

Testimony re: 2021-2022 Executive Budget Proposal—Higher Education

Submitted to
Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means Committee

Submitted by
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Thank you, Chairwoman Krueger, Chairwoman Weinstein, and all other committee members, for allowing me to present this testimony on behalf of the Hispanic Federation; a non-profit organization seeking to empower and advance the Hispanic community, support Hispanic families, and strengthen Latino institutions through direct service programs and legislative advocacy.

COVID-19 & Latinx College Enrollment Crisis

New York State's college students have been deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. While college enrollment has been on the decline for years, Latinx students have been enrolling at exponential rates. Now, the coronavirus pandemic is forcing many of them to decide between staying in school and working to help their families survive the economic fallout from COVID-19.

According to the National Student Clearinghouse, college enrollment in New York State declined by 3.4% in the Fall of 2020 compared to the previous year¹. Since the coronavirus pandemic began, Latinx communities have been hit disproportionately hard. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that Hispanics are more likely to be hospitalized for COVID-19 and are dying at disproportionate rates. Many students have had to put their education on the back burner as they worry about their jobs, finances, housing, and families.

Hispanic Federation is pleased that the Executive Budget maintains its support for over \$1 billion in Higher Education Services Corporation financial aid programs and is calling on the legislature to ensure that this number remains whole as the budget is finalized. Nevertheless, to heighten the number of enrolled Latinx college students, Hispanic Federation strongly urges the legislature to include and prioritize the following budget and legislative recommendations in their one house budgets, as they directly benefit and remedy the issues many Latinx young adults face when trying to achieve their post-secondary dreams.

Senator José Peralta New York State DREAM Act**Continued Funding for the Senator José Peralta Dream Act—\$27 million**

Hispanic Federation asks the legislature to again allocate \$27 million for the Senator José Peralta NYS DREAM Act, to ensure undocumented students continue to have access to higher education. As the

¹ [COVID-19: Stay Informed - National Student Clearinghouse Research Center \(nscrclearinghouse.org\)](https://www.nscrclearinghouse.org/research-center)

community is growing to trust this opportunity, more and more people will utilize this new path to receiving financial aid. The state must continue to fund its state financial aid programs to compensate for the continuous increase of eligible applicants.

Marketing, Community Outreach, and to Create Educational Materials for HESC—\$1 million

Unfortunately, undocumented and mixed status families remain hesitant to apply for the NYS DREAM Act due to fear of deportation and are unclear of how to navigate the application process. Further, even school counselors and professionals have questions about NYS DREAM Act eligibility and the application process, and are unable to best help their students, even more so due to remote learning. It is crucial that the Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC) receives funding to provide public education and training about the program.

HESC must spearhead community outreach in partnership with community-based organizations that work directly with the community; create training materials and host workshops for counselors and professionals; and launch a statewide marketing campaign to dispel misinformation and inform New Yorkers of this opportunity that has the ability to change the trajectory of their careers and financial stability. We strongly believe that HESC requires a minimum of \$1 million to ensure that this program is successfully executed.

Support for SUNY and CUNY to Increase Outreach and Recruitment Efforts—\$500,000

Moreover, HESC alone cannot provide enough outreach to communities and high schools on the NYS DREAM Act. SUNY and CUNY must participate and increase marketing and recruitment efforts to assist students in understanding the NYS DREAM Act application and eligibility criteria. This requires additional funding that can be directly put into action plans so that higher education institutions can increase visibility and assistance to students applying to the NYS DREAM Act.

In fact, SUNY has provided similar support when the Excelsior Scholarship came into effect. SUNY made clear efforts in marketing and recruitment “to assist new students in understanding the Excelsior Scholarship application process and eligibility criteria,” and explored “the use of Smart Track’s targeted email communications to assist Excelsior Scholarship recipients in understanding the academic requirements to maintain their scholarship eligibility while they pursue their education at a SUNY campus.”² Further, SUNY “distributed information about the Excelsior Scholarship to more than 8,000 high school students at SUNY College Fairs” during the 2018 fall term.³

We insist that both institutions provide intentional outreach to direct high schools and current college students to guarantee that students are equipped with the right understanding to apply for the NYS DREAM Act. The sustainability and success of the NYS DREAM Act is highly dependable on the number of students that apply for it. Our communities are eager to apply for its resources, but if the support mechanisms that ensure transparency and safety are not there, our students are less likely to take advantage of a program that can significantly improve their odds at completing a college degree. We must provide a robust set of tools that can encourage and increase the number of students applying for state financial aid.

² <https://www.suny.edu/govtrelations/state/testimony/2017-excelsior-testimony/>

³ Ibid.



CUNY Accelerated Studies in Associate Programs (ASAP)

Restore CUNY ASAP Funding - \$2.5 million

The CUNY ASAP program is a national model due to its effectiveness in supporting students through graduation and its high student graduation rate. With the COVID-19 crisis, many Latino students have been forced to drop out. Latino students make up 44% of CUNY ASAP, and 85% of all ASAP students are PELL or TAP recipients,⁴ which underscores the strong support that the program brings to underserved students.

The ASAP graduation rate is more than three times the national three-year graduation rate of 16% for urban community colleges.⁵ ASAP's current cross-cohort three-year graduation rate is 53% vs. 24% for comparison group students.⁶ Since 2009, ASAP has admitted students with some developmental needs who also graduate at significantly higher rates than non-ASAP comparison group students. After three years, 48% of ASAP students with developmental needs graduated vs. 21% of comparison group students with developmental needs.⁷ ASAP's effectiveness is evident as this empirical data shows, and it is the reason the ASAP program has been replicated across the country.

We urge the legislature to restore this funding to continue this impactful program that helps to eliminate systemic barriers faced by low-income minority students. ASAP offers a proven strategy to increase graduation rates among educationally and economically disadvantaged populations.

CUNY Citizenship Now! Program

Restore Funding to the Citizenship Now! Program - \$20,000

CUNY Citizenship Now! offers free, high quality, and confidential immigration law services to help individuals and families on their path to U.S. citizenship. Attorneys and paralegals at Citizenship Now! centers offer free immigration services to all members of the community (both CUNY students and non-students) helping to assess applicants' eligibility for legal benefits and to help them apply for citizenship. They provide updated trainings on immigration law and citizenship exam preparation tools. Founded in 1997, Citizenship Now! has assisted more than 300,000 New Yorkers on the path to U.S. citizenship. The legislature must restore this funding so Latinx and other individuals in New York City can continue to receive support with the complex process of obtaining citizenship.

SUNY Hispanic Leadership Institute

Restore Funding to the SUNY Hispanic Leadership Institute—\$150,000

Institutions must develop resources to ensure diverse representation in their faculty and staff. The Hispanic Leadership Institute is an important program that helps to ensure that SUNY's leadership is

⁴ [CUNY-ASAP-Program-Overview-January-2021.pdf](#)

⁵ [About CUNY ASAP](#)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

reflective of the Latino students enrolled at SUNY (14% of students). It is crucial that leaders at the highest levels share common experiences and culture with those who comprise the fastest growing segment of its student population: students who will become our next generation of Hispanic leaders.

The SUNY Hispanic Leadership Institute identifies, develops, recruits, and ultimately supports the success of Hispanic leaders at the University President and President's Cabinet level. Enhancing the proportion of Hispanic leaders at SUNY will require more than just a willingness to engage Hispanic/Latinx candidates. It will take ongoing investment to demonstrate SUNY's dedication to the success of emerging and current Hispanic leaders who oversee and work on behalf of the over 55,000 enrolled Latino students. We strongly support the Hispanic Leadership Institute and urge \$150,000 in funding be restored to SUNY for this purpose.

SUNY and CUNY Tuition

Stop Tuition Increases at SUNY and CUNY Campuses

Hispanic Federation strongly opposes the increase of tuition at SUNY and CUNY. Authorizing the advancement of a \$200 tuition increase and allowing SUNY and CUNY to raise tuition will be detrimental for students, especially students from undeserved backgrounds who are already struggling to continue their higher education studies. We ask that the state rectifies this approval and moves toward more funding support for tuition affordability.

Federal Funding Allocations

Allocate Federal Funding Equitably across Higher Institutions— \$692 million for CUNY and \$818 million for SUNY

State funding allocations must ensure that higher education institutions distribute these funds to students with the greatest needs, including those from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, students from mixed-status households, and students who experience homelessness. Programs that support students' mental health, increase access to quality technology supports, provide tutoring and academic supports, and address direct food, housing, and employment insecurities must be prioritized to receive funding.

I thank you for your time and reemphasize how critical it is to focus on these priorities for the benefit of many students, communities and in turn the entire state.