



The Commission on
INDEPENDENT
Colleges & Universities
in New York

**Testimony of
The Commission on Independent
Colleges and Universities**

Joint Budget Hearing on Higher Education

Monday, February 27, 2023

Good morning, Chairpersons Krueger and Weinstein, and members of the committees. My name is Lola Brabham, and I serve as President of the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities. I appreciate the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Independent Sector regarding the FY 2024 Budget.

CICU represents more than 100 private, nonprofit colleges and universities across New York, and nearly 500,000 students, more than half of which are New Yorkers. Our members award 58 percent of education degrees, 61 percent of STEM degrees, and two-thirds of nursing degrees. We are graduating the skilled workforce New York's businesses require to remain competitive. Recently, the New York State Office of Strategic Workforce Development awarded more than \$6 million in grants to eight projects across the state to support employer-driven, high-skilled workforce training programs. Two of those awardees were CICU members.

Our state's future is in the hands of today's college students, whether they attend a public or private college. They are the next generation of entrepreneurs, healthcare workers, and educators. They need New York State's help to realize their full potential. The most effective way to help students is to invest in student aid to ensure that more students succeed in their pursuit of higher education and are prepared to heed the call of service in response to society's pressing issues. Two-thirds of students at CICU member colleges are from families who earn less than \$125,000 annually, and of the nearly 50,000 Independent Sector students receiving TAP awards, half have annual family incomes under \$20,000.

While I represent the Independent Sector, I want to emphasize that the public and private higher education sectors form an ecosystem that together, and only together, will be able to educate and develop the skilled workforce our state needs. For example, CICU, SUNY, and CUNY have united to support legislation, which we hope the Legislature will enact to address the urgent nursing shortage. As you are aware, New York has a serious healthcare workforce crisis. Colleges and universities, both public and private, must play a significant role in addressing this challenge. We are working closely with the State Education Department to develop a pathway to utilize simulation education to alleviate the bottleneck created by a lack of available clinical placements.

Together, both sectors can ensure access to the opportunities and pathways that higher education provides, particularly for students from historically marginalized communities. It is imperative that the state bolster student aid and increase support for proven education programs for all of New York's college students.

On behalf of New York's independent, nonprofit colleges and our students, we ask the Legislature to provide that support by expanding the Tuition Assistance Program, investing in Bundy Aid, supporting Opportunity Programs and student wellbeing, strengthening faculty diversity, and investing in funding for HECap and research and development.

Expand the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP)

New York's Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) has been changing students' lives for more than 50 years. Last year, the Legislature made a significant investment in the program by increasing the maximum award amount, expanding eligibility for part-time students, and overturning an almost 30-year ban for incarcerated students.

We are grateful for these important actions; however, more needs to be done to help New Yorkers.

In 2010, Graduate TAP was eliminated, leaving New York students without state assistance to pursue an advanced degree. New York, like the nation, is experiencing a serious workforce shortage that has impacted critically needed fields, particularly in healthcare, education, and STEM. **CICU proposes an investment of \$35 million to restore Grad Tap to provide support for students pursuing graduate degrees in these impacted fields.**

Moreover, the income eligibility limit for TAP has not been raised since 2000, failing to keep pace with family income levels or the needs of working families. The result is that every year fewer students are eligible for TAP. **Increasing the income eligibility limit for TAP to \$110,000 (from \$80,000) will allow an additional 24,000 middle-class families access to financial support for college.**

Likewise, the minimum TAP award has also been stagnant for more than two decades. **Increasing the minimum award to \$1,000 (from \$500) will help working families and students across New York.**

Invest in Students through Bundy Aid

Bundy Aid is another critical source of student aid that New York provides for students enrolled at Independent Sector colleges and universities. In fact, it is the only source of unrestricted support private, nonprofit colleges receive from New York. It is outcome-based and student-focused which means colleges receive funding based on the number of degrees they confer, and the funding is invested back into student aid and support programs that help more students graduate.

Bundy Aid has been dramatically underfunded for decades – currently it is funded at just 18 percent of statutory levels, or approximately \$35 million. CICU is requesting that the Legislature increase Bundy Aid funding by 10 percent to provide additional support for academic support programs such as tutoring, summer bridge programs, and services for students with disabilities.

Support Educational Opportunity Programs

We are grateful that last year's budget included a 10 percent funding increase for Opportunity Programs. The HEOP, STEP, CSTEP, and Liberty Partnership Programs – provide invaluable access to higher education for talented students from disadvantaged communities, including those most gravely impacted by the pandemic. They are transformative programs with a proven record of success.

CICU requests that the Legislature restore funding eliminated in the Executive budget. In addition, CICU joins the NYS Education Department's budget request for an additional 10 percent increase in funding to ensure these programs have adequate resources to serve deserving students:

- **Increase HEOP funding to \$53.15 million** (from \$48.32 million)
- **Increase STEP and CSTEP funding to \$41.59 million** (from \$37.81 million) and provide flexibility for programs to target resources in a manner that best serves their students
- **Increase Liberty Partnerships Program funding to \$27.42 million** (from \$24.98 million)

Support Student Wellbeing

Students across the state are struggling and the need for campus mental health support is growing at an alarming rate.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this crisis. The CDC reports that before the pandemic 1-in-10 college-age Americans reported that they had contemplated suicide; during the pandemic that number rose to 1-in-4.¹ For students of color, a study last year found that while mental health worsened among all groups, students of color have seen larger increases in mental health problems and have been less likely to receive treatment.²

Furthermore, a national survey by the Trevor Project of 34,000 LGBTQ+ college students found one-third had contemplated suicide and seven percent had attempted suicide in the prior year; the numbers were higher for students of color and transgender and nonbinary students. According to the survey, access to mental health support on campus significantly reduced suicidal ideation and attempts.³

In her State of the State Address, Governor Hochul called for a major investment in mental health care across the state. College students must be included in the investment, and we know the Legislature is aware of this growing crisis. Last year, the Assembly proposed \$30 million in student mental health funding that would have been exclusive to SUNY and CUNY campuses. While the enacted budget appropriated \$4 million in funding, our students were left behind. We hope the Legislature will provide the resources needed to address this growing crisis and significantly increase assistance to students in need across all sectors.

We are grateful for the passage of \$2 million in funding for the Enhanced Support for Students with Disabilities (SWD) in Higher Education Program in last year's budget. We urge the Legislature to **grant SED's full request for \$15 million in funding for students**

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8130819/>

² <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2022/04/11/students-color-less-likely-get-mental-health-treatment>

³ <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/09/29/mental-health-supports-reduce-suicidality-lgbtq-students>

with disabilities. This funding provides ways for institutions to support student wellbeing such as expanding services, assisting incoming SWDs to better navigate the campus facilities and systems, and provide faculty and staff with appropriate training.

Strengthen Faculty Diversity

Diversity in the classroom is critical at all levels. Despite best efforts, colleges and universities have struggled to increase the number of faculty members from underrepresented communities on their campuses.

CICU proposes establishing the **Charles L. Reason Fellowship Program with an initial investment of \$3 million to support students who have shown academic promise to succeed in a career in academia.** The program is modeled on existing opportunity programs and would provide financial support, academic advising, mentorship, and research opportunities. In addition, students who go on to pursue doctoral degrees would be eligible for loan forgiveness. This investment would help New York ensure a pipeline of diverse faculty across the state for years to come.

Partner for Stronger Campuses and Communities

Investing in higher education has the power to strengthen communities and the state's economy. In fiscal year 2021-22, the Independent Sector generated almost **\$95 billion** in economic activity for the state's economy. This includes 403,000 direct and indirect jobs with a combined payroll of almost \$30 billion. To sustain this economic engine, and maintain the state's competitive edge, higher education institutions require New York's assistance to remain at the forefront of science and technology, developing innovations that will attract more companies like Micron to New York.

One of the most cost-efficient approaches is through matching grant funding for infrastructure and research and development (R&D) projects. As federal research funding increases every year, New York must increase its commitment to bring those grant dollars to our state. Without this additional funding, New York will become less competitive and will lose critical federal R&D funds to other states.

CICU urges the state to **invest \$20 million in the NYSTAR Matching Grants Leverage Program** which would bring hundreds of millions in federal research grants to New York campuses. NYSTAR's 2022 Annual Report shows that this program has brought in nearly \$24 million in federal grants from only \$1.5 million in state expenditure: a 16-to-1 return on investment.

We also recommend a **\$20 million investment in the Faculty Development Grants Program** to help retain and recruit world-class talent and their groundbreaking work to New York. Currently, New York is second in higher education R&D spending behind California, and third in research doctorates awarded. While Texas and Florida are increasing their higher education R&D spending, New York's has decreased over the past decade. In an earlier version of the program, New York saw a 7-to-1 return on its investment after 10 years.

In addition, the Centers for Advanced Technology (CATs) and Centers of Excellence (CoEs) have proven results of incubating technology and creating jobs and opportunity across the state. But they have suffered from years of flat, or reduced, funding and we need to build on the steps taken last year to support these programs. **We encourage the Legislature to restore the funding eliminated in the Executive Budget and increase funding for each CAT and CoE to \$1.25 million.**

Finally, the Higher Education Capital (HECap) Matching Grant Program has created more than \$1.3 billion in infrastructure spending across the state. **Investing in another \$30 million round of the competitive HECap grant program** will result in at least a 3-to-1 match for every dollar invested by the state. The HECap program has created more than \$1.3 billion in infrastructure spending across the state, creating more than 17,000 jobs in our communities, including over 8,700 construction jobs paying prevailing wages. **Establishing a new \$30 million competitive Green HECap Program** would also create significant return on investment for the state while helping college campuses decarbonize in accordance with the state's ambitious climate goals.

Invest in New York's Future

In the last few years, the value of higher education has been challenged. I firmly believe that higher education is critically important and must be accessible to everyone. Higher education has the power to transform us into the best versions of ourselves. Our country has a much better future with higher education than without it.

We look forward to working with you in support of New York's college students.