

Testimony re: 2020-2021 Executive Budget Proposal—Higher Education

Submitted to
Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means Committee

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Thank you, Chairwoman Krueger, Chairwoman Weinstein, and all other committee members, for taking the time to read the testimony drafted by the Hispanic Federation; a non-profit organization seeking to empower and advance the Hispanic community, support Hispanic families, and strengthen Latino institutions through direct service programs and legislative advocacy.

Latinx College Completion Crisis

New York State is failing to graduate Latinx student college and career ready, forcing them to leave high school unprepared for post-secondary success. From 2007-2017 in New York City, Latinx young adults ages of 18-24, have increased their college enrollment by 9%, from 29% to 38%.¹ However, nearly one in four Latinx young adults who are not enrolled in school are college non-completers.² In the same decade, the Latinx completion crisis has risen from 13% to 23%, demonstrating that young Latinx non-completion rate is growing faster than the increase of college enrollment.³

Further, young Latinx adults are disproportionately attending community colleges, which do not always provide the same guidance and support as four-year universities. In fact, at CUNY alone, first time fall freshmen enrollment of Latinx students has decreased 5% from 2007 to 2017, making the total enrollment of Latinx students 12% at senior CUNY colleges.⁴ Through research and focus groups with both Latinx college completers and non-completers, it was clearly

¹ Unreleased study by LEAD Coalition and HERE to HERE on the Latinx College Completion Crisis. Plans to be released in the next couple of months. Please reach out to Maria Morrissey at the Hispanic Federation for more information: mmorrissey@hispanicfederation.org.

² [https://research.steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/media/users/ks191/New_York_City_Goes_to_College_Report.p](https://research.steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/media/users/ks191/New_York_City_Goes_to_College_Report.pdf)
[df](#)

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

demonstrated that these students were not given the proper education, experiences, and supports prior to college to be postsecondary ready.⁵

In order to address this Latinx college completion crisis, Hispanic Federation strongly urges the legislature to include and prioritize the following budget and legislative recommendations in their one house budgets, as they directly benefit and remedy the issues many Latinx young adults face when trying to achieve their post-secondary dreams.

I. Senator José Peralta New York State DREAM Act

Continued Funding for the Senator José Peralta Dream Act—\$27 million

Hispanic Federation asks the legislature to secure the same funding as last year of \$27 million for the Senator José Peralta NYS DREAM Act, to ensure undocumented students continue to have access to higher education. According to an analysis by the New York State Youth Leadership Council and N.Y.U. Law School's Immigrant Rights Clinic, approximately 146,000 young people are now eligible for state financial aid through the NYS DREAM Act.⁶ As the community starts to trust this opportunity, more and more students will utilize this new path to receive financial aid. The state must continue to fund its state financial aid programs to compensate for the increase of applicants now eligible.

Marketing, Community Outreach, & to Create Educational Materials for HESC—\$1 million

Unfortunately, the undocumented and mixed status families are still fearful to take advantage of this higher education opportunity and have many misconceptions about what the NYS DREAM Act is and what the application process entails. Further, school counselors and professionals are also experiencing confusion around the NYS DREAM Act and how to best help their students, due to the lack of training. Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC) needs the proper funding to address these issues. HESC is using its resources to the best of its ability and yet, does not have the capacity to create and implement a plan to educate families, counselors and school districts on the NYS DREAM Act and the application process.

HESC must spearhead community outreach along with CBO's that work directly with the community; create training materials and host workshops for counselors and professionals; and launch a statewide marketing campaign to dispel misunderstandings and inform New Yorkers of an opportunity that has the ability to impact the trajectory of their careers and financial stability. We strongly believe that HESC needs a minimum of \$1 million to properly put the law into action.

⁵ 2019 LEAD Coalition organized focus groups

⁶ http://www.law.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/upload_documents/The%20NY%20State%20Dream%20Act.pdf

Support for SUNY and CUNY to Increase Outreach and Recruitment Efforts—\$500,000

Moreover, HESC alone cannot provide enough outreach to communities and high schools on the NYS DREAM Act. SUNY and CUNY must participate and increase marketing and recruitment efforts to assist new students in understanding the NYS DREAM Act application and eligibility criteria. This requires additional funding that can be directly put into action plans so that higher education institutions can increase visibility and assistance to students applying to the NYS DREAM Act.

In fact, SUNY has provided similar support when the Excelsior Scholarship came into effect. SUNY made clear efforts in marketing and recruitment “to assist new students in understanding the Excelsior Scholarship application process and eligibility criteria,” and explored “the use of Smart Track’s targeted email communications to assist Excelsior Scholarship recipients in understanding the academic requirements to maintain their scholarship eligibility while they pursue their education at a SUNY campus.”⁷ Further, SUNY “distributed information about the Excelsior Scholarship to more than 8,000 high school students at SUNY College Fairs” during the 2018 fall term.⁸

We insist that both institutions provide intentional outreach to high school and college students to guarantee that all are equipped with the right understanding to apply for the NYS DREAM Act. The sustainability and success of the NYS DREAM Act is highly dependable on the number of students that apply for it. Our communities are eager to apply for its resources, but if the support that ensures transparency and safety is not there, students are less likely to take advantage of a program that can significantly improve their odds at completing a college degree. We must provide a robust set of help that can encourage and increase the number of students applying for state financial aid.

II. Opportunity Programs**Increase Opportunity Program Funding**

Opportunity Program Funding has been proven to increase retention and graduation rates, especially for first generation college bound students. Many of these students are low-income students of color that need additional academic and financial supports and services to graduate college. For example, Higher Educational Opportunity Program (HEOP), is specifically designed to enroll first-time; full-time college students who are financially and academically challenged and might not otherwise be accepted into a college degree program. These programs change generational wealth disparities and sets students up to be the first in their families to attain

⁷ <https://www.suny.edu/govtrelations/state/testimony/2017-excelsior-testimony/>

⁸ Ibid

college degrees. We urge the legislation to allocate the following funding to these needed programs:

FOUR YEAR UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS	
Higher Educational Opportunity Program—HEOP	\$41.4 million
Liberty Partnership Program	\$18.4 million
Science and Technology Entry Program—STEP	\$18.4 million
Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program—CSTEP	\$13.9 million
COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAMS	
Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge—SEEK	\$32.8 million
College Discovery Opportunity Program—CDOP	\$1.6 million

III. Diversity in Higher Education Institutions

Create and Fund the SUNY Office for Diversity and Educational Equity—\$500,000

As discussed above, when describing the Latinx college completion crisis above, there has been a shift in demographics of students enrolling into college, specifically a dramatic increase of Latinx young adults. This change of demographics demands institutions to take a closer look at developing resources and acknowledge how representation in their faculty and staff matters. The establishment of an office that solely concentrates on diversity and educational equity will serve as a first step in ensuring students of color have better outcomes in college. Studies consistently show that when students of color have faculty of color to learn from and lean on, the success of their educational outcomes increase dramatically, directly addressing the Latinx college completion issue.

The SUNY Office of Diversity and Educational Equity will be tasked with drafting a report to the Governor and legislature on diversity efforts that must include: minority enrollment for each campus; minority withdrawals and dismissals for each campus; size of minority freshman class; size of minority graduating classes in four, five, and six years per campus; number of faculty positions filled by each campus; and the number of minority faculty hired by each campus and their pay scale and title. The report will also include graduate and doctorate degrees and total enrollment numbers and graduation rates. All information must be broken down by each campus, gender, and ethnicity. This will build transparency to better understand where institutions are meeting student needs and or may need more support from the state to better serve students of color. The expected data is critical as the state develops initiatives that can best represent and fulfill the need of underrepresented students. We strongly support the creation of this office and urge \$500,000 in funding be allocated to SUNY for this purpose.

In summation, New York State must continue to fund the Senator Jose Peralta New York State DREAM Act and invest in its implementation, similarly to the marketing and recruitment efforts afforded to the Excelsior Scholarship. Further, ensuring HESC and higher education institutions are receiving enough funding to educate and dispel misinformation to fearful undocumented communities will expand the pool of NYS DREAM Act applicants. Additionally, Opportunity Programs are specifically designed to benefit first generation college goers who may not have had the opportunity otherwise. New York must increase the funding for this program to address the Latinx college completion crises and end generational wealth inequities. Lastly, as we acknowledge that student demographics are becoming more diverse, there is a high need of a center that specializes in capturing data that reinforces diversity and inclusion for the student population and faculty/staff in higher education spaces

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