.

TAP has helped millions of New Yorkers pay for their college education. The Changes made last year were significant:

- **Expanded Part-Time TAP Eligibility** – Now includes students attending proprietary colleges
- **Increased TAP Minimum Award** – Raised from \$500 to \$1,000
- **Higher Income Eligibility Limits**
  - Dependent students: Increased to \$125,000 net taxable income
  - Independent single students: Increased to \$30,000 net taxable income
  - Independent married students: Increased to \$60,000 net taxable income

While these improvements are greatly appreciated, further steps are necessary to ensure that TAP continues to support New Yorkers in achieving their higher education goals while strengthening the state's workforce.

### Continued Enhancement of TAP:

1. **Support for Part-Time TAP expansion** – The Executive Budget included an initiative to combine three existing programs for part time students into one streamlined Part-Time TAP program. As well, the proposal would lower the minimum enrollment requirements to three credits.

Many students must balance family or work responsibilities, making full-time enrollment challenging or requiring them to shift between full-time and part-time status from semester to semester. By streamlining these programs and lowering credit requirements, this initiative would provide greater flexibility and financial support, ensuring more students have access to the education they need to succeed.

**Request:** *APC supports streamlining part-time state financial aid programs and the proposed additional changes to part-time TAP. We ask the legislature to include these proposals in the final budget.*

2. **Expanding access to the Opportunity Promise Scholarship Initiative** – The Executive Budget allocates \$47 million to fund the new Opportunity Promise Scholarships, supporting

students ages 25–55 pursuing certain associate degrees in high-demand fields such as nursing, teaching, technology, and engineering at SUNY and CUNY community colleges.

While APC applauds this investment, we urge the legislature to expand the program to include all students, regardless of where they choose to attend college. Many APC member institutions offer associate degree programs that serve as critical pipelines for these in-demand industries and have deep rooted connections with local industry partners. Ensuring that students at private colleges and universities have access to this scholarship would further strengthen the workforce and provide greater educational opportunities for all.

**Request:** *APC believes all students should have equal access to state funded grant and scholarship programs. We ask the legislature to expand the program so that students who qualify could use the scholarship at any college or university in New York that offers associate degree programs in these high demand fields.*

- 3. Expanding TAP Eligibility to Support Student Success** – APC supports S. 3779 (Gounardes)/A. 508 (Anderson), which would extend the number of years a student can receive Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) awards. This legislation increases eligibility from four (4) to six (6) years, or from five (5) to seven (7) years for programs that typically require five years to complete.

This expansion acknowledges that many students face personal, financial, or academic challenges that require additional time to earn their degrees. By extending TAP eligibility, more students will have the opportunity to complete their education while continuing to receive critical state financial aid.

**Request:** *APC supports this legislation and requests inclusion in the final budget.*

- 4. Support for Low-Income Independent Students** – APC appreciates the legislature’s successful efforts to raise TAP income eligibility limits for independent students in the FY2025 budget. While this marks a positive step toward expanding access, the current TAP award structure continues to disadvantage many independent students.

To promote true equity in financial aid, APC strongly supports eliminating the distinction between dependent and independent students in TAP eligibility determinations. Removing this barrier would ensure that all students, regardless of their financial independence, have equal access to the support they need to pursue higher education.

**Request:** *APC believes there are many students who are single or married without dependents that could benefit from additional state financial aid and the current limitations on these programs are a barrier to accessing higher education. We request the eliminate the disparity between independent and dependent students in the final budget.*

- 5. Reimagining TAP to Support Graduate Students** – The elimination of Graduate TAP in 2010 has had a significant impact on students seeking advanced degrees. We urge the State to reconsider this decision and restore financial support, particularly for high-demand fields such as STEM, education, and healthcare, where skilled professionals are critically needed.

In response to workforce demands, APC member institutions have expanded their Master’s-level offerings to prepare students for these vital industries. Notable examples include Monroe University’s Master’s in Public Health (M.P.H.) program and LIM College’s Master’s in

Professional Studies (M.P.S.) programs in Fashion Merchandising and Retail Management, Fashion Marketing, and the Business of Cannabis. Restoring TAP for graduate students would help ensure a robust talent pipeline to meet the evolving needs of New York's economy.

**Request:** *APC supports graduate students and know the elimination of graduate TAP has had a direct impact on this population. We ask the legislature to include S. 3810 (Stavisky) in the final budget.*

## Other APC Legislative Priorities:

### Support Funding for Other Programs That Impact Students:

APC also advocates for other funding programs that positively impact our students. For instance, several APC member institutions are receiving funds to provide enhanced supports for students with disabilities. As well, Bryant & Stratton College recently converted to a non-profit institution allowing them access to BUNDY Aid that they are using to help support their students. Finally, Five Towns College is proud to be the only institution on Long Island that offers a HEOP program.

We ask the legislature to consider the following:

- **Enhance Supports for Students with Disabilities** - New York State Education Department's Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education for Students with Disabilities recommended – and the Board of Regents adopted – a plan to provide much-needed enhanced supports and services to over 104,000 identified students with disabilities attending New York State's degree-granting colleges and universities. APC member colleges have used the funding from this program to increase and expand faculty and staff training and mental health literacy and improve the processes for identifying students with disabilities and mental health issues. The Governor's budget proposal contains \$2 million for this program, a \$2 million reduction from the SFY 24-25 budget.

**Request:** *APC requests the legislature restore \$2 million for this program and fully fund the \$6 million request from NYSED to support students with disabilities.*

- **BUNDY Aid** is a critical source of student aid for students enrolled in independent, non-profit institutions and funds academic support programs like tutoring, summer bridge programs and support for students with disabilities. The Governor's budget proposes a continued reduction for this program and continues to limit eligibility to private colleges and universities with endowment assets of less than \$750 million.

**Request:** *APC requests the Legislature to restore and fully fund the BUNDY Aid program at the 2023 levels.*

- **Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP)** is designed to provide access to higher education for historically underrepresented and economically disadvantaged students. HEOP students receive specialized academic support services, tuition assistance, supplemental financial assistance and full need packaging to ensure they can successfully complete the requirements for graduation. These programs have a proven track record of improving graduation rates, lifting families out of poverty and are well worth the investment of NYS tax

dollars. The Governor's proposed budget proposes \$46.9 million, a \$2.1 million reduction from SFY 24-25 budget.

**Request:** *APC requests the legislature to restore \$2.1 million to fully fund the HEOP program.*

## **Ensure Continued Parity Across All Sectors of Higher Education:**

New York State has a long-standing history of working together with institutions of higher education in all four sectors (SUNY, CUNY, independent/non-profit, and proprietary) to benefit all New Yorkers. This commitment to equality and parity across all sectors has created a robust and diverse education system that has resulted in innovative and novel ideas, a consistent pipeline of employees for local businesses, and a strong, positive economic impact across the State.

Despite this history, there are areas where proprietary colleges are excluded, and we ask for your consideration and support in the following program:

### **Expand ECHS programs to Include Proprietary Colleges.**

In the Executive Budget, the Governor promised support for early college in high school programs, streamlining the existing programs, creating parameters for college or university participation and providing ongoing, per-credit funding for these programs.

New York State's ECHS programs are innovative programs through which public school districts partner with local institutions of higher education in order to enable high school students to earn college credits (up to a full associate's degree) while earning their high school diploma – at no cost to the students or their families. While APC fully supports the Governor's initiative, in the past bill language defined "institution of higher education" to include only public and independent institutions – thereby excluding New York State's entire proprietary sector from participating in these programs.

Proprietary institutions of higher education play an important role in ensuring students across New York State have access to a high-quality, affordable postsecondary education that meets their needs. In some geographic areas of the State, APC member institutions provide some of the only available options to pursue higher education, and many of APC's member institutions have been recognized for their excellent academic outcomes, especially among low-income and traditionally underrepresented students.

Further, many of APC's member institutions are proud to work closely with their local school districts and have repeatedly been recognized for their contributions to their surrounding communities. Accordingly, APC believes the exclusion of proprietary institutions from the ECHS programs would only constitute a disservice to students by depriving them of opportunities to advance their education. Further, because institutional partnership decisions under the ECHS programs are made by school districts and inherently tied to an institution's geographic area, APC believes it would be most appropriate to permit school districts to arrange partnerships with any institution in its local area. School districts are best positioned to evaluate the needs and interests of their students and should have the discretion and flexibility to partner with local institutions of higher education accordingly.

**Request:** *APC requests the legislature include language in the final budget that would align the definition of an institution of higher education with the definition used for state financial aid purposes in Education Law section 601.*

## Conclusion

APC is deeply grateful for the ongoing commitment of the Legislature to expanding access to higher education and supporting students from all backgrounds. The investments made in TAP and other financial aid initiatives have transformed the lives of countless New Yorkers, and we are eager to continue working together to build on this progress.

As we look ahead, we urge the Legislature to sustain and expand these critical programs, ensuring that all students—regardless of where they choose to attend college—have the support they need to succeed. By investing in financial aid, opportunity programs, and workforce development initiatives, we can empower more New Yorkers to achieve their educational and career goals while strengthening the state’s economy.

Thank you for your continued leadership and support. We look forward to collaborating with you to advance policies that benefit students, families, and the future of higher education in New York State.

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