



## NEW YORK STATE SENATE DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY

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### Senate Majority To Pass Legislation to Aid Students In Higher Education

(Albany, NY) Today, the Senate Democratic Majority will advance legislation to improve resources and support in the higher education systems of New York. This package will ensure sufficient on-campus resources for veterans and grant veterans academic credits to state universities based on their military service and experiences. These bills will also standardize the award schedule of the Tuition Assistance Program for dependent and independent students, create a task force to study refinance options for private student loans, and protect the privacy rights of immigrant students on campus.

“The years our students spend in higher education will help shape the trajectory of their lives,” said **Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins**. “New York is, and will continue to be, a national leader in offering quality college and advanced education opportunities. SUNY is the largest university system in the nation and CUNY is the nation's largest urban public university. I applaud the bill sponsors and am proud of the Senate Democratic Majority’s commitment to support those seeking higher education.”

The legislation being passed by the Senate Majority, include:

- **Helping Veterans in our Colleges:** This bill [S.2291](#) sponsored by Senator James Sanders Jr. will require the State University of New York and the City University of New York to examine and conduct a study on the availability of campus services, programs and resources for veteran students.
- **SUNY/CUNY Veteran Credit:** This bill [S.2680A](#) sponsored by Senator Joseph P. Addabbo will allow state operated institutions to grant academic credit to veterans based on their military experiences.
- **Immigrant Student Privacy Protections:** This bill [S.2778](#) sponsored by Senator Toby Ann Stavisky prohibit any employee or officer of a CUNY or SUNY university to request the specific details of a student's immigration status except when required by federal law, pursuant to court order, or as required in connection with tuition or financial aid eligibility.
- **Help Returning Students and Update their TAP Award Amounts:** These two bills [S.2764/S.2765](#) sponsored by Senator Toby Ann Stavisky will update the tuition assistance program, to increase award amounts to current day rates for dependent and independent students at degree-granting colleges in the state. This will incentivize students to continue their education.
- **Standing up for Borrowers and creating the Student Loan Refinance Task Force:** This bill [S.2767](#) sponsored by Senator Tim Kennedy will establish a private student loan refinance task force, made of various lending experts, legislative, and state representatives to come up with solutions to benefit borrowers.

This builds on the Senate Democratic Majority's continued work to maintain a high standard of continued education in New York State. In addition to the measures passed in this package, the Senate Majority held a [hearing](#) to hear from students, educators and community members on ways to best conduct our higher education system and combat fiscal challenges students face.

**Bill Sponsor, and Chair of the Senate Committee on Higher Education Toby Ann Stavisky** said, "All New Yorkers should have access to higher education, regardless of when they pursue it. This legislation makes sure students who initially qualified for TAP benefits decades ago, can receive financial assistance that reflects the current cost of tuition if they choose to re-enroll. Additional legislation protects the immigrant student community, by prohibiting colleges from asking about their immigration status so they can pursue their educational aspirations without fear of deportation."

**Bill Sponsor, Senator Joseph P Addabbo** said, "Our military service members get an education in many different ways, be it on the battlefield, through their training, or with direct job experience. When they return from service, they should be able to have their relevant experience transferred into academic credits at state-operated institutions. By allowing veterans to transfer real life experiences from their military service into relative academic credits at state-run institutions, it will provide veterans with an accelerated path to a degree and hopefully encourage more veterans to finish their higher education."

**Bill Sponsor, Senator Tim Kennedy** said "Nationwide, there is over \$130 billion of outstanding private student loan debt, leaving many New Yorkers saddled with high interest rates and less flexible terms than federally-backed loans. By establishing a task force to examine this problem, we can find new and creative ways to help private student loan borrowers refinance their debt, easing the crushing burden imposed by these lenders."

**Bill Sponsor, Senator James Sanders Jr.** said, "As a Marine Corps veteran and CUNY Alum, I am proud to have introduced this legislation which would have CUNY and SUNY study how to increase the availability of its existing campus services, programs and resources for veterans attending its schools. Those who have served in our country's military have made sacrifices to protect the freedoms, we often take for granted. The least we can do is make it easier for them to continue their education, because when they accomplish their goals and achieve their dreams, everyone benefits."

**Senate Deputy Majority Leader Michael Gianaris** said, "Higher education is the foundation of opportunity. Making more education attainable, and not burdening students with a lifetime of financial obligations, is part of our mission to help all New Yorkers climb the economic ladder. I'm pleased the Senate Majority is passing these bills and investing in our future this way."

**Senator Jamaal Bailey** said, "Higher education for New Yorkers shouldn't mean lifelong debt. Far too many are struggling to pay off student debt and find themselves at times unable to make payments. Education is the great equalizer in our society, and it is important to ensure that we continue to expand access and make our system more affordable. I would like to thank Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Higher Education Committee Chair Senator Toby Ann Stavisky for their leadership, and my colleagues who sponsored legislation included in the package."

**Senator Alessandra Biaggi** said, "Our higher education system must always prioritize the best interests of the students it's intended to serve. I am glad to join my colleagues in passing important legislation to expand financial accessibility to degree programs and create additional protections for immigrant students at SUNY and CUNY institutions. I extend my gratitude to the bill sponsors for their leadership to move these bills forward."

**Senator Samra Brouk**, “The challenges facing higher education students are great, and it is essential that we meet this moment with meaningful action. Providing access to education to all New Yorkers is key to the success of our state, and this legislation develops important solutions to protect students’ financial security, supports veterans’ access to higher education, and protects immigrant students from unnecessary invasions of their privacy. These are key steps to leveling the playing field and creating equitable access to higher education for everyone in our state.”

**Senator Jeremy Cooney** said, “Rochester is home to some of the best colleges and universities in the nation. As a former student aid recipient, now member of the Senate’s Higher Education Committee, I am proud to support an increase in TAP funding, which helps thousands of local students afford college and reduce their student loans.”

**Senator Jim Gaughran** said “Higher education remains unattainable and unaffordable for far too many in our society. I’m glad to support this package of legislation to further incentivize higher education, support veterans and immigrants, and address the ballooning student loan crisis that is suffocating millions of New Yorkers.”

**Senator Andrew Gounardes** said, “Investing in higher education and making it easier for our immigrant, veteran and students from low- and middle-income families get a college degree will help the next generation thrive and help our state recover from this crisis. This package of bills is a good step forward but we need to go much further to ensure every person, no matter their background, can get a world-class higher education, thrive, grow and succeed.”

**Senator Michelle Hinchey** said, “The future of higher education should focus on creating pathways that make college more accessible and affordable for all who choose to pursue it. I’m glad to join my colleagues in passing this bill package, which proposes common-sense efforts to address the college affordability crisis and will help our state and distinguished SUNY institutions — like SUNY Albany and Ulster County Community College in my district — better serve students who have historically faced barriers to completing their degrees, including our veterans who would benefit from enhanced on-campus supports to help reach their college and career goals. With more skilled graduates, we’ll grow our economy, workforce, and strengthen our communities across New York State.”

**Senator Brad Hoylman** said, “As of fall 2019, more than 950,000 New Yorkers were enrolled in an undergraduate degree program. A college degree is the building block of a comfortable life, and every New Yorker deserves access to one. With this suite of bills, New York’s Senate Majority is making it easier for veterans and immigrants to get college degrees, and making it easier for students of all backgrounds to pay tuition and student loans. The SUNY and CUNY systems provide some of the best public higher education in the country, and I’m grateful that Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Senate Committee on Higher Education Chair Toby Ann Stavisky prioritize making those schools more accessible for all New Yorkers.”

**Senator Robert Jackson** said, “Our New York State and City public university systems are the pride and joy of our great state. While we have much work to do in this year’s budget to ensure they receive the support they deserve and desperately need, this package of legislation makes some important policy changes to improve access to higher education for marginalized groups like immigrants and veterans. I thank the bill sponsors and the tireless CUNY and SUNY advocates for their work to ensure New York continues to boast well-resourced, equitable, socially just, and integrated public institutions.”

**Senator Rachel May** said, “Accessing higher education should be simple for everyone in this country, and it should not threaten you with bankruptcy. I am proud to vote for this package of legislation that will encourage

veterans and immigrants to seek higher education and that works to address some of the issues with financial assistance, both public and private.”

**Senator Shelley Mayer**, said, “The Senate Majority Conference is committed to bringing higher education within reach for millions of New Yorkers. I am pleased to support legislation sponsored by my colleagues that creates a Student Loan Refinance Task Force, allows veterans to get credit for their military experience, and increases the TAP Award for returning students. Higher education is still one of the key ladders we have to the middle class, and I am committed to strengthening the support systems that help New Yorkers get there.”

**Senator Elijah Reichlin-Melnick** said, “A college education is one of the best paths into the middle class. These bills will make college and vocational school training more affordable and accessible for veterans, and make it easier for people to attend college while still staying in the workforce. The passage of these bills would mean that more students will be able to achieve the American dream right here in New York.”

**Senator Sean Ryan** said, “This package of legislation will help ensure all our students, including veterans and immigrants, have the financial and structural support they need to pursue their dream of getting a degree. By taking this action today we are removing financial hurdles for returning students, and those working to pay off student loans with high interest rates. Supporting our students with these reforms will go a long way toward building a better future for New York State.”

**Senator Julia Salazar** said, “Higher education continues to be a top priority, and public higher education institutions in particular have historically been a necessary vehicle for upward mobility in our communities. I am thrilled to vote in support of this legislative package that supports our students by updating the tuition assistance program, and also protecting the privacy of immigrant students.”

**Senator Luis Sepúlveda** said, "Education is critical in creating fruitful opportunities for students to succeed and thrive. Therefore, it is essential to provide equitable pathways for students to continue their education and receive the services and resources needed to help shape future generations to come. The package of legislation passed today will take significant steps in assisting veterans in our colleges to receive the guidance and programs necessary to prosper and ensure easier access for veteran students to gain academic credit. In addition, it also seeks to protect our immigrant student body from being deported by universities and relieve New York students' financial burdens."

**Senator Kevin Thomas** said, “New Yorkers deserve a fair and equal opportunity to pursue an affordable, quality education. Now more than ever, we need to alleviate the growing financial strain on students and families across our state. I am proud to support this package of legislation, which will provide essential resources to our veterans attending SUNY and CUNY, and step up protections for financially vulnerable students so that they can focus on what really matters - staying healthy and using their education to improve their lives and communities.”

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