



**NYS Higher Education and Civil Service and Pensions**

**Committee Hearing**

**Testimony of Trustee and President Austin Ostro**

**State University of New York Student Assembly (SUNY SA)**

**February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020**

NYS Higher Education and Civil Service and Pensions Committee Hearing  
Testimony of Trustee and President Austin Ostro  
State University of New York Student Assembly (SUNY SA)

February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020

On behalf of the SUNY Student Assembly, and the 1.4 Million students of our great University system, we very much appreciate the tireless efforts of Committee Chair Gounardes, legislative colleagues, and staff for hosting a hearing to explore the idea of establishing a “civil service pipeline” statewide in which graduating students are trained for and recruited directly into public sector jobs.

The Student Assembly is the recognized system-wide student government supporting the students of SUNY. We are comprised of Student Leaders from across the state and represent the students of the many University centers, colleges, technology colleges, and community colleges. In addition, we are also involved in advocacy on the local, state, and federal level. The President of the Student Assembly serves as the head of the organized student government for all 64 campuses in the system and holds the position as the only student member of the SUNY board of trustees. Twice annually the Student Assembly brings together hundreds of student leaders from across the state and beyond to participate in student leadership conferences, where the organization’s advocacy priorities are finalized, and members are offered the opportunity to network and learn leadership skills from students, campus and system administration, and world class faculty through various workshops and lectures.

Additionally, Student Assembly representatives meet on a monthly basis to coordinate advocacy efforts and further refine strategies towards the advancement of quality and affordability in public higher education. We operate a variety of committees focused on promoting academic excellence throughout the system and highlight areas of campus safety, disability services, gender equity, and sustainability.

The benefits to a career in civil service at the state level are far and wide. Not only does it provide a meaningful and purposeful vocation, but it offers practical benefits that many students seek when entering the workforce. Civil service careers provides prospective job growth, security, and competitive salary and benefits. Civil service is not just an occupation but a vocation in which all students should view as a viable career path.

Students across all of SUNY’s 64 campuses aspire to live the State University motto: “To Learn, To Search, To Serve,” and view civil service as a pathway to achieve this goal. However, educational debt and the rising cost of public higher education often dissuades students who are passionate about civil service, to seek a job in the private sector. <sup>1</sup>According to a study by Duke University, a survey of 1,622 graduate school alumni found that 66% did not consider a civil service job because of debt incurred from their academic career. Fostering programs that

---

<sup>1</sup> Erica Field , “Educational Debt Burden and Career Choice: Evidence from a Financial Aid Experiment at NYU Law School,” American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, 2009, <http://www.aeaweb.org/articles.php>

promote loan forgiveness, contingent upon civil service to the state, would allow SUNY students the opportunity to pursue meaningful work without the burden of loan payments. For example, the New York State Get on your Feet Loan Forgiveness Program<sup>2</sup> provides 24 months of federal student loan relief, in return the participants serves in a civil or public interest organization. This program does just that; jumpstarts a career in public service without staggering loan payments.

Similar financial programs such as the NYS Public Service Loan Forgiveness<sup>3</sup> (PSLF) Program offers loan forgiveness, but only after the borrower has made 120 months' worth of qualifying payments prior to the PSLF application. This requirement makes it difficult for a recent graduate to enter a civil service job straight out of an undergraduate or graduate school program. Lowering the threshold for qualifying candidates is critical to opening a higher applicant pool.

Initiatives for current students such as the New York State internship program, Empire State Fellowship program, and New York State Senate and Assembly Page Program should continue to be supported. However, new opportunities can be created that offer currently enrolled students part time employment with the state in the anticipation it will be streamlined into a full time job after the completion of an academic program.

Establishing a pipelines for students committed to civil and public service both during and after their academic career ensures the State and University's commitment to excellence and will uphold the state promise of success in New York.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://ag.ny.gov/loan-forgiveness-options>

<sup>3</sup> <https://studentaid.gov/manage-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/public-service>

