



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Robert G. Ortt

Ortt Releases College Affordability Package

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| ISSUE: **HIGHER EDUCATION**



Higher Education Committee Member Senator Rob Ortt (R,C,I – North Tonawanda) today released a legislative package of bills to help make college more affordable and attainable for thousands of students and families and debt less burdensome. The bills deal with community college scholarships, establishing an apprenticeship program for career readiness, requiring public disclosure of financial statistics to current and potential college students, and reforming New York's Tuition Assistance Program.

Senator Ortt said, “The rising cost of college tuition over the years has burdened families and left students drowning in debt before they graduate and start a career in their chosen field. Currently, big government politicians continue to propose that taxpayers take on trillions of dollars in student debts, and New York City liberal special interests continue to push to have government foot the bill for illegal immigrants or prisoners to attend college. But, I'm working to enact legislation that's pragmatic and fair. The proposed legislation that's supported by my Senate Majority colleagues will help tens of thousands of individuals achieve the dream of attending college.”

The exponential increase in the cost of tuition and the amount of money students have to borrow go hand in hand. A 2015 report from the Project on Student Debt showed that the average debt of a Class of 2014 borrower graduating from a four-year college in New York State was \$27,822. That debt level increased from a decade ago when the average student loan debt was \$18,857 in 2004.

The average debt of 2014 graduates at Buffalo State SUNY was \$24,290. Student debt data for Niagara University, a private institution, showed an average debt of \$30,289 for 2014 graduates.

Legislation sponsored by Senator Ortt and supported by the Senate Majority to help reduce unsustainable student debt includes:

- **(S6838)** Launching the “Learning for Work Program” that establishes a Youth Apprenticeship Program for high school juniors or seniors. The apprenticeship program would combine academic work in the classroom with mentored on-the-job training to advance career readiness. This legislation would also offer an Enhanced Regents Professional Diploma in the specified occupation, and create a tax credit of \$1,500 for each apprentice the participating employer sponsors.

- **(S6839)** Increasing transparency to help students and families make informed decisions about college and borrowing. Higher education institutions would be required to collect data and provide more detailed information on student retention and graduation rates, average amounts of federal and private student loan debt after graduation, and average earnings and employment metrics broken down by program of study.
- **(S6841)** Awarding a Community College Merit and Mobility Scholarship to high school students across the state who graduate within the top 20 percent of their class. Eligible students must attend a New York State community college and would receive \$1,000 per year for up to two years. Up to 1,000 scholarships would be awarded to new students every year.

Also, legislation co-sponsored by Senator Ortt would:

- **(S2129)** Restore New York State's Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) for graduate students. In 2010, the state legislature eliminated TAP for all graduate degree programs. Many of today's jobs now require a Master's degree, but without the help of financial aid, the cost of graduate school is too expensive for many. Since the program's elimination, it's been increasingly difficult for students to further their education and obtain a graduate degree. This bill would provide students with access to tuition assistance and make them more competitive in today's job market.

In addition to this legislative package, the Senate Majority was able to recently secure more than \$1 billion for the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) as part of the enacted 2016-17 State Budget. The budget also freezes SUNY and CUNY tuition this year while boosting funding for SUNY and CUNY community colleges with an additional \$20 million.

RELATED LEGISLATION

2015-S6838

- Introduced

- - In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate

- - On Floor Calendar Assembly
 - On Floor Calendar Senate

- - Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate

- Delivered to Governor

- Signed By Governor

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Enacts the "Learning for Work" act; appropriation

February 26, 2016

In Senate Committee **Finance**

Sponsored by **Robert G. Ort**

Do you support this bill?