



The State University of New York  
Student Assembly

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**2016 New York State Budget Testimony**  
Senate Committee on Finance  
Assembly Committee on Ways and Means

Good afternoon. My name is Tom Mastro and I am a senior at Binghamton University studying education and human development. I have the distinct pleasure of serving as President of the Student Assembly and as the Student Trustee on the SUNY Board. Along with my colleagues, today we will talk about five key issues which have a significant impact on students across our system.

The absolute need for a fair, equitable, and predictable tuition plan, an increase in base aid for community colleges, more attention paid to disability accommodations, an increase in funding for childcare centers, and the reinstatement of tuition assistance for graduate students.

As you heard discussed in detail this morning by the Chancellor and myself, a renewal of NY-SUNY2020 is absolutely vital. We need to ensure that our students can plan ahead with their families, we need to ensure that their tuition dollars are staying on their respective campuses, we need to ensure that tuition is not consistently raised to the maximum threshold, and we need to ensure that students are consulted on tuition decisions. Perhaps most significantly, we need to ensure that the state is paying its fair share such that the burden of higher education does not fall squarely on the shoulders of our students. Since the enactment of 2020, SUNY campuses have been able to hire 919 new faculty members and approve over 350 new academic programs. It is because of these incredible advances that the students voted 59-4-1 in favor of renewing NY-SUNY2020.

I yield now to Nicholas Simons, our Director of Legislative Affairs, to discuss the importance of increased funding for our childcare centers throughout the state.

Thank you President Mastro.

Good afternoon everyone. My name is Nicholas Simons and I am a junior at the University at Albany studying American politics and Spanish. I would like to begin by saying that on-campus childcare and the funding of such services could be the most important issue to a single parent who attends one of our SUNY campuses. Among the most significant issues facing our non-traditional students is the inadequacies surrounding childcare funding. SUNY childcare centers

provide not only an important resource for our students, faculty, staff, and members of the community, they also give our students applied learning opportunities. One quarter of undergraduates in the SUNY system are raising children; of those students, 43% are single mothers and 11% are single fathers. This growing demographic of parents exemplifies the diversity in our system. With the governor cutting Community College child care again this year to the tune of \$1.1 Million, the legislature need not only reinstate these funds, but transcend them as well. With 28 centers at community colleges, and 22 centers at state-operated campuses, SUNY has done its work to accommodate these non-traditional students. We ask that the legislature follow suit and show these parents that this issue is important to the state. These students who take the time to go back to school deserve a well-funded and well-staffed location to leave their children while they work to better themselves and provide for their family. The state would be doing a great disservice to our colleagues if they did not seriously examine the restoration and reinvigoration of these underfunded institutions. I, myself, attended daycare at Broome Community College in my infancy, and my sister attended daycare at Binghamton University. Our parents, both SUNY students and members of the community, utilized these institution's services. As I stated, this could be a make or break issue for some parents who are debating whether to come back to school. With that, the legislature should recognize the importance of this issue to students across the state.

I yield to our Vice President, Melissa Kathan, from the University of Buffalo.

Thank you, Nicholas.

Good afternoon. As Nicholas said, my name is Melissa Kathan and I am studying political science and management at the University of Buffalo. Newly accepted to UB Law School, I would have appreciated the opportunity to apply for tuition assistance as a graduate student. Unfortunately, as Assemblywoman Malliotakis pointed out earlier this afternoon, the program has been inactive since 2010. Graduate student issues are often overlooked, but we are making as strong an effort as we can to ensure that their voices are heard. Our nearly 41,000 graduate students should have the same access to aid as any student pursuing his or her education, whether that be undergraduate or graduate work. During the life of this program, 7,000 SUNY students took advantage of this program. Restoring the Tuition Assistance Program for graduate students will incentivize more students to pursue a graduate degree and mitigate the burdens of debt. Speaking of underrepresented student populations, we recognize the gravity of disability accommodations. A student's opportunity to obtain an education must not be impeded by a campus' physical or structural insufficiencies. There are currently 23,000 students with disabilities enrolled in the SUNY system, 6.2% of community college students and 4.4% of state operated students, and increases annually. Our students with physical disabilities, invisible disabilities, and learning disabilities should have the resources they need on campus to ensure their success. Burdandi Rakowski, a Fredonia student and advocate for students with disabilities is able to seamlessly pursue her education at Fredonia because the school has accommodated her needs regarding Accessible Dormitories, Accessible Classrooms and Snow Removal. This should be the norm on all campuses and we hope that the legislature will partner with SUNY in bringing additional resources to bear in support of this movement.

I yield to the Student Assembly's Chief of Staff, Marc Cohen, from the University at Albany.

Thank you, Melissa.

My name is Marc Cohen and I am a senior in the BA/MPA program at UAlbany's Rockefeller College studying Higher Education Policy and policy analytics.

An issue which both we, and SUNY administration, have discussed here in the past is that of community college base aid. Be it a non-traditional student looking to continue their education or a new high school graduate looking to ease the transition into college, community colleges provide endless opportunities for our students from all walks of life. It is also important to realize the significant economic impact community colleges have on their surrounding counties. A recent NYCCAP study shows that community colleges contribute nearly \$15 billion to their communities. For all the good that our community colleges do, all of the ways the students contribute back to their communities, they are grossly underfunded. The most updated information has only one of our 30 community colleges being funded at 33%. While the law holds that the state contributes up to 40%, the average contribution is far less. The proposal in the Executive Budget of a flat Base Operating Aid per FTE of \$2,597 would mean a year to year decrease in direct state tax support of nearly \$21 million.

Attending community colleges is becoming increasingly difficult for our students. The past budgets that have allocated 75 or \$100 in raises have still left schools with a funding deficit. This applies to most of the community colleges in the system. The days of students paying upwards of 40% cannot continue. Restoring sufficient funding to all campuses is not something we expect to be achieved in one session. However, this year needs to be the beginning of a new trend toward less of a burden on our students.

We thank you for your time and attention this afternoon. At this time we would look forward to answering your questions about these issues and others affecting the students of SUNY.