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NEWS RELEASE

NYPIRG Applauds Passage for City Budget for FY 2015

Students commend Mayor and City Council for prioritizing increased funding for CUNY

(New York, NY) – Rewarding months of tireless advocacy from students, faculty, staff, and concerned citizens, The New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) today applauded approval of a New York City budget that boosted support for higher education. As part of the newly passed budget, the City Council and Mayor have agreed to restore a total of \$11.1 million in merit-based scholarship funding for City University of New York (CUNY) and Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) students. The award would be available to New York City high school graduates with at least a B average, regardless of immigration status. The restoration of this Council-funded initiative comes at a time when tuition has continued growing and state Tuition Assistance Program funding has struggled to keep up.

“By restoring the merit-based scholarships for CUNY, the Mayor and City Council are doing their part to ensure that some of New York’s best and brightest can afford pursuing higher education,” stated Aileen Sheil, Queens College student and NYPIRG chairperson. “By making this investment into higher education, the City is really investing in New York’s future.”

Originally called the Peter F. Vallone Scholarship, after the former City Council Speaker, the merit-based scholarship benefitted over 14,000 students annually until it was completely defunded in 2011. At its peak, the scholarship covered almost half of CUNY tuition. In its revived form, the merit-based scholarship will total \$800 a year or \$400 a semester, what the former City Council Speaker says is “less but still a significant incentive and a good start for the future.”

In addition to the restoration of the scholarship, several council-funded initiatives were restored, including, the Creative Arts Team, CUNY Prep and the Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies. Funding for the Center for Puerto Rican Studies and the Dominican Studies Institute was more than doubled. The final budget also included additional funds to support and to expand CUNY’s Citizenship Now and STEM programs.

“The final budget should be a reminder to students and fellow advocates that our efforts can achieve tangible results,” shared Armando Chapelliquen, NYPIRG project coordinator at Borough of Manhattan Community College. “The final budget demonstrates the City’s willingness to be a partner in fighting for affordable education. The priority now is to keep that relationship going.”

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