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2026 Higher Education Joint Budget Hearing

Tuesday, February 24, 2026

Chair Stavisky, Chair Hyndman, Chair Krueger, Chair Pretlow, and distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly Higher Education and Finance Committees:

My name is George Cushman, Trustee at Finger Lakes Community College and chair of NYCCT, representing the trustees of the thirty SUNY and seven CUNY community colleges. We stand at a critical juncture where increased investment will determine whether we can meet the rapidly evolving educational and workforce needs of our state.

We are deeply appreciative of Governor Hochul's Reconnect initiative, which has created access for working-poor adults to pursue critical careers. Reconnect has accelerated positive enrollment trends. Programs like EOP and ASAP are making measurable differences in retention and completion.

We are aligned with CUNY and SUNY in support of the Governor's budget, including the operating expense "floor."

However, we respectfully urge three critical investments:

FIRST - Continue the \$8 Million in Targeted Operating Funds: This investment has been effective and essential. We are thankful for your leadership.

SECOND - Increase Unrestricted Operating Funds via the Funding Stability Act:

- State funding has been flat while expenses continue escalating
- New York Community College students pay 40-50% of costs through tuition
- The national average is only 20% - we're more than double
- The Community College Funding Stability Act (S7122/A8504) will help offset increasing salaries and benefits and limit tuition increases

THIRD - Support High-Cost Nursing Programs:

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- Students are shifting to high-need, high-cost majors like nursing and advanced manufacturing
- These programs create significant losses due to higher faculty ratios and specialized equipment
- Onondaga Community College's nursing program alone faces a loss of almost one million dollars annually
- The Nursing Education Support Act (A7966/S7652) will expand capacity, improve quality, and ensure a robust pipeline of skilled nurses

Peter Drucker wrote that community colleges were designed "to educate technologists who have both theoretical knowledge and manual skill"—the foundation of America's productivity advantage and our ability to create new industries "almost overnight."

With your partnership, we can ensure sustainability for our community colleges and position New York to thrive in the 21st century.

George W. Cushman
Chairman