

**Testimony to the New York State Senate Finance and
Assembly Ways and Means Committees Higher Education Hearing**

February 13, 2026
Legislative Office Building
Albany, New York

Dear Chair Krueger, Chair Pretlow, and Members of the Assembly Ways and Means and Senate Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on the critical importance of protecting and strengthening the **Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP)** and the **Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (CSTEP)**—New York State’s only coordinated, statewide Opportunity Programs serving students from middle school through graduate and professional education.

For nearly four decades, STEP (est. 1986) and CSTEP (est. 1987) have created an unbroken pathway for students from historically underrepresented and economically disadvantaged backgrounds to enter the State’s most academically rigorous and economically essential fields: **STEM, health, and licensed professions**. These programs identify and support talent early, nurture academic and professional development, and prepare students to join high-need, high-income professions that strengthen local and regional economies across New York.

In this testimony, I will (1) outline the programs’ contributions to New York’s workforce pipeline, (2) describe the threats posed by the proposed funding cuts, (3) detail the impact of a funding increase, and (4) highlight the urgent need for State-backed loan alternative to support student entering high need professions that require graduate and professional school training.

The Role of STEP and CSTEP in New York’s Workforce Pipeline

STEP and CSTEP are intentionally designed to expand representation in STEM, healthcare, and licensed professions —fields that require rigorous academic preparation and contribute significantly to the State’s income tax base. As the Governor has noted, professionals in these fields are central to the economic health of New York.

At a time when New York faces persistent workforce shortages in engineering, computer science, mental health, medicine, allied health, and licensed professions, STEP and CSTEP cultivate the homegrown talent required to stabilize and grow New York’s economy.

The programs also directly support the workforce needs associated with the State’s major economic investment —including Micron, Regeneron, and the Governor’s Empire AI Consortium, which demand a diverse, highly trained pool of New Yorkers.



Despite Proven Success, the Executive Budget Reduces Funding

The FY Executive Budget proposes a **5% reduction—\$1.9 million—to STEP and CSTEP** in the “Aid to Localities” section (p. 193). This cut comes at a time when demand for these programs continues to rise and when New York reliance on STEM, health, and licensed professionals is at all time high.

A reduction in funding will:

- limit student access,
- reduce program capacity, and
- directly threatens the State’s ability to prepare the professionals needed to fill workforce shortages.

APACS Requests Legislative Action

1. Restore the 5% Budget Cut (\$1.9 Million) and Increase Funding by 20% (\$7.8 Million).

Total allocation \$46.7 Million (up from \$38.9M)

Restoration ensures thousands of capable New Yorkers—already committed to STEM, health, and licensed fields—remain supported in their educational and career trajectories.

A 20% increase allows STEP and CSTEP programs dispersed into 133 projects statewide in 2-year, 4-year CUNY, SUNY, and independent institutions to:

- **Expand enrollment** to meet growing workforce demand and address a reduction in student enrollment in the 2025-2030 funding cycle. The network increased by 19 projects for this funding period and to fund the size of the network, program enrolment was reduced.
- **Strengthen core offerings**, including:
 - summer program enrichment,
 - academic year support services,
 - research, internships, and
 - Test prep and advising for graduate/professional school
- **Support students through the rigorous academic pathways** required for STEM, health, and licensed professions

This investment ensures New York develops the skilled, diverse workforce essential for sustaining the State’s economic competitiveness.

3. Establish a New York State Graduate & Professional Student Loan Alternative

Students entering high-need fields—medicine, dentistry, mental health, engineering, and other licensed professions—must complete advanced degrees. Recent federal financial aid changes increase students’ exposure to predatory lending, creating barriers that disproportionately impact the very students STEP and CSTEP prepare for these professions.



A **state-backed loan alternative** is urgent. It would:

- Protect New York students from predatory lending
- Reduce financial obstacles to entering essential professions
- Support long-term workforce stability and professional retention within the State

State intervention is essential to strengthening the STEP and CSTEP pipeline through the final—and most expensive—stage of professional preparation.

Conclusion

STEP and CSTEP have demonstrated, across four decades, that targeted investment in educational opportunity produces measurable student success and significant economic return for New York State. Restoring the 5% budget cut, increasing funding by 20%, and establishing a State loan alternative for graduate and professional students will ensure New York continues to cultivate the diverse and highly skilled workforce required to meet present and future demands.

On behalf of the 25,000 students served annually and the 133 projects operating across New York, I respectfully urge the Legislature to take action to protect, strengthen, and expand these important programs. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Renaldo D. Alba, Ed.D.
President

441 East Fordham Road
Bronx, NY 10458
718-817-3267