



**Fostering Youth Success Alliance**  
**Prepared for Submission to the Joint Legislative Public Hearing**  
**On the FY 2027 Executive Budget Proposal**  
**February 24, 2026**

We respectfully thank Chair Toby Ann Stavisky of the New York State Senate, Chair Alicia Hyndman of the New York State Assembly, and the honorable members of the Committees on Higher Education for the opportunity to submit testimony on the 2026–27 Executive Budget proposal. This testimony addresses funding for the Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI).

The Fostering Youth Success Alliance (FYSA) is a statewide coalition that works to advance policies and programs that improve educational, housing, health, and economic outcomes for youth currently in, or aging out of, foster care. FYSA is made up of foster care providers, government partners, advocates, and young people with lived experience who are committed to ensuring that youth have the supports they need to succeed. FYSA is housed at and managed by Children’s Aid, a multi-service human services organization based in New York City.

In 2015, FYSA worked with stakeholders to support the creation of the Foster Youth College Success Initiative. First enacted in the 2015–16 State Budget, FYCSI was established to help students with foster care experience access and complete higher education. The program provides targeted financial assistance to students who often lack traditional support and face significant barriers to college persistence.

Since the program began, FYCSI has served over 4,000 students. In FY 2026–27, 1348 students with foster care experience accessed FYCSI funding. FYCSI provides flexible financial support to students currently or formerly in foster care, as well as eligible orphans. Funding is available to students enrolled at SUNY, CUNY, and private institutions with Higher Education Opportunity Programs (HEOP) and may be used for tuition and fees, housing (including intersession housing), books and supplies, transportation, and medical or personal expenses.

Over the past nine years, New York State has invested \$67.207 million in FYCSI. While total appropriations have increased over time, funding has not kept pace with enrollment growth or rising college costs. As a result, per-student awards have declined, leaving many students with unmet financial need. Although FYCSI funding increased by 3.0 percent over the past three

years, per-pupil funding decreased by 12.3 percent due to growing participation. At the same time, students face rising costs for housing, food, and transportation. These pressures often require students to work extensive hours while enrolled or make difficult decisions about housing stability, particularly during academic breaks.

In FY 2026, the State allocated \$8.4 million to FYCSI. We appreciate that the Governor's FY 2027 Executive Budget proposes \$7.92 million in continued funding. However, this level does not reflect current demand or the real cost of supporting students through degree completion. At a time when affordability remains a serious challenge, sustained investment in FYCSI is necessary to prevent students from falling behind or leaving school altogether.

We urge the Legislature to include **\$10 million for FYCSI in the FY 2027 Enacted Budget** to stabilize per-student awards and ensure that eligible students receive meaningful support.

**The Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI)**

FYCSI awards are distributed annually through students' financial aid packages. The per-student award is determined each year by the State Education Department based on available funding and the number of eligible students, and has generally ranged from \$5,000 to \$10,000. Students are eligible for FYCSI at any age if they were in foster care on or after their 13th birthday, whether in New York State or elsewhere. Students who became orphans before age 18 and were not adopted prior to age 13 are also eligible. While FYCSI is available at all public colleges in New York State and at private colleges with opportunity programs, students are not required to be enrolled in an opportunity program to receive funding.

FYCSI is supported through ongoing advocacy by FYSA and youth advocates and is administered collaboratively with state and city partners, including NYSED, HESC, SUNY, OCFS, CUNY, and ACS. This structure has allowed the program to adjust over time to better meet student needs.

**Promising Results: 2026 FYCSI Impact Survey & SUNY Rockefeller Report**

In 2025, a decade after the launch of the Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI), FYSA examined how students across New York state used FYCSI funding and how it shaped their higher education journeys. [The 2026 FYCSI Impact Report](#) shared the findings from this survey and found that FYCSI students experienced:

- **Greater Peace of Mind:** Students reported emotional relief knowing they had consistent financial backing, which reduced anxiety about unexpected costs.

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- **Housing Stability:** Funding helped cover year-round housing gaps (including breaks when dorms close), reducing risk of homelessness or couch-surfing.
- **Food Security:** Students were better able to consistently afford groceries and meal plans.
- **Improved Academic Focus:** Because of the funding, many students were able to work fewer hours and dedicate more time to academics.
- **Ability to Participate in Campus Life:** Students reported being able to join clubs, internships, and leadership opportunities rather than focusing solely on survival employment.
- **Improved Mental Health:** Reduced financial strain and increased stability contributed to improved overall well-being.
- **Financial Stress Reduction:** Nearly all surveyed recipients reported that financial uncertainty is a major stressor in college, and a large majority said FYCSI funding alleviated that stress by covering tuition and essential expenses.

Data from the State University of New York (SUNY) system further demonstrate the impact of FYCSI. FYCSI recipients at SUNY have higher retention rates than Pell Grant recipients, underrepresented minority students, and SUNY students overall. FYCSI awardees also show higher associate degree graduation rates than their peers with foster care experience who did not receive the funding, as well as higher rates than Pell Grant recipients. Early data on bachelor's degree completion also show promising results.

These outcomes show that targeted financial support plays an important role in improving college persistence and completion for students with foster care experience. Young people who have experienced foster care face ongoing instability and limited financial support as they transition to adulthood. Access to higher education, and the resources needed to complete it, should not depend on year-to-year funding uncertainty.

While the Governor's proposed **\$7.92 million** allocation for FYCSI is a positive step, additional investment is needed. We respectfully ask the Legislature to provide an additional **\$2.08 million**, bringing total FYCSI funding to **\$10 million in FY 2027**. This investment would help ensure that students with foster care experience can cover basic college costs, remain enrolled, and complete their degrees. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the approximately **14,000 children and youth in foster care in New York State**. For questions regarding this testimony, please contact **Ashley Staggers, Director of the Fostering Youth Success Alliance**, at [astaggers@childrensaidnyc.org](mailto:astaggers@childrensaidnyc.org).

