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**TESTIMONY OF THE ASSOCIATION OF PRIVATE COLLEGES**

**FOR THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC HEARING  
ON THE EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL FOR  
SFY 2024 – 2025**

**February 8, 2024**

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## Testimony Provided by the Association of Private Colleges (APC)

Assemblywoman Fahy, Senator Stavisky, Assemblywoman Weinstein, Senator Krueger and members of the Legislature, thank you for giving the Association of Private Colleges (APC) the opportunity to present testimony regarding this year's budget.

### Introduction

Founded in 1978, the Association of Private Colleges (APC) represents 12 privately held, primarily family-founded institutions of higher education with 19 campuses across New York State. APC member institutions are deeply-rooted in their local communities and have strong ties to the businesses and industries they partner with, making them important economic drivers, focused on educating and training people to fill the workforce pipeline in New York State. APC member institutions are also nimble, allowing them to ensure curriculum offerings align with industry standards and are responsive to the needs of students, especially first-generation, non-traditional, and working parents.

TAP has supported students attending our member colleges since its creation. We celebrate TAP turning 50 this year and look forward to working with legislature on TAP reforms that will enable more students and families to benefit from the program. Together with institutional financial support, APC member institutions are proud to share in the State's commitment to increasing access and affordability to high quality education.

APC has a long history of working with state and federal decision makers to advocate in favor of legislation and policies that protect and support the interests of our members' students. APC is committed to legislation and policies that promote **transparency, universal accountability, and strong student outcomes**.

For more information on APC, its member colleges, and our students' outcomes, please visit the APC website at [www.apc-colleges.org](http://www.apc-colleges.org).

### APC's Focus on Workforce Development

As we look to SFY 2025, APC looks forward to working with the Governor and legislature to establish policies that ultimately serve the best interest of our students and help to fulfill the workforce pipeline, especially in health care, IT, hospitality, and business.

Governor Hochul's State of the State address and proposed budget made clear her commitment to public higher education, support for students and workforce development. We are encouraged by Governor Hochul's focus on prioritizing the economy, providing a living wage, and the need to create a high-quality workforce pipeline. Far too many New Yorkers do not have the opportunity or access to higher education and APC member colleges look forward to working towards a solution.

However, the Governor's focus on the role of SUNY and CUNY while overlooking private colleges is short sighted. Thousands of students attend private colleges, and these colleges are connected to their communities and local industries. APC would encourage the Governor and the legislature to leverage all colleges and universities in New York to expand opportunities and to help build the economy and workforce.

APC member colleges are strong financial engines for New York's economy and part of the state's work force solution because we identify the needs of employers and adjust or develop curriculum to meet those needs. Our member colleges partner with employers throughout the state by preparing qualified graduates who are ready to make an immediate contribution in the workplace.

Students attending APC member colleges are earning degrees in many traditional and emerging fields, including law enforcement, nursing and allied health, education, business administration, accounting, computer animation, music and fine arts and the business of fashion and cannabis.

## **APC Legislative Priorities**

### **Building Tomorrow's TAP Program**

I sincerely thank the legislature for their continued support for our members' students, especially those who come from backgrounds often under-represented on college campuses and students who are the first in their family to attend college. For fifty years, the Legislature has been a true champion for TAP, State-supported financial aid, and other opportunity programs. New York has one of the largest and most generous state sponsored aid programs in the country. The commitment to maintaining financial aid, is needed now more than ever, and ensures that a college education remains an affordable option for New Yorkers that are struggling to meet basic needs such as feeding their family, housing and child care.

TAP has helped millions of New Yorkers pay for their college education. Changes have been made to TAP in recent years, including a \$500 increase to the maximum TAP award, restoration of TAP eligibility to incarcerated individuals, and the expansion of part-time TAP eligibility to certain undergraduate students and students enrolled in eligible non-degree workforce credential programs. However, the data shows that utilization of the program has declined by 15% since 2017 as the program has become outdated, not keeping pace with inflation and other policy initiatives to create a living wage in New York.

Table 2

## Tuition Assistance Program Recipients

by Level of Study and Type of Institution

Academic Year

Annual Average Recipients (FTE)

Level of Study/Type of Institution	2017 - 2018	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	Estimated 2021 - 2022
<b>Undergraduate:</b>					
<b>City University</b>					
Senior Colleges	56,441	56,921	58,008	54,125	49,584
Community Colleges	27,923	26,164	23,480	17,530	13,836
<b>CUNY TOTAL</b>	<b>84,364</b>	<b>83,085</b>	<b>81,488</b>	<b>71,655</b>	<b>63,420</b>
<b>State University</b>					
State Operated	66,928	67,669	64,829	55,976	53,047
Community Colleges	44,892	39,817	35,521	23,296	21,097
<b>SUNY TOTAL</b>	<b>111,820</b>	<b>107,486</b>	<b>100,350</b>	<b>79,272</b>	<b>74,144</b>
Independent Colleges	60,899	57,673	52,966	45,263	44,705
Proprietary Degree-Granting Institutions	13,258	12,079	11,562	9,807	9,360
Nondegree Business Schools	1,269	914	702	459	562
All Other Institutions	62	68	61	133	123
Chapter XXII TAP schools	6,218	6,338	6,723	7,328	7,250
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>277,890</b>	<b>267,643</b>	<b>253,852</b>	<b>213,917</b>	<b>199,564</b>

\*HESC Annual Report 2022

The Governor's proposed budget reduces the TAP, Enhanced Tuition Awards (ETA) and Excelsior Scholarship appropriations for the first time in decades without advancing limitations on the program due to falling college enrollments and a rebasing to better align with utilization. State sponsored, needs based, financial aid programs are critically important to our students. APC members successfully educate more than 20,000 students of which **65% are women; 26% are black/African-American and 21% are Hispanic/Latino**. More than **67% of APC students receive federal Pell Grant awards** and almost **10,000 students receive a New York State TAP award**.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of TAP it is important to reflect on the significant impact the State's investment has made in the lives of so many. APC fully supports the Senate and Assembly #TurnOnTheTAP campaign and their proposed package of bills that would raise TAP income thresholds, award amounts, and expand the number of students eligible to participate in the program.

However, it is time to explore and evaluate whether the program continues to make investments that assist New Yorkers in meeting their higher education goals and support our economy by helping those seeking employment or advancements in our high need's workforce areas.

## Let us work to build tomorrow's TAP together.

- **Let's build a TAP program that supports all part time students regardless of where they chose to go to college in New York.** Recently the legislature expanded access to the Part-Time TAP program by eliminating the 24-credit prior year eligibility requirement, and instead made prorated awards available to students enrolled in six or more credits at a SUNY, CUNY or not-for-profit institution. Unfortunately, students attending proprietary colleges continue to be denied access to this program.

In the past, our member institutions would encourage full-time attendance; providing flexible class schedules and learning modalities that allow their students to reach graduation in a timely manner. However, the current reality is, many students find themselves needing to focus on family or work obligations and may only be able to attend college part-time or move from full-time to part-time depending on the semester. More importantly, it will allow our students to continue to work or care for family members while attending college without having to make the difficult decision to drop out or take on additional student debt. HESC estimates that expanding Part Time TAP to include students attending proprietary colleges would impact approximately 2,800 students and cost \$5.5 million.

**We ask the legislature to ensure that all students have equal access to the newly expanded part-time TAP program. Include A.5833 (Hyndman)/S.6466 (Fernandez) in the One House budgets and advocate for inclusion into the final budget.**

- **Let's build a TAP program that supports low-income independent students.** APC supports proposals that would increase the cap on earnings for single individuals with no dependents. A modest step forward would be increasing the earnings cap from \$10,000 to \$30,000 and for married applicants from \$40,000 to \$60,000 for tuition assistance program award eligibility. The current income thresholds are significantly outdated and easily surpassed even for those working at or below the poverty level. APC also fully supports eliminating the distinction between dependent and independent students for the purposes of determining TAP.

**We ask the legislature to increase the maximum income level for independent students. Support A.6713 (Fahy)/S.7682 (Stavisky) or A.2622 (Hyndman)/S.2578 (Gounardes) or eliminating the distinction completely A. 8432 (Fahy).**

In August 2023, colleges and universities were informed that an error had been made in calculating TAP awards for certain Independent students in the 2021, 2022 and 2023 academic years resulting in overpayments to these students. For students attending APC member institutions the total overpayment was approximately \$1.4 million. We appreciate that the staff at HESC have been transparent as they worked through determining the depth of the error. APC would support legislation that would hold Independent students and institutions harmless for this error for two reasons: 1) Independent students are the neediest, making less than \$10,000 a year, and 2) the miscalculation was made by the state, and now the state is seeking recoupment, from institutions for three prior academic years

**We ask the legislature to support A.8191 (Fahy)/S.7713 (Stavisky) that would hold students and institutions harmless for this error.**

- **Let's build a TAP program that supports low-income students with increased minimum and maximum awards.** In the past, the State demonstrated its support for low-income

students attending higher education programs when it increased the maximum TAP award from \$5,165 to \$5,665. Continued adjustments to the minimum and maximum TAP awards would make a tremendous difference to many lower income students and their families.

**We ask the legislature to support A.8089 (Clark) that would increase the minimum TAP award to \$1,000.**

- **Let's build a TAP program that supports more moderate to middle class families.** We recommend the State expand the maximum income threshold for TAP recipients to \$110,000. Also, establish a funding formula for future years whereby TAP would be increased annually to keep pace with inflation. This would open the door to a college degree for many students from moderate to middle class families. The maximum income threshold has not been adjusted in over 20 years when it was last raised in 2000 from \$50,500 to \$80,000. Both the cost of living and the cost of obtaining a college degree have increased significantly since 2000 and the maximum income threshold for TAP recipients should be adjusted accordingly.

**We ask the legislature to support A.1889 (Clark)/S.3474 (Stavisky) that would increase the income eligibility threshold from \$80,000 to \$110,000.**

- **Let's build a TAP program that reimagines support for graduate students.** The elimination of Graduate TAP in 2010 has had a significant impact on students. We urge the State to reconsider its elimination and provide support for critically needed STEM, education, and healthcare degrees. Over the past several years, APC member colleges have invested in Master's-level programs that are in demand by employers. Notable examples among APC member colleges include Monroe College's Master's in Public Health (M.P.H.) program and LIM College's Master's in Professional Studies (M.P.S.) in Fashion Merchandising and Retail Management, Fashion Marketing, and Business of Cannabis.

**We ask the legislature to support S. 8404 (Stavisky) or A.1094 (Epstein)/S.5447 (Jackson) that would expand TAP eligibility to graduate students.**

### **Other APC Legislative Priorities:**

#### **Support Funding for Other Programs That Impact Students:**

APC also advocates for other funding programs that positively impact our students. For instance, Five Towns College is proud to be the only institution on Long Island that offers a HEOP program. As well, Bryant & Stratton College recently completed its conversion to a non-profit institution allowing them access to Bundy Aid that they are using to help support their students. Finally, several APC member institutions are receiving funds to provide enhanced supports for students with disabilities.

We ask the legislature to consider the following:

- **Bundy Aid** is a critical source of student aid for students enrolled in independent, non-profit institutions and funds academic support programs like tutoring, summer bridge programs and support for students with disabilities. The Governor's budget proposes a reduction of \$13.6 million from the SFY 24 budget for this program and includes amendments that would limit eligibility to private colleges and universities with endowment assets of less than \$750 million. The proposal also includes language that would limit the aide appropriated in each year's

budget, with aid to each institution reduced proportionally as necessary to fit with the annual budget allocation.

**APC requests the Legislature to restore this cut and fully fund the Bundy Aid program.**

- **Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP)** is designed to provide access to higher education for historically underrepresented and economically disadvantaged students. HEOP students receive specialized academic support services, tuition assistance, supplemental financial assistance and full need packaging to ensure they can successfully complete the requirements for graduation. These programs have a proven track record of improving graduation rates, lifting families out of poverty and are well worth the investment of NYS tax dollars.

The Governor's budget includes \$46.9 million, a decrease of \$1.4 million from the SFY 24 Budget.

**APC requests the Legislature to restore this cut and fully fund the HEOP program.**

- **Enhance Supports for Students with Disabilities** - New York State Education Department's Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education for Students with Disabilities recommended – and the Board of Regents adopted – a plan to provide much-needed enhanced supports and services to over 90,000 identified students with disabilities attending New York State's degree-granting colleges and universities. APC member colleges have used the funding from this program to increase and expand faculty and staff training and mental health literacy and improve the processes for identifying students with disabilities and mental health issues.

**APC requests the Legislature fully fund the \$2 million request from NYSED for this program.**

## Conclusion

The goals of the Tuition Assistance Program continue to hold true today. We know that investments in higher education will yield a stronger workforce and economic growth. We know that students who are successful in higher education invest back into their communities. We also know that student demographics, institutions of higher education, the workforce, and the economy of today are very different than they were 50 years ago. We know that over 90% of students attending an APC member institution are from New York and stay in New York after graduation. It is time. Let us work together to Turn On The TAP in the coming year. Together we can build a program that supports our students and the economy for another 50 years.

We appreciate your consideration of our proposals and look forward to working with you.

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