**Testimony of
Arturo Soto
Secretary, CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities (CCSD) and President of the Queens
College Committee for Disabled Students (CDS).**

**2024 Higher Education Joint legislative budget hearing
LOB, Hearing Room B
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Chairs Stavisky, Fahy, Krueger, and Weinstein, distinguished members of the New York State legislature, my name is Arturo Soto and I serve as secretary of the CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities (CCSD), an advocacy group representing more than 10,000 self-identified students with disabilities at the City University of New York.

I also serve as president of the Queens College Committee for Disabled Students (CDS).

In the interest of time, I am only including some words about myself and my experiences in my written testimony....

I was born in a coastal town in Honduras and grew up in New York City. I am super proud of my Latin roots and frequently enjoy watching a good classic novela or singing my heart out to Spanish 80's music. I began losing my vision in 2020 due to a genetic condition and I am now a passionate advocate for the disabled community. I am in my third year of an undergraduate program at Queens College, where I am the President of the Committee for Disabled Students, where I work with fellow board members and the campus community to organize events, spread awareness, and foster an equitable and diverse campus environment.

I have traveled to Albany today to urge you to include the following items in the FY25 New York State higher education operating budget:

First and foremost, **CCSD supports CUNY's $7 million request for services for students with disabilities and ADA compliance**.

This funding is absolutely essential for our respective campuses to provide adequate basic disability accommodations for our students in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

CCSD supports the proactive approach that Chancellor Matos and our University leadership have taken in support of our students.

It is our University's goal, not only to remain ADA compliant, but to serve as a beacon for students with disabilities. Our University has a time-honored tradition in providing innovative programs for our diverse student population.

Many of you, like Senator Stavisky, have championed CUNY LEADS, our unique career and academic advisement program, and we are most grateful for that continued support.

However, we now ask you to support our University's request to address our most basic needs

Secondly, **CCSD urges the State legislature to restore the $2 million that you included in the FY24 State operating budget for the State Education Department's statewide program for enhancing postsecondary services for students with disabilities.**

In addition, **CCSD endorses the SED budget request to increase support for this program by $2 million in FY25.**

However, funding for the SED initiative should not be confused with our University's request for providing basic accommodations, as required by law.

Both requests are important, but they are very different.

Moreover, CUNY currently receives only a small percentage of the SED program's budget

CCSD also supports CUNY's request for a $4 million investment in mental health services.

There is a growing demand for mental health services at our campuses.

And finally, please consider including students with intellectual disabilities in any deliberations about TAP reform.

Students enrolled in Comprehensive Transition Postsecondary (CTP) programs are eligible to apply for Pell Grants and other Federal student financial aid programs, but they are not currently eligible for our State's Tuition Assistance Program (TAP).

There are currently only a few dozen CTP students in New York State who receive Pell Grants. Therefore, there are minimal fiscal implications associated with the legislation.

HESC should be able to absorb the cost within its existing TAP budget.

We urge you to pass A2341/S1880: allowing students enrolled in Federally recognized CTP programs to be eligible to apply for TAP.

Thank you.