



University Student Senate
555 West 57th Street, 1420
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Tel: (646) 664-8844
Website: www.usscuny.org

**New York State Legislative Joint Assembly & Senate Legislative Public Hearing:
Higher Education: 2021 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
Testimony of Juvanie Piquant
Student, New York City College of Technology, City University of New York (CUNY)
Chairperson, CUNY University Student Senate (USS)
FEBRUARY 4th 2021**

Good afternoon members of the New York State Legislature,

My name is Juvanie Piquant, I'm a junior at New York City College of Technology at the City University of New York, majoring in Law and Paralegal Studies. I serve as Chairperson for the City University of New York University Student Senate also known as CUNY USS. USS is the university-wide elected student governance and advocacy organization representing the interests of over 500,000 students that attend CUNY each academic year. I also have the distinct honor to serve as the only student member of the CUNY Board of Trustees. I'm also a proud constituent of Assembly District 59 represented by Assemblymember Jaime Williams and Senate District 19 represented by Senator Roxanne Persaud.

Before the start of the pandemic, poverty was already a real significant barrier experienced by CUNY students on a daily basis. Sixty percent of the CUNY student population reported an annual household income of under \$30,000, while forty percent reported a household income of less than \$20,000 per year. According to a 2018 survey, 1 in 5 students on campus reported experiencing food insecurity on a regular basis. In December of last year, the United States Congress successfully passed legislation allowing for temporary adjustments to SNAP eligibility requirements for college students. As a result of the COVID-19 Relief Package, college students enrolled half-time who otherwise meet income and eligibility requirements, can qualify for SNAP. This includes many college students who are currently struggling and work less than 20 hours a week due to part time employment or reduced hours as a result of the pandemic. With fewer jobs, reduced income and rising costs, now is the time to invest and not disinvest in our public higher education system.

I was greatly surprised that the Executive Budget proposes 5 years of \$200 tuition hikes for CUNY and SUNY students, under the extension of The Predictable Funding Plan for CUNY and SUNY through AY 2025. This runs contrary to the state's mission of preserving New Yorker's access to affordable college education in the face of economic challenges, by again asking the university to either fork over money it doesn't have or supplement the costs of an affordable



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education on the backs of everyday hardworking students through tuition hikes or cuts to vital funding and services. At a time when everyday college students are struggling to make ends meet in balancing both making a living and pursuing their education, now is not the time to disinvest, but to invest in our public higher education system.

We need to make sure that the state's commitment to protecting CUNY's and SUNY's core academic mission during tough fiscal times is real, and not just a fluke. Under the Executive Budget, operating support for CUNY senior colleges is being reduced by 5%, translating into a \$26 million cut for CUNY institutions. In the past, operating costs have played a large role in fueling tuition hikes. This has created a worrying trend where we are seeing a growing affordability gap quantified in tuition costs between community and senior colleges, where students have begun to prioritize the cost of receiving an education over the type of degree they're receiving in choosing two-year institutions over four year ones. While we are grateful for the 5% in state operating support that was withheld by the state for FY 2021, being finally released to campuses, we need the state to do more to support public colleges and increase revenue, while seeking to expand the state's financial aid programs as well.

While the Executive Budget doesn't include cuts to opportunity programs, it doesn't provide additional support for HESC administered financial aid programs including TAP and Excelsior at a time when students are under intense economic distress. Despite highlighting the university's response during the pandemic to successfully transition to online learning and expand purchases of IT equipment to help students with online distance learning, the Executive Budget makes little mention of the overwhelming multitude of financial pressures and issues facing both the university and everyday college students. Students and their families desperately need relief, and not tomorrow, but now. Desperate times call for strong measures and I'm calling on the state to increase funding through the Tuition Assistance Program and the state's opportunity programs. Now is the time to make a REAL investment in CUNY.

Thank you for your time and consideration.