



The Commission on
INDEPENDENT
Colleges & Universities
in New York

**Testimony of
The Commission on Independent
Colleges and Universities**

Joint Budget Hearing on Higher Education

Tuesday, February 25, 2025

Good morning, Chairpersons Krueger and Pretlow and members of the finance committees.

My name is Lola Brabham, and I am the President of the Commission on Independent College and Universities. I appreciate the opportunity to testify on behalf of New York's private non-profit colleges and universities regarding the 2026 State Budget.

Independent Sector institutions educate over 40 percent of New York's college students, including first generation students and those from underserved backgrounds. We share the same mission as public institutions: to produce capable graduates who drive the State's workforce, economy, and communities forward. As we navigate the many challenges facing higher education today, we remain committed to the principles of access, opportunity, choice, and excellence.

We are grateful for the support the State has provided to higher education in previous years, but now is the time to build on that foundation by taking bold steps to strengthen New York's higher education landscape to ensure a resilient and thriving future for New York students.

EXPAND OPPORTUNITY

Reject Proposed Cuts, Increase Opportunity Funding by 20 Percent (\$27.5M)

We are thankful to the Governor and State Legislature for last year's historic expansion of the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) and for the continued expansion of Part Time TAP in this year's proposed budget. These investments have significantly enhanced access to higher education for countless students across the state and demonstrated a strong commitment to educational equity and opportunity.

To ensure continued access, we ask that the Legislature reject the Governor's proposed cuts to critical pipeline programs and instead increase funding by 20 percent. Programs like the Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP), the Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP), Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (CSTEP), and the Liberty Partnerships Program (LPP) have proven to be both successful and effective. These programs that annually serve more than 15,000 New York State residents increase college access for students with demonstrated economic need and the ability to compete academically in competitive higher education institutions. These cuts are not simply a rollback of legislative additions, they threaten the future of thousands of New Yorkers.

I want to express our gratitude to the legislature for rejecting similar proposals in last year's budget. We are hopeful that this year, you will again protect education opportunity programs to sustain this critical investment and ensure that students across our State can achieve their dreams of earning a college degree, realize their full potential, and become contributors to our vibrant society and economy.

SUPPORT ACCESS OPPORTUNITY AND CHOICE

Restore Bundy Aid (\$18.8M)

We were disappointed by the continued elimination of Unrestricted Aid to Independent Colleges and Universities, also known as Bundy Aid, for campuses with endowments greater than \$750 million.

Bundy Aid is outcome-based and student-focused, which means colleges receive funding based on the number of degrees they confer, and the funding is invested back into programs that help more students graduate.

This cut will continue to increase costs for hardworking students and their families who rely on the financial support provided by Bundy Aid to help them achieve their dream of a college degree. This is wrong and we strongly urge you to restore Bundy Aid to impacted institutions.

Expand the Opportunity Promise Section for all Students (\$7M)

CICU urges the legislature to expand the Opportunity Promise Scholarship, also known as “Free Community College,” to associate degree students in our sector. This initiative, aimed at students aged 25-55, can reduce worker shortages in critical fields such as education, nursing, and STEM. More than 50 independent institutions award nearly one-third of associate degrees in high-demand fields. One-in-five associate’s degree students aged 25 and older attend an Independent Sector campus. This program should work like TAP and be open to all New York students regardless of whether they attend a public or private non-profit institution.

Despite substantial contributions to the state’s higher education ecosystem, private non-profit institutions are needlessly excluded from key state initiatives and funding opportunities. These exclusions limit our ability to fully serve diverse student populations, and hinder our shared mission of producing capable graduates who drive New York’s workforce and economy forward.

SUPPORT STUDENT WELLBEING

Reject Proposed Cut, Increase Funding (\$4M)

Access and affordability must never be barriers for students with disabilities. Colleges and universities serve as gateways to opportunity, yet too many of our students with disabilities continue to face obstacles that hinder their success. Ensuring equitable access to education is not only a responsibility but a moral imperative. By investing in comprehensive support systems—from enhanced mental health services to robust disability accommodations—we empower students to thrive both academically and personally. CICU supports the NYSED request of \$6 million for students with disabilities, the executive budget proposal includes only \$2 million.

PUBLIC – PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

We must also take steps to strengthen the partnerships and collaborations that fuel our state's economy. Independent Sector colleges and universities generate \$97 billion in economic activity and employ more than 400,000 New Yorkers through on-campus and spillover jobs. To sustain this economic engine and maintain the state's competitive edge, higher education requires the state's partnership to remain at the forefront of business innovations that will attract global industries to New York.

The economic partnership between the Independent Sector and New York State is exemplified through HECap, the Centers for Advanced Technology (CAT), and the Centers of Excellence (COE) programs.

Invest in Educational Infrastructure with HECap (\$50M)

HECap is a 3 to 1 matching program that allows campuses to prioritize capital development and has created over 9,000 prevailing wage construction jobs across the State. Our campuses have matched the state's investment with more than \$1.7 billion in campus-driven capital spending to maintain state of the art campuses. The Legislature's continued support of HECap is critical to job creation and educational infrastructure across New York. CICU urges a new round of HECap to be funded at \$50 million.

Restore Cuts and Increase Funding for Cutting Edge Research (\$11M)

The CATs and COEs are proven programs that leverage campus-based research to grow New York's economy. These programs generate almost \$1 billion in annual economic activity through their work with start-ups and New York based companies. We urge the legislature to continue fighting for these programs, reject the proposed cuts, and increase funding to \$1.25 million per center.

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Given the extent of higher education's benefits to society, we must do everything we can to maintain a resilient higher education ecosystem. The challenges confronting higher education are not insurmountable but require decisive action.

As you know, Higher Education is facing attacks at the federal level that threaten student aid, research funding, and our efforts to maintain diversity on campuses. New York Colleges and universities have faith that you will support us through these troubling times. We need you to reject harmful short-sighted proposals that diminish support for student aid and instead prioritize the contributions of our higher education institutions as drivers of access, opportunity, and creators of solid pathways to upward mobility.

We look forward to working with you in support of New York's college students. Thank you.