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Testimony

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Creating Pathways to Public Service in New York State
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New York State Senate Committees on Civil Service and Pensions and Higher Education

250 Broadway
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Good afternoon. Thank you, Chairman Gounardes, for hosting this hearing on New York's pipeline to public service and for your dedication to moving this important conversation forward.

I am Mary Beth Labate, and it is a privilege to join you today as president of the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities (CICU), representing more than 100 private, not-for-profit colleges and universities and nearly 500,000 students across New York State

New York's Independent higher education sector plays an important role in the public service career pipeline. Many of you, who are graduates of Independent Sector colleges, know this better than anyone. In fact, half of the distinguished members of the state Legislature are proud graduates of a private college in New York or across the country

Preparing Students for Public Service

Many times, when we talk about careers in public service, we think about careers in government – either as an elected official or working for a state or local agency. However, public service can also mean careers in nursing and teaching, among others. Private, not-for-profit colleges in New York are responsible for educating many of the men and women who enter into public service, conferring 55 percent of degrees in political science and government, 65 percent of degrees in nursing, 58 percent of degrees in public administration and 59 percent of degrees in education. There are 15 law schools in New York and 13 of them are not-for-profits.

How New York Can Build a Stronger Pipeline to Public Service

Students who have a natural bent toward public service must be given the tools to get there. Today, I want to offer a few suggestions of how:

A first step is to provide financial aid to incentivize students to pursue careers in public service, which are seldom as lucrative as a private sector career. Currently, New York offers an array of grants and loan forgiveness programs designed to encourage graduates to enter careers in public service. However, these programs are not well funded nor are they well publicized. As we look toward the future, New York has an opportunity to be a national leader and take a more comprehensive approach to instituting programs that incentivize students to enter public service.

We've seen how other states incentivize students, including in California with their Civic Action Fellowship awarding students up to \$10,000 to put toward their college costs in exchange for one semester working in public service. In New York, one such example is an existing scholarship program to encourage more people to enter the teaching profession. Last year, the Governor vetoed a bill that would extend this scholarship program to candidates who attend private colleges, despite the fact that our institutions confer more teaching degrees than any other sector. If we are going to be serious about public service, we have to take a holistic approach that incentivizes all students – not just those who attend public institutions. That is why I urge you to pass this important legislation again in order to prepare the next generation of leaders at the front of the classroom.

A second step is to provide exposure to meaningful internship experiences in public service. These internships should be paid; they should have a strong mentorship component, and; they should give students the opportunity to see an array of public service possibilities, from not-for-profit management to working at the city, county and state levels.

Finally, I recommend reviewing the civil service system to ensure that those interested in public service have adequate pathways into public service. In particular, if we want to attract a public service workforce that is representative of those it serves, we need to look past one size fits all civil service exams; we need to put a greater focus on the experiences and unique perspectives that candidates bring to the table and not just the score that they received on a civil service exam.

I look forward to working with you and your colleagues as we take the next bold step forward to ensure a vibrant public service sector in New York State. Thank you for your time and I welcome any questions.