

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Joint Legislative Budget Hearings
FY 2026–27 Executive Budget

Submitted to:

The Honorable Liz Krueger, Chair
Senate Finance Committee

The Honorable Carl Heastie Pretlow, Chair
Assembly Ways and Means Committee

Submitted by:

Friends of the New York State Liberty Partnerships Program, Inc.
On behalf of Liberty Partnerships Program (LPP) projects statewide

Contact:

Elizabeth Altman, President

TESTIMONY

Chairs Krueger and Pretlow, and Members of the Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means Committees:

Friends of the New York State Liberty Partnerships Program, Inc. respectfully submits this testimony regarding the Governor’s Executive Budget for State Fiscal Year 2026–27 and its impact on the Liberty Partnerships Program (LPP).

Program Overview

The Liberty Partnerships Program is a statewide, twelve-month initiative established in 1988 to address high school dropout prevention and postsecondary readiness. LPP provides coordinated academic, social-emotional, and college and career readiness supports to students in grades 5–12 through partnerships with colleges, universities, school districts, and community stakeholders across New York State. The program is designed to provide consistent, long-term intervention that supports student engagement, persistence, graduation, and successful transitions beyond high school.

LPP is fundamentally a prevention and early-intervention program. Its effectiveness is grounded in sustained relationships, year-round programming, and coordinated supports that follow students across critical academic and developmental transitions. As such, LPP depends on funding stability and operational continuity to deliver results.

Program Reach and Outcomes

In the 2024–25 program year, Liberty Partnerships Program projects served more than 18,000 students statewide. NYSED-reported data reflects an 87.4 percent graduation rate among Grade 12 LPP participants, demonstrating strong outcomes associated with

sustained academic and social-emotional supports. LPP serves a student population with levels of economic disadvantage and other indicators of need that are comparable to or exceed statewide averages, underscoring the importance of stable, year-round programming.

These outcomes reflect nearly four decades of state investment in a program model that prioritizes consistency, accountability, and measurable student success.

Budget Impact and Funding Request

Friends of LPP is concerned by the Governor's proposed reduction to LPP funding in the FY 2026–27 Executive Budget. LPP is not a short-term or school-year-only initiative; it is a twelve-month program that depends on continuity of staffing and services.

Reductions in funding would destabilize program operations, disrupt service delivery, and undermine the long-standing relationships that are central to student success, particularly at a time when students and families continue to face economic uncertainty and increasing mental health needs.

Accordingly, Friends of LPP respectfully requests that the Legislature restore the proposed FY 2026 reduction to at least the FY 2025 enacted funding level of \$25.7 million and provide a 20 percent increase, raising total funding to approximately \$30.8 million.

Restoration is necessary to prevent service reductions and operational disruption. The additional investment is needed to address the structural realities of delivering a twelve-month program, retain qualified staff, and strengthen program stability. Together, restoration and augmentation would allow LPP projects to deepen services, serve additional students, and expand access in communities with limited program coverage, advancing statewide goals related to student success, workforce readiness, and long-term economic stability.

Return on Investment and Alignment with State Priorities

Sustained investment in LPP represents a fiscally responsible strategy that leverages existing infrastructure to deliver measurable outcomes. By improving graduation rates, supporting postsecondary transitions, and strengthening workforce readiness, LPP contributes to long-term cost avoidance associated with remediation, disengagement, and workforce instability.

These outcomes align directly with the Governor's FY 2026–27 priorities emphasizing student success, mental health and wellness, workforce development, and expanded pathways to college and career attainment. LPP's integrated academic and social-emotional support complement broader state investments by ensuring that students are positioned to benefit from those initiatives.

Operational Barrier: FS-10 Encumbrance Process

In addition to funding levels, Friends of LPP respectfully raises a critical operational issue that affects the effectiveness of this investment: the encumbrance and release of grant funds through the FS-10 process.

FS-10 budgets are reviewed by the appropriate NYSED program office and then routed through NYSED grants and contract administration, with grant contracts also subject to review and approval by the Office of the State Comptroller. Because these approvals are

sequential and centralized, LPP projects across the state experience recurring delays in the encumbrance of funds.

These delays are systemic and annual, not isolated. Even when funding is appropriate, delays in encumbrance limit projects' ability to incur costs at the start of the fiscal year, complicate hiring and contracting, and disrupt timely program delivery. The result is uncertainty for host institutions and staff, and reduced continuity of services for students—undermining the intent of the appropriation itself.

Requested Administrative Remedy

Friends of LPP respectfully requests that the Legislature consider convening a targeted workgroup or task force, including representatives from NYSED, the Office of the State Comptroller, and grantee programs, to examine the FS-10 process for long-standing, recurring grants such as LPP.

The purpose of this effort would be to identify opportunities to streamline approvals, explore expedited or differentiated processing pathways, and recommend administrative solutions that maintain fiscal oversight while reducing delays. Addressing this issue would significantly improve program implementation and maximize the return on state investment without requiring additional appropriations.

Conclusion

For nearly four decades, state investment in the Liberty Partnerships Program has supported measurable student outcomes, strengthened educational pipelines, and contributed to workforce development across New York State. Ensuring both adequate funding and a functional, timely encumbrance process is essential to sustaining these results.

Friends of the New York State Liberty Partnerships Program, Inc. appreciates the opportunity to submit this testimony and looks forward to continued partnership with the Legislature to ensure that LPP remains a stable, effective, and accountable investment in New York's students.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Altman

President

Friends of the New York State Liberty Partnerships Program, Inc.