



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrew Gounardes

## Assemblymember Epstein, Senator Gounardes, State Elected Officials, and College Students with Disabilities Rally in Albany for Increased State Funds

ANDREW GOUNARDES February 6, 2020

| ISSUE: **DISABILITY ADVOCACY, EDUCATION, NYC DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

Over 150 students with disabilities who attend State University, City University, and private colleges and universities from every corner of the state rallied at the state Capitol on Wednesday to urge increased state funding for higher education disability services. More than 80 lawmakers, led by Assemblymember Harvey Epstein and Senator Andrew Gounardes also introduced a resolution memorializing February 5th, 2020 as Students with Disabilities Advocacy Day in the State of New York.

State Education Department (SED) has included a \$15 million proposal as part of its 2020-21 State budget request to supplement existing federal, state, and local funding in support of students with disabilities in postsecondary education. According to SED, more than 75,000 students with disabilities currently attend New York State degree-granting colleges and universities. The students came to Albany to urge the state to fulfill the SED's budget request to adequately fund education, services and programs for higher education students with disabilities.

These students gathered at the Capitol's Great Western Staircase ("Million Dollar Staircase") with some of their leading champions in the state legislature, organized by State Assembly

Member Harvey Epstein and State Senator Andrew Gounardes.

“I thank all my colleagues for the strong level of bipartisan support for this initiative. We are in the 30th year of the ADA, intended to level the playing field for people with disabilities. Yet funding for higher education students with disabilities has remained stagnant since FY 1993-1994 despite the fact that their enrollment has increased over 50%,” said Assembly Member Harvey Epstein. A good education is key to employment and among people with disabilities the employment rate has hovered approximately at a dismal 30%. At a time of purported ‘full’ employment, why are we leaving students with disabilities behind?”

Assembly Member Epstein serves as a member of the Assembly Committee on Higher Education, and the Assembly's Task Force on People with Disabilities.

“Every student has a right to access higher education to thrive and succeed. In order to guarantee that right, we must fully fund services for students with disabilities. We must listen to the lived experiences of these student leaders with disabilities here today and telling us loud and clear that fair funding is crucial for their success in their schooling, careers and beyond,” said Gounardes.

Senator Gounardes is a member of the Senate Committee on Higher Education.

“It is my honor to co-sponsor Students with Disabilities Advocacy Day 2020, which will take place on February 5, 2020,” said State Senator Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr. “Students with disabilities are bright and talented as demonstrated by their determination to overcome hurdles that face them, and this day is designated to celebrate those students and their accomplishments. While we celebrate these students, this day is also meant to draw attention to the many services that students with disabilities still need.”

"Every student in New York has a right to pursue their full academic potential, regardless of their unique style of learning. We must ensure that students with disabilities have access to the support and tailored services they need to meaningfully engage in their education and reach scholastic success. I am proud to co-sponsor Students with Disabilities Advocacy Day with Senator Andrew Gounardes, and will continue to fight for equal opportunity for all students across New York State," said State Senator Alessandra Biaggi.

"New York's public and private universities benefit tremendously from the contributions of the 73,000 students with disabilities that are part of their student bodies. Individually and collectively, these students' talents and academic achievements enrich the college environment and further widen the opportunities for others facing the same challenges," said State Senator George Borrello. "Today is about recognizing their ever-growing participation in our higher education community and affirming the importance of supporting their quest for academic success, independence and equality."

"I am so pleased to serve as a co-sponsor of Students with Disabilities Advocacy Day as we celebrate our youth. We must focus on providing whatever services are needed to ensure all students in New York can realize their full potential," said State Senator Phil Boyle.

"Providing for the individualized needs of all students in New York is crucial as we look to improve upon our existing educational practices. We need to ensure that there are resources in place for students with disabilities to understand and overcome the challenges they face. I welcome the New York State Students with Disabilities Advocacy Day and will continue to fight for comprehensive support and equality in education in the days still to come," said State Senator John E. Brooks.

"We must increase accessibility and resources for all students of all abilities. I am proud to co-sponsor Students With Disabilities Advocacy Day to recommit to fighting for equal

opportunity, schooling, and critical services for all our students,” said Senator David Carlucci, Chairman of the New York State Senate Committee on Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities.

"I am proud to co-sponsor Students with Disabilities Advocacy Day. It is imperative that we ensure students with disabilities have the same basic services as everyone else, particularly in educational institutions. Today's event is important in highlighting how much more we in the Legislature have to do to ensure equal access for all students and I thank Senator Gounardes for organizing it,” said State Senator Jim Gaughran.

“There are more than 1 million students going to college or university in New York – they deserve the chance to grow, learn and thrive. Students with disabilities must have the resources they need to succeed in the classroom, and that means providing basic support services at higher education institutions. I’m thrilled to welcome so many students with disabilities to the Capitol today and am proud to co-sponsor Students with Disabilities Advocacy Day with my colleague Senator Gounardes,” said State Senator Brad Hoylman.

"I'm proud to co-sponsor this advocacy day for students with disabilities and thank Sen. Gounardes for his efforts organizing us. The barriers that students with disabilities face in getting the services they need and deserve are too high, especially for working-class and black and brown students and those who attend our under-resourced city and state colleges. Advocacy days like today are crucial to applying pressure on legislators to do the right thing. We have to come together to fund public higher education and ensure our colleges and universities have the resources to meet the needs not just of neurotypical or able-bodied students, but of ALL students who come through their doors,” said State Senator Robert Jackson.

"I'm proud to co-sponsor 'Students with Disabilities Advocacy Day 2020' to recognize students with disabilities as they work toward achieving academic success, independence, and equality. New York State needs to do even more to support and celebrate these bright, shining lights who inspire us all," said State Senator Daphne Jordan.

"I am proud to support and co-sponsor Students with Disabilities Advocacy Day 2020. As an educator, I have witnessed the success of an individual when appropriate resources are provided. Every student has the right to an equitable and just education," said State Senator Monica Martinez.

"I am pleased to co-sponsor the Students with Disabilities Advocacy Day to recognize the thousands of students with disabilities who attend colleges and universities throughout New York State. As the current Chair of the Senate Education Committee and former Chair of the Assembly Education Subcommittee on Students with Special Needs, I have always been committed to ensuring that all students receive the resources and support they need to thrive. This is an important day to recognize students with disabilities and re-commit ourselves to investing in the services students with disabilities need to succeed," said State Senator Shelley B. Mayer.

"I am proud to stand with Senator Gounardes and my colleagues in co-sponsoring Students with Disabilities Advocacy Day. Every student deserves equal access to educational opportunities and the chance to realize her, his, or their full potential. We are fortunate in my district to have a program like SUNY Orange BRIDGES, which provides a post-secondary education to students with developmental and intellectual disabilities that is customized to each student's needs and interests. I had the opportunity to visit a class and see first-hand the valuable skills the students were learning to further their own independence and autonomy. Access to educational opportunities like this can be life-transforming, and I will continue to advocate strongly for State support of programs like these," said State Senator

Jen Metzger.

"I am proud to join Senator Gounardes and my colleagues in honor of Students with Disabilities Advocacy Day. It is important that we work together to create legislation and provide funding to improve the quality of life for students with disabilities, their parents, and caretakers. Our goal is to empower students while creating opportunities that will propel in their academic and personal life," said State Senator Kevin Parker.

"I am proud to be a co-sponsor and supporter of Students with Disabilities Advocacy Day, a time when we should remind ourselves and others that these are bright and vibrant individuals who deserve the tools and resources to excel and be their best. Unfortunately, for students with disabilities the path to higher education is difficult and they face many barriers. We need to take steps to remove those barriers. Having a disability should not stand in the way of a productive future," said State Senator James Sanders Jr.

"Today, on Student with Disabilities Advocacy Day, we celebrate and encourage our students as they work to achieve their goals in future careers, academia, and life. We must continue to support services that reflect on accessibility, independence, and equality amongst disabled students and society at large, for they are too often isolated and forgotten. We, as legislators, must work to ensure that all students have the opportunity to reach their full potential in an inclusive world and have the tools necessary to thrive and feel empowered," said State Senator Luis R. Sepulveda.

"Over 73,000 students with disabilities in New York are pursuing degrees at our colleges. I am so proud of my constituent and friend, Vice Chancellor Christopher Rosa, who has been a lifetime advocate for students with disabilities and CUNY has made significant gains in the services they provide students who need extra assistance. Today's resolution reminds us of the role the State has to ensure a quality education for all students," said State Senator Toby

Stavisky, Chairwoman of the Higher Education Committee.

"All students deserve the opportunity to pursue an education that enriches their lives and helps them achieve their full potential. My New York State Senate colleagues and I are committed to ensuring that students living with disabilities are supported in their education and have the opportunity to access and succeed in college," said State Senator Kevin Thomas.

"A lack of accessible resources should never prevent New Yorkers with disabilities from achieving their higher education goals," said Assemblymember Phil Steck, Chair of the Assembly Task Force on People with Disabilities "Each and every student deserves the opportunity to learn in an educationally stimulating environment with the tools and support they require to earn their degree. I will work to ensure our state budget properly funds higher education disability services so that no student ever feels shut out of the classroom."

"As a former teacher of deaf and deaf-blind students, a former university disability services provider, and disability civil rights attorney, I have seen firsthand the benefits of quality, accessible education for all. It is imperative that we make New York's institutions of higher learning accessible for all students. Increased funding for education, services and programs for higher education students with disabilities is critical. I support Senator Gounardes and Assemblymember Epstein and our colleagues in memorializing Students with Disabilities Advocacy Day," said Assemblywoman Jo Anne Simon

"The state has a responsibility to support all students equally. Access to higher education should exist for all. State funding needs to be increased for higher education disability services. We must stand firm and remove barriers to educational pursuits for all New Yorkers," said Assistant Speaker Félix W. Ortiz

“Our students are the emerging leaders in our communities and across New York. It is unthinkable to believe that we are forced to continue to fight for the resources and support students with disabilities need to successfully enter into the workforce. As leaders, we must continue to fight for our most vulnerable! I will continue to be a voice for the needs in our communities and proudly stand here today,” said Assembly Member Catalina Cruz

“As state lawmakers it is incumbent on us to ensure that higher education is accessible for students with disabilities,” said Assemblymember Dan Quart. “Securing adequate funding in the state budget for higher education disability services will allow the State Education Department to expand the tools available to both students and teachers, bringing us closer to realizing that goal.”

“All students, including students with disabilities, in our higher education system deserve a fair chance to succeed. As former Chair of the Assembly Task Force on People with Disabilities and longtime advocate of education equity for students with disabilities, I am glad to join Assemblymember Epstein, Senator Gounardes, and my colleagues in the legislature to call for increased state funding for students with disabilities and look forward to seeing additional funding in this year’s budget,” said Assemblyman David I. Weprin.

“I am very proud to sponsor and pass a resolution honoring the tremendous achievements of New York’s students with disabilities. Those in our state living with a disability have boundless potential and our students deserve the same access to education and opportunities as all other students. We need to raise awareness for their needs and create an inclusive and helpful environment to see that all students reach their full potential,” said Assistant Minority Whip Karl Brabenec.

"I strongly support this call for increased funding towards education, services, and programs for higher education students with disabilities. No one should be obstructed from higher



education because of their disabilities, and this increased funding will serve as an integral milestone in our fight towards accessible education for all. Tens of thousands of students throughout New York will benefit from these services, and I stand by the State Education Department in their request for an additional \$15 million in funding," said Assembly Member Daniel Rosenthal.

"As a result of institutional barriers and lack of accommodation, many students with disabilities are often required to smash through substantial obstacles to succeed in school. We in the Legislature have a legal duty and moral responsibility to remove the obstacles that stand in the way of student success. Securing this funding will help students with disabilities meet and exceed their potential in New York State higher education. I look forward to working with my colleagues to secure this vital increase," said Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal.

"I am a proud supporter of this budget proposal, and the resolution memorializing Students with Disabilities Advocacy Day in the State of New York as well. I will work diligently towards an increase in state funding for higher education disability services," said Assemblymember Joseph R. Lentol.

"All people have the right to freely participate in our society regardless of disability, whether it is using mass transit to get to work or going to college or anything else. We should not nickel and dime this basic human right, guaranteed by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and it is imperative that we fully fund the \$15 million proposal from the State Education Department," said Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz.

"I am proud to stand together with these students to advocate for greater inclusion and accessibility in our colleges. As a society, it is our utmost duty to ensure students with disabilities experience a life they deserve and learn on an equal footing with their peers. I

will continue to fight with you until this necessary funding is secured so that young people with disabilities get the support they need to thrive in their educational endeavors," said Assemblywoman Aravella Simotas.

"I am proud to join with these advocates as they fight for what is right. As I have said so many times; No matter who you are, where you come from, what you look like, what your abilities, who you love or how you identify, we all have dignity and deserve full equality, justice and the opportunity to succeed," said Assemblymember Harry Bronson. "A simple proposition perhaps, yet one that is consistent with the greatest movements in our country's history including the fight for equality for people with disabilities."

"Advocacy is about listening and understanding," said Assemblymember Mathylde Frontus. "The more we listen to students with disabilities, the more we can help overcome barriers to education."

"Over 75,000 students with disabilities are pursuing higher education in New York State. Institutions of higher education should be accessible of opportunity and experiences in the classroom to learners of all backgrounds. I commend my colleague Harvey Epstein, Senator Gounardes and advocates for amplifying the voices of those students with a call for \$15 million and a legislative resolution making February 5, 2020 Students with Disabilities Advocacy Day in the State of New York. Together, we are taking steps to ensure that higher education is accessible to the greatest extent possible by all students with disabilities," said Assembly Member Rebecca A. Seawright.

"Tens of thousands of New Yorkers with disabilities pursuing a higher education deserve full access to the services and opportunities they need, and support to ensure that they're able to realize their full potential in all their academic and professional pursuits," said Assembly Health Committee Chair Richard N. Gottfried.

"Increased state funding for students with disabilities in higher education is a no brainer. Education equity across the state should be applied in all realms of society. These students need adequate tools and resources to succeed in their educational goals and propelling this vision is a must for this vulnerable community that needs our ultimate support and assistance." said Assemblywoman Carmen De La Rosa. "I look forward to continue working with my colleagues in the legislature and with advocates to ensure this proposal is satisfied seamlessly."

"I am proud to be a co-sponsor of the 2020 Students with Disabilities Advocacy Day here in Albany," said Assemblywoman Mary Beth Walsh (R,C,I-Ballston). "As legislators it is incredibly important to work together to shed light on the various issues that impact residents statewide. Together we can ensure that individuals living with disabilities are supported and that the resources they need are available to them at all stages of life."

"I completely agree that we need more funding to supplement the existing federal state and local funding to provide for those more than 75,000 students with disabilities attending college," said Assemblyman David McDonough

"Every child, adolescent and young adult should be afforded equitable academic services and program opportunities to build toward their future success," said Assemblyman Charles D. Fall. "I am proud to stand with my fellow colleagues to assure every individual, of all abilities, is properly supported with the resources needed to pursue their dreams. Our City and State Universities must be institutions of inclusive learning so all students may feel a sense of purpose."

"I was deeply proud to sign onto the resolution; joining together we can uplift and help every New Yorker to reach their full potential. I commend the author and every sponsor of this legislation. It's imperative that we increase assistance to programs like higher education

disability services so that everyone has a fair shot at actualizing themselves. It's through our spirit of camaraderie and bipartisanship that we can truly move New York forward for all," said Assemblyman Chris Tague.

"Academic success in higher education must be accessible to everyone. I was proud to co-sponsor today's resolution, and I am grateful to stand in solidarity with Students with Disabilities fighting for their fair share," said Assembly Member Pat Burke.

The New York State Coalition for Higher Education and Disability (NYSCHED), a statewide coalition formed in 2018 comprised of students, service providers, and a number of advocacy organizations in support of college and university students with disabilities, supports the State Education Department's budget proposal.

"At CUNY, the disability services budget line has remained at the same level for more than a quarter of a century... despite the fact that [our University] is providing services for about 50 percent more students than we were in 1993," according to Leonard Blades, chair of the CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities (CCSD), one of the founding groups of the new statewide coalition. He also serves as vice chair for students with disabilities for the University Student Senate, CUNY's student governance organization. He is an alumnus of Brooklyn College.

According Melanie Hecker, a graduate student at the University of Albany, "SUNY is home to 43 percent of all self-identified college students with disabilities in New York State. The State Education Department's initiative would supplement and advance efforts to attract and support prospective and enrolled college students with disabilities." Hecker is an alumna of the University at Albany and Hudson Valley Community College.

The measure also has the support of the New York State Disability Services Council (NYDSC), an independent organization of professionals who have responsibility for the provision of disability services to students in New York State in degree-granting institutions of higher education.

According to Catherine Carlson, President of the New York State Disability Services Council, there are over 75,000 students with disabilities enrolled on college campuses in New York State. In furtherance of supporting State and Federal expenditures for tuition for these students, New York State needs to make a commitment toward enhancing supports and services so that the tuition expenditure leads to the completion of degrees for these students. There has not been an increase in support services for students with disabilities in more than 25 years, and that is far too long to ignore the needs of this population of students.

###