



The State University of New York
Student Assembly

Committee on Higher Education

New York State Senate

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Testimony of Trustee and President Jahad Hoyte
State University of New York Student Assembly (SUNY SA)

July 28, 2020

On behalf of the 1.4 Million students of our great University system we very much appreciate the efforts of Senator and Committee Chair Stavisky, Assemblymember and Committee Chair Glick, as well as their colleagues in the legislature for hosting a hearing address the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on higher education in the state.

The Student Assembly is the recognized system-wide student government supporting the students of SUNY. The Student Assembly is comprised of Student Leaders from across the state and represents the students of the many University centers and colleges, technology colleges, and community colleges, and advocates 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 student advocacy priorities are finalized, and members are offered the opportunity to network and learn leadership skills from students, campus and system administration, and faculty through various workshops and networking opportunities.

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. The Student Assembly operates a variety of committees focused on ensuring academic excellence throughout the system and highlights the areas of campus safety, disability services, gender equity, and sustainability.

The Student Assembly urges the state to recognize and act upon the magnitude in which under-funding public higher education has on the delivery of services and the quality of education across the system during these challenging and uncertain times. The Committee clearly identifies the benefit to the state from an accessible State University due

to the return on investment made by students pursuing higher education in New York.

Graduates of SUNY are likely to work and live in New York and continue to stimulate local and state economies through employment and taxes. Adequately funding higher education holds the potential to yield a greater return on investment for the state as students, faculty, and staff from across the SUNY system continue to enhance the quality of life and economic prosperity in their communities.

Various state and federal financial aid programs greatly benefit the students of SUNY. The Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) aids eligible students in attending in-state postsecondary institutions. However, there is a consistent gap in the funding mechanism that penalizes campuses for accepting and enrolling students who utilize the Tuition Assistance Program. The shortfall in funding by the state to provide this support has severely diminished the ability of our campuses to provide quality education and critical student services. Now more than ever these services and programs are necessary for student success.

With increased investment by the state in institutions of public higher education students can benefit more from quality education, services and programs such as mental health counseling, food pantries, EOP, academic advisement, and gender and sexuality resources at an affordable cost.

Additionally, the Excelsior Scholarship, in combination with other student financial aid programs, allows eligible students to attend a SUNY college tuition-free. This program is successful as it aids students in graduating on time and with less debt. The Student Assembly urges the state to expand the promise of the Excelsior Scholarship and implement measures that would allow for a greater number of students to apply the scholarship to their academic career.

The Student Assembly urges the state to invest in public higher education by funding the shortfall created by the Tuition Assistance Program, making amendments to and expanding current financial programs available to students, and recognizing its fundamental role and responsibility to offer a world class education at an affordable cost to all. With an increase in funding and expansions of aid programs campuses across the state will be equipped to provide greater quality education and student services that address the backgrounds and needs of all students during these challenging and uncertain times.