



**Testimony on the 2024-2025
Executive Budget for Higher Education**

**Senator Liz Krueger, Senate Finance Committee Chair,
Assemblymember Helene E. Weinstein, Assembly Ways and Means Committee Chair,
Senator Toby Ann Stavisky, Senate Higher Education Committee Chair,
Assemblymember Pat Fahy, Assembly Higher Education Committee Chair**

**Albany, NY
February 8, 2024**

Testimony of Allen Williams, Chair of the New York Community College Trustees (NYCCT)

Greetings Chair Kreuger, Chair Weinstein, Chair Stavisky, Chair Fahy and distinguished members of the Senate Finance, Assembly Ways and Means, and the Senate and Assembly Higher Education committees. Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Chair Allen K. Williams, chair of the New York Community College Trustees (NYCCT). It is my honor to speak on behalf of NYCCT, the state-wide organization that represents all trustees of the 30 State University of New York (SUNY) community colleges.

Community colleges are at the heart of higher education as we offer innovation, equitable economic growth, and upward mobility for New York's residents. As trustees, it is our fiduciary responsibility to keep SUNY community colleges sustainable and accessible to educate our workforce. We are here today to advocate for \$97 million dollars in base operating aid for all 30 SUNY community colleges.

Over the past two decades, community colleges saw disinvestment of \$2.5 billion versus SUNY 4-year colleges. Because of the chronic disinvestment in our community colleges, our ability to keep tuition low and provide resources to support high-cost workforce education programs is at risk. As a result, we have been forced to reduce programs and student support services while increasing tuition to balance our budgets, as required by law.

We applaud Governor Hochul's support in 2023. With her backing, we maintained our previous year's funding level and successfully applied to SUNY for new one-time investments to enhance enrollment and invest in high-demand workforce programs. The state's investment proved effective, as demonstrated by the 3.9 percent increase in first-time undergraduate student enrollment across the SUNY Community College System.

SUNY community colleges educate 174,042 students, representing 45% of the SUNY undergraduate population, yet our students are not supported equitably; a student at a four-year SUNY college receives \$19,136 in state funding, and a student at a community college receives only \$5,482 (55% of this funding is provided by local counties).



We unequivocally support the state's level of investment and commitment to our four-year SUNY students, and we also ask that our community college students receive a similar and equitable level of commitment.

We appreciate our community college presidents who are willing to address both statewide and local workforce needs. Our presidents have pioneered the Empire State Workforce Guarantee, an initiative designed to enable community colleges to train and educate 20,000 students across the state in various workforce development fields, including nursing, cybersecurity, HVAC, and automotive, among others.

The need for this increase in base operating aid is due to inflationary increases, contractual increases to name a few. Without an additional \$97 million in funding for this year, the continuation of key high-cost workforce development programs will be in jeopardy. Without additional funding, there will be cuts in mental health services, food insecurity programs, and housing assistance, which community colleges offer. Without additional funding, we will be forced to continue to reduce workforce programs and raise student tuition annually.

Moreover, the need for an increase in base operating aid is attributed to the absence of a rationale cost-per-student model by the state. According to New York State Education Law 6304, which governs the financing of community colleges, the funding model should be equally shared among New York State (33.3%), the local sponsor (the local county government, also at 33.3%), and student tuition (33.3%). Based on the latest available data from 2021-2022, community college students bear the highest share, contributing \$580 million, followed by local counties covering \$525 million, and the state paying the lowest share at \$428 million.

New York community college tuition is already one of the most expensive in the country affecting the most vulnerable students, most of whom are low-income and minorities (34.7 percent of students in community colleges are Pell-recipients, 14.7 percent of our students are economically disadvantaged, and 35.6 percent of our students are minorities).

Investing in our community colleges will allow us to continue to offer New York residents access to economic mobility and living wages which will result in improving New York's tax base. Funding New York's community college students equitably will cement your legacy for generations to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Allen K. Williams