



# **The Funding Priorities of the Students of the State University of New York**

*Testimony before the Joint Fiscal Committees of the New York  
State Legislature Regarding the 2013-2014 Executive Budget*

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## **Introduction**

Good afternoon and I would first like to begin my testimony by thanking Chairperson John DeFrancisco, Chairperson Denny Farrell, Chairperson Ken LaValle, and Chairperson Deborah Glick, members of the Senate and Assembly, and legislative staff for allowing me the privilege to speak today.

My name is Kevin Rea and I am a proud graduate student at SUNY Maritime College. I am the elected President of the Student Assembly of the State University of New York, and also a voting member of the SUNY Board of Trustees.

The Student Assembly is comprised of student leaders elected by their peers from across all 64 SUNY campuses. Empowering students throughout the state, we are committed to ensuring the representation of SUNY students at the state and national levels, as well as within the SUNY system. We are proud of our work with the state over the past few years on the issues that matter to students, most notably rational tuition and maintenance of effort.

I am here to speak to you today to ask your help in extending SUNY's upward trajectory. There are several critical steps that our next state budget needs to include for us to be successful as students. These steps are:

- Full funding of SUNY's Academic Medical Centers
- A small increase in the Community College Base State Aid
- Funding of SUNY's Five Year Capital Plan
- Classification of the Residence Hall Program as a non-State Supported Entity
- Increase of the State Operated Campus Support to Reflect Enrollment Growth

## **SUNY's Medical Centers**

In the earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, minorities faced discrimination in the United States, and New York was no exception. Many groups, notably individuals who were Jewish, and African Americans, were denied the opportunity to pursue a professional degree just because of who they were. Becoming a doctor or lawyer was out of the question. This is one of the main reasons for the creation of the State University of New York in 1948; to allow for everyone in the state who wished to become something had the opportunity and the place to work towards their goal.

Sadly, a major piece of the opportunity New York provides to unprivileged groups is in danger. With the loss of revenue from Medicare and Medicaid as well as inadequate funding by the state, some question whether SUNY will be able to continue to support medical centers that provide quality care and quality training for our medical students.

If the financial situation does not improve, I fear for the educational medical centers of the State University of New York. Where will our students be able to receive an affordable medical degree, if not in their own state? The state has an obligation to increase the funding of these schools to ensure their continued success, and to show the perspective doctors of the future that

New York is serious about its commitment to public health. More funding would allow students to continue to practice medicine, serving populations who need it most.

SUNY Downstate Medical Center is without a doubt the worst hit of them all. While they stand proud of the fact that 1 out of 3 practicing doctors in the borough of Brooklyn graduated from Downstate and 1 of 9 in New York City, their financial position is still quite alarming. As you already know, it has brought them to the point of asking the Department of Health to approve shutting down Long Island College Hospital, with over 150 years of providing care to some of Brooklyn's neediest. With over \$90 million dollars in lost state support alone, it cannot sustain another cut if it is to continue to be an economic engine in Brooklyn.

While offering medical degrees is an expensive undertaking to be sure, New Yorkers need a place to receive a quality medical education that is affordable. To do anything less would be an injustice to the men and women that worked so hard to start SUNY in the hopes of elevating those who cannot accomplish their educational dreams alone.

### **Community College Base State Aid**

Community Colleges are a place for unparalleled access and opportunities; students who don't really know what they want, students who want something different, students who are place bound, students who are returning to school after a hiatus. The list goes on and on. However, all of these stories have a strong common element: these students cannot carry the cost of their education alone. Whatever the reason that a student chooses community college, it must be affordable in order to be able to meet their needs at a reasonable price.

A good friend of mine, Angel, did not have much hope when he was 25. A teenage runaway, he had been tossed around from foster homes for years and felt like a failure. He thought of giving up any chance he had of being successful. One day, he met a girl who convinced him that he needed to go back to school. After meeting a local trustee, he eventually met with Dr. Cliff Wood, President of Rockland Community College and enrolled. After 25 years of being "headed for failure," He not only excelled during his tenure at Rockland, but was also elected the student trustee at RCC. To quote Angel: "Today, thanks to so many members of the Rockland Community College family, my dreams are now becoming a reality." Will stories like these still be possible if the student's tuition gets to be much higher? I hope we never have to find out the answer.

Since the creation of community colleges in New York, a 1/3 state, 1/3 local, and 1/3 student formula had been the agreed upon cost structure. However, there has been a lack of support from both the local and state shares of the equation. Since then, students have been relied on more and more to carry the increase in cost of their schools. In spite of this, community colleges have proven to be extremely effective in the economic growth of New York State. A study by NYCCAP, the New York Association of Community College Presidents, states the economic impact of community colleges in the State of New York at over \$15 billion dollars! Community Colleges are forging and continuing partnerships to ensure their graduates can be job-ready. They are receiving grants and taking us to new highs never before seen, all thanks to our 36

catalysts throughout the state. To quote from a discussion I had recently with a faculty member at Nassau Community College "It's amazing what a little community college can do, isn't it?"

With the implementation of Seamless Transfer, students will now be able to move throughout the SUNY system and have a handle on what their course requirements will be, giving them an edge how on long degree competition might take. SUNY has recognized the obstacles placed on a student when transferring, and has made great strides in eliminating them. Now, the students of New York State need the same commitment from their legislators in terms of the cost of community college.

To continue their great work, the students of this state ask that the state legislature adopts the "Rational Aid" model advocated for by our partners in the Faculty Council of Community Colleges, NYCCAP, as well as SUNY. While we are aware that the rise to one third support from the state cannot happen in one year, we are requesting that the state increase their FTE funding by \$260 this year to keep us on our path to one third.

### **Capital Funding and the Dormitory Bond Cap**

SUNY is composed of 64 campuses, all with a vast array of unique and historical buildings and grounds. Maritime has a fort built in the 1830's, New Paltz has a planetarium, and ESF has a forest. Our facilities are used constantly, and are essential to our education. That is why it is so important to maintain them, so that they can be used for generations to come. To make this happen, the state needs to invest the dollars that will allow critical projects to be performed. These projects do not just make sure the buildings are kept up to code; they ensure that students have a safe and comfortable environment in which to learn. With thousands of colleges in the United States alone, SUNY cannot afford to lag behind while others continue to invest in their campuses' infrastructure.

If we are serious about our commitment to graduating more STEM students, this becomes even more critical. Students will need the equipment required to be successful in these fields, and these are neither cheap nor easy to come by. For example, Maritime acquired a diesel engine last year in order to give our engineering students hands on training with an engine of that time. At the University at Albany, a new building was constructed for students to study Nano-science.

These projects also serve as a way to keep our campuses beautiful as well as state-of-the-art. Neither prospective students nor their parents are going to want to continue looking at a college that is not in peak shape and does not offer the best facilities that a college can offer. SUNY can continue to be the best at educating students by staying ahead of the pack with facilities that amaze students, and give them the opportunity to learn in a way that other schools just cannot compete with. The students of SUNY ask that this legislature approve the capital funding plan put together by SUNY by approving its long term funding.

However, it is not just our educational facilities that are in need of attention. SUNY has a large amount of dormitory buildings that depend on the sales of dormitory bonds in order to pay for their construction and maintenance. However, as you are well aware, the state is quickly approaching its debt cap. In order to maintain their quality and to provide for expansion, we

request that you honor the governor's proposed budget request in this regard, and allow these bonds to be separated from the cap.

## **State Operated Campus Funding**

Since the Great Recession of 2008, SUNY has seen a large amount of its support trimmed away, over 30% of its total support from the state. The cuts made were greatly felt amongst the 34 state operated campuses in SUNY. While some were able to mitigate the cuts with minimal damage to quality or course offerings, some schools were not as able. Class sizes increased, class offerings were scaled back, and department openings were left unfilled. Some schools, such as Albany, were forced to trim majors. One definite result of the cuts was felt universally: increased campus enrollment.

Over the course of six years, SUNY's state operated campuses have increased their enrollment by 9%. However, we have only seen a stabilization of state support, not an increase to reflect the change in campus size. There is currently no state support to match the increased load on the system. In order to ensure that state support matches the students enrolled, we ask that you raise your level of support to that of current enrollment.

## **Conclusion**

SUNY students understand the difficult financial position facing the legislature. There is an unlimited demand for money, but only a limited supply. However, the best investment of funds for New York State continues to be investment in higher education. NYCCAP estimates a return of \$21 dollars for every dollar invested in a SUNY school.

Today, SUNY is on an upward trajectory. We are a world class system in which a student can go from an Associate's Degree to a Doctorate, never having to leave the state, at a fraction of the price of other educational centers. However, we will need your help to keep us headed in that direction. Even in these difficult economic times, we can prove to the world that a continual, solid commitment to higher education is not only possible, but is necessary to move us forward.

We the students stand ready to make this state, this system, and this country so much more than it is today. The question is, will the New York State Legislature partner with us, and help grab that brass ring?

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you all today.