



# PRESS RELEASE

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**NEW YORK COLLEGE STUDENTS ACROSS THE STATE CALL FOR GOVERNOR HOCHUL'S FIRST EXECUTIVE BUDGET TO BE STUDENT FRIENDLY**

*Over 6,600 students sign petition urging for a new era of higher education investment*

(*New York*) Over 6,600 students from CUNY, SUNY, and independent New York universities joined a petition calling on Governor Hochul to leave state divestment in higher education in the past. ([https://www.nypirgstudents.org/pubs/202112/Student\\_Friendly\\_HE\\_Budget\\_Letter\\_Hochul\\_Final\\_2.pdf](https://www.nypirgstudents.org/pubs/202112/Student_Friendly_HE_Budget_Letter_Hochul_Final_2.pdf))

As Governor Hochul puts together her first Executive Budget, due in January, students have coalesced around the call for a student-friendly budget that recognizes that investing in higher education boosts racial and economic equity and strengthens our economy amid the unpredictable pandemic recovery.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it difficult for students to stay in school and finish their degree. Students have experienced struggles with isolation, job loss and financial hardships, and a growing toll on their mental and physical health.

However, serious issues with college accessibility were clear even before the COVID-19 pandemic. During the past decade, New York State passed budget after budget that provided stagnant funding for higher education, while raising tuition costs and leaving too many students ineligible for financial aid programs. Even though, during the same time period, the state's All Funds budget increased by over 26%.<sup>1</sup>

While there were some bright spots in NY's higher education budget over the years – the Jose Peralta Dream Act, opportunity program funding, the rejection of some tuition hikes, and the increase in maximum Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) awards – the fact remains that the state's budget realities should have allowed for increased state funding, and halted the growing tuition burden placed on public college students and their families.

College should be affordable for all, to provide access to one of the greatest economic equalizers for any individual who seeks it.

“As someone who transferred into CUNY, you can only imagine how crucial it’s been to get the help of advisors and professors to navigate my educational experience. Unfortunately, the advisor-to-student ratio is staggeringly low, and the professor-to-student ratio isn’t better. I spend every semester combing through advising schedules to get an appointment. I’ve spent even more time being disappointed that the classes I need to take for my major aren’t being offered when I need to take them. It’s safe to say that the New Deal for CUNY is important to me because it demands crucial funding that will allow for lowered student-to-teacher and advisor ratios,” said **Rani Persaud, NYPIRG Higher Education Project Leader and City College of New York student.**

“CUNY and SUNY are vital economic engines not only for our City and State but for millions of New Yorkers. As their economic mobility is tied to education, the time to fully fund CUNY and SUNY is now. As we look to leave the pandemic behind us, we need our institutions of higher education prepared to aid every New Yorker. The time for a tuition free university system is now, the time for fully funding our systems is now,” said **Cory Provost, CUNY University Student Senate Interim Chairperson.**

“The time is now to fully fund public higher education across New York State. Now more than ever, college students need access to mental health services, food pantries, childcare options, textbooks, and more full time faculty. Addressing these issues this session will be imperative to student success at SUNY - plus we’ll repay that investment back into the state economy for decades to come,” said **Brad Hershenson, SUNY Student Assembly President.**

“A student-friendly executive budget that reverses years of state disinvestment in CUNY and SUNY is exactly what New York needs right now. The PSC is proud to stand with NYPIRG and thousands of petitioners who are calling on Governor Hochul to make game changing investments in public higher education in the coming year. Fully funding the CUNY request for a \$313 million increase in operating funds and a five-year \$5.8 billion capital investment would be a shot in the arm for the Black and brown communities, the immigrant communities, the working families who depend on CUNY. Passing the New Deal for CUNY to guarantee top quality free undergraduate education would be an unmistakable signal that the era of racialized austerity for New York’s public higher education systems is over,” said **James Davis, president the Professional Staff Congress CUNY,** the union that represents 30,000 faculty and professional staff at CUNY.

“After more than a decade of austerity, Governor Hochul has the opportunity to set New York on a new path, a path towards expanding opportunity and access to high quality higher education and public healthcare. By investing in SUNY institutions across the state Governor Hochul will be investing in our communities. Expanding access through EOP, fully funding TAP, and reforming the Excelsior Program will provide pathways to careers and life changing opportunities for students from every economic background. This must be the year we break from the budgets that strangled SUNY and CUNY and limited the tremendous impact they can have in ensuring a diverse, vibrant and more just New York.” said **Fred Kowal, United University Professions President.**

The petition calls for an Executive Budget which:

- Includes the New Deal for CUNY legislation (S.4461/A.5843) and provides analogous funding to SUNY to support smaller class sizes, more mental health resources, and lower student-to-adviser ratios;
- Overhauls the Tuition Assistance Program to cover eligible graduate students, part-time students, and students who are incarcerated;
- Continues to expand funding to New York’s proven Opportunity Programs;
- Expands funding for student support programs on campus such as campus childcare, open educational resources, and programs which address food insecurity such as the Hunger Free Campus Act (S.1151B); and
- Includes full funding for Bundy Aid for independent college students.

### **Selected Student Stories from NYPIRG’s Higher Education Storybank:**

“My name is Britney Trinidad and I am a Sociology Major with a concentration in Criminology with a double minor in Communications and Black studies. In order to pay for college I use subsidized loans, unsubsidized, federal Pell Grants, tuition assistance program (TAP), I work full time 65 hours a week, and I pay out of pocket. If there is anything that I could change about TAP I would change the eligibility and the award size. If you drop below a 2.0 they do not give you your award. The biggest challenge with paying for college is time. Schools give us unreasonable deadlines to pay enormous amounts of money for school which breaks our backs. After graduation I will have a lot of money in loans to pay. I am absolutely worried about them. Loans grow interest as we all sadly know. The loans I have now will have me in debt for another 15 years. In order to cover my expenses, I do have to work. My freshman – junior year I had three jobs. Currently I only have 1 which is a fulltime job where I work 60 hours a week to make ends meet. I currently live off campus because it was cheaper than living in one of the uncomfortable residence halls where the school would charge me \$1,200 a month for unlike my apartment where I pay \$700 a month. Within my family I am a first-generation college graduate. My sister attended college at the University at Buffalo and graduated with her bachelor's in liberal arts. My sister as well is now struggling after college to pay her student loans while also trying to find a job in the nursing field in the midst of a pandemic.” **Britney Trinidad, SUNY New Paltz**

“It is my fourth year studying at BMCC. I would not be able to afford college if it were not for the DISCOVERY and TAP programs that help me cover the costs. Even though I receive financial aid I still did get a job to help my parents pay for the mortgage and other household bills. I was waking up at 3:30 in the morning to catch the bus to JFK for my 6 am shift. I worked 4 times a week, working 36 hours weekly. Eventually, I had to take a break from classes because it was too much to do both work and school at the same time. During COVID my job laid me off and then they would not rehire me because they found out I was back at school. This makes it very difficult to help pay for the costs of living and help my parents with the bills. Tuition needs to be free and there needs to be more financial assistance to college students and their families.” **Sabrina Maharaj, Borough Manhattan Community College**

“My name is Isabelle Pastore and I attend SUNY Cortland full time. I work 15 hours a week over summer and winter break to help pay for my personal expenses, but it’s not nearly enough to pay my student loans. I think college should cost substantially less than it does. When my parents went to school, it cost much less and attending college was less common. I don’t think it’s fair that tuition costs so much because in today’s society, it is expected that people attend college in order to get a well-

paying job. It upsets me that I will have to spend a good portion of my life paying back my student loans. I definitely think college should be way more affordable and less expected than it is and I hope that in the future, college is way more affordable for everyone” **Isabelle Pastore, SUNY Cortland**

“My name is Rafael Fonseca. I am a Business Management student. I live off-campus with my parents. I have received FAFSA and TAP before. It helped me to pay for tuition and books. But I wish that college was free because it’s too expensive. Tuition, textbooks, and transportation make it expensive. With all these expenses not everyone can afford it. If you were to take less than 4 classes, you don’t take get financial aid. I would like FAFSA and TAP to change that so part-time students can be eligible for financial aid. This semester I took 3 classes to finish my associate degree. I didn’t get FAFSA or TAP to cover the tuition, textbooks, and transportation. I had to pay out of my pocket which was hard for me. As of result of this, I was tight on money. If FAFSA and TAP were provided for a part-time students. I could have been stress-free.” **Rafael Fonseca, Borough Manhattan Community College**

“Even with the financial aid awards I’ve received, there’s still a good amount of money I have to pay. And I have to pay for the materials on my own and that itself is a lot of money. I still have a balance to pay, and I can’t register for classes until I’ve paid my balance. And it’s not like I can just write a check - that check will bounce - and I can’t get a loan, and my parents can’t get a loan. College isn’t a guaranteed thing. Even if you get a high-paying job – you still have to figure out rent and water bills, and then you have the student loans that you have to start paying for six months after college. And to even get the job in the first place? It’s difficult because there’s a lot of people fresh out of college and they’re doing the same thing you’re doing.” **Anahi Urias, Pratt Institute**

“My name is Jordan Gibberman and I am a student at SUNY Purchase. In 2018, My family and I had to apply for student loans all because I decided to live on campus. We didn’t have a lot of money to afford housing and meal plans, so the loans were the only option. Then in 2020, I transitioned to remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. So, my family and I stopped applying for student loans and focused on paying for school with financial aid, along with the Excelsior scholarship that I had throughout my whole college experience. That scholarship only helped me cover the tuition. I certainly hope I qualify for student loan forgiveness. That would be a huge benefit for me. Overall, I wish I didn’t have to go through this experience paying for college -- it’s honestly one of the reasons why I often think about if I should’ve gone to college or not.” **Jordan Gibberman, SUNY Purchase**

“I am a senior attending Hunter College. Although I am grateful to get tuition assistance, I worry that one mistake will take away my financial aid such as not doing well in school, failing a class, or in this case, an error made by the system. I also help pay for phone bills, water bills, wifi bills, etc. Tuition, textbook fees, and transportation are not the only things being paid for with the help of financial aid. To make it worse, transportation fees cost a lot and with things being a one-tap system, I cannot save money on transportation fees. I worry that the MTA will increase the price again one day which will become very troubling to me. I worry about the cost of tuition and financial aid will not cover me the whole time. I wish the people in charge of higher education realize that many students out there are worrying about paying for their tuition on top of working hard to study. I hope that they can work more on the funding and make it more accessible to other people who wish to have the opportunity to go to college.” **Angela Shin, Hunter College**

“I am currently a sophomore transfer student double majoring in Political Science and Women & Gender Studies here at CUNY Hunter. At my previous institution I was in a program that granted me a tuition scholarship, however upon transferring to Hunter I was awarded no financial aid since my mother had a full time job and has been working for 20 years. As a single mother of 4, my mom works full time and pays rent. Oftentimes since my mother is so overwhelmed with work, I have to assume responsibility for household errands such as grocery shopping, laundry, picking up my siblings from school, etc. I pay for my own phone bill, books, my commute, food, and any other miscellaneous costs. Every student has a different financial situation and supporting them through making CUNY free like in the past can help aid the accessibility in obtaining higher education for many.” **Isabellah Paul, Hunter College**

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<sup>i</sup> Citizens Budget Commission, “NYS Trends During the Cuomo Administration,” Fiscal years 2011-2019, October 18, 2018, <https://cbcny.org/research/nystrends-during-cuomo-administration>.