



The State University of New York
Student Assembly

Testimony of SUNY Student Assembly President Bradley Hershenson

Joint Legislative Public Hearing on the 2022 Executive Budget

Senate Finance Committee

Assembly Ways and Means Committee

Senate and Assembly Higher Education Committees

Monday, February 7th, 2022

On behalf of the students of our great University system we very much appreciate the efforts of Chair/Senator Krueger, Chair/Assemblymember Weinstein, and Chair/Senator Stavisky, and Chair/Assemblymember Glick, and your colleagues in the legislature for hosting a hearing to address needs of our students across the State of New York.

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. Each semester 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 discussed, 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 investment needed across our campuses during these challenging and uncertain times.

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.

With an increase in 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, childcare centers, food pantries, EOP, academic advisement, and gender and sexuality resources at an affordable cost. Expansions to programs can be made such as providing menstrual products on campuses at no cost or ensuring graduate students receive a living wage.

Additionally, expanding aid programs such as the Excelsior Scholarship to include areas such as housing, textbooks, and fees would allow eligible students to attend a SUNY college cost-free. The Student Assembly urges the state to expand the promise of the Excelsior Scholarship and similar initiatives and implement measures that would allow for a greater number of students to benefit from support programs. One key step towards true affordability would be implementing free summer sessions.

The Student Assembly also urges the state to invest in public higher education by investing in our campus to create a more

inclusive environment for all. This means investing in our infrastructure so all of our buildings, facilities, and other areas are accessible to all students. This extends to providing funding to train our faculty and staff in areas such as gender and sexuality concerns, religious observances, implicit bias, and other areas.

Additionally, the elected student leaders of SUNY need your help in ending the discrimination we face within our system. We have never been granted the resources needed to fully thrive as a student organization charged with representation of students across 64 campuses. Our minor allocation of around \$57,000 annually has remained the same for decades. We need your help to instate a minor fee of \$1 per student to fund our activities and advocacy (S5436/7054 – Jackson/Epstein). This would provide the Student Assembly of SUNY similar levels of support to that of our counterparts at CUNY and other institutions.

We must also discuss the ever-rising cost of tuition. We applaud the legislature for freezing tuition for three years – but we must do more. We must enact FREE Tuition for SUNY students. A 5-year phase in for free tuition coupled with increases in revenue streams such as gambling, the legalization and sale of marijuana, and returns on our green investments will position New York State to truly become a leader within the field of higher education.

Lastly, ensuring access to affordable housing for all students is imperative as we emerge from the pandemic. The last year has stressed our colleagues, emotionally and financially, and addressing all of these areas is imperative to student success. Providing a campus environment that is inclusive for all students is what SUNY means. Your investment in public higher education

this year will help our system recognize and act upon its fundamental role and responsibility to offer a world class education at an affordable cost to all.