

NEWS RELEASE

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For More Information:

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NEW YORK STUDENTS AND FACULTY CALL FOR MORE STATE REVENUE, NO CUTS TO HIGHER EDUCATION, AMID COVID STRAIN

Letter from over 150 student, faculty, and staff groups to Governor Cuomo, Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Assembly Speaker Heastie, and Minority Leaders Ortt and Barclay

(New York) A coalition of 166 student, faculty, and community groups representing public and independent institutions from across the state today delivered a letter to Governor Cuomo and the state's legislative leaders calling on them to increase state revenue to support public and independent colleges and strengthen financial aid and opportunity programs.

As the COVID pandemic and resulting economic downturn continue to destabilize public programs, the letter stated, New York must invest in its future; higher education cuts harm both the future economy, the state's civic life, and jeopardize low-income and working college students' education.

While the Governor has stated that he plans no budget cuts before the outcome of the election in November, what happens after? NY's colleges and universities have already suffered over \$430 million in withheld payments from April to July, according to the state's Department of Budget.

LOCAL AID PAYMENTS WITHHELD - APRIL THROUGH JULY¹ (in thousands)	
Total Payments Withheld	1,714,406
Higher Education	430,943
Transportation	325,307
Education	324,169
Health Care	279,353
Human Services/Housing	179,598
Mental Hygiene	78,540
Local Government Aid	77,505
Public Safety/General Government	12,741
Economic Development	6,250

¹ Includes payments withheld for local aid payments of \$500,000 or more prior to the withhold and reflects withholds only for those payments planned through July in the Enacted Budget.

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Among the organizations that signed onto NYPIRG's letter were advocacy groups, student government associations, opportunity program administrators, and faculty unions representing SUNY and CUNY.

Addressed to Governor Cuomo, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Speaker Heastie, and Minority Leaders Ortt and Barclay, the letter underlines that lawmakers must not cut economic aid to already struggling students.

CUNY and SUNY have already experienced the impacts from faculty layoffs and Excelsior Scholarship applicants had been in the dark for months about whether they would receive their awards for classes that had already begun. NY's Higher Education Services Corporation, which administers financial aid and scholarships, has reportedly warned that Excelsior awards may be slashed this coming spring.

"Many students who rely on financial aid, especially the state's Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), are either essential workers themselves or have family members working during this crisis. These are the people that have had to endure health threats from COVID to keep our economy moving. Over 150 groups, including NYPIRG, agree that if the question is whether to generate more tax revenue from the rich or to cut services that benefit the essential workers and their families, then the choice is very clear," said **Hifza Hameed, NYPIRG's Board of Directors Vice Chairperson and Brooklyn College student.**

"To emerge from the current economic crisis, New York needs CUNY. And CUNY needs funding to help rebuild our battered economy and put New Yorkers back to work. Instead, Albany has unilaterally withheld millions of dollars allocated to CUNY in the enacted budget. The CUNY administration has responded by laying off nearly 3,000 adjuncts and increasing class-size to the point where students find it hard to learn. Albany is choosing to protect billionaires rather than working people, families and communities of color. The ultra-rich have seen their wealth grow during the pandemic, while CUNY faculty and staff and the communities CUNY serves have experienced job-loss, illness and death. It's time for Albany to right that wrong and increase taxes on the rich to protect public higher education. New York cannot rely entirely on another stimulus from Washington, and the state cannot cut its way out of this crisis," said **Barbara Bowen, President of the Professional Staff Congress,** the union representing 30,000 faculty and professional staff at CUNY.

"The Student Assembly is proud to stand with leaders across higher education to fight for investment for all students, faculty, staff, and community members. New York State has an obligation to enhance academic excellence and educational opportunity. SUNY students repay the investment made now in their higher education many times over through the taxes they pay now and after they graduate. We must protect that investment in the State budget process and continue to advocate for federal aid to New York. SUNY graduates are essential to the health and well-being of New York's economy, its workforce, and the social fabric," said **Bradley Hershenson, President of the SUNY Student Assembly.**

"The continuous cuts to higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic has drastically affected our university and the drastic disinvestment to CUNY is a direct attack on working class and low income students. It is important to provide resources and support to the students of CUNY and ensure they have resources and opportunities to help them sustain themselves and their collegiate journey. The investment

to CUNY is imperative to the progression of New York City," said **Juwanie Piquant, Chairwoman of the University Student Senate.**

"Malcolm X once said that 'Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today. The amount of money that SUNY and CUNY's received before the budget cuts were just enough to get by. How will we prepare today's youth, for tomorrow if we are now receiving less funds than ever before? You may not be able to see the huge impact that this is having on us today, but the impact that this will have on the future of our students will be impossible to miss if a change doesn't come. The youth is our future, and we need help financially now more than ever. We did our part. We paid over 2.5 billion dollars in tuition collectively, with little to no help. It is time for you to do your part and to look at the bigger picture. We are the bigger picture," said **Cierra Shelton of the CUNY Black Male Initiative at QCC.**

"As New York faces a nation-altering pandemic, gentrification drives out Black and Brown communities and university prices continue to soar, the hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers who rely on CUNY and SUNY for access to opportunity are left unaided. We know that to improve society, New York, or the nation requires the youth to have access to education. Reducing funds and increasing policing are not solutions by any means, now is the time for the state and city elected officials to understand what long-term aid and abolition can do. Increase funding to CUNY and SUNY and boost financial aid for students to ensure we continue to rise as a society," said **Sarah Kanu from Pratt Institute's Black Student Union.**

"We need a huge voter turnout from those who understand the nature and value of education. The fight for social justice while battling the effects of an unprecedented pandemic has affected all of NYS in unspeakable ways, with Black and Brown communities disproportionately so. We can't afford to lose funding and support for Opportunity Programs," said **Yanick Jenkins, Director of the Educational Opportunity Program at Buffalo State College.**

"The CUNY system is home to the most diverse students in the country and has been one of the greatest contributors to education equality. CUNY and SUNY provide the opportunity to a better way of life for thousands of students, and by the divestment of higher education, we not only see the state's dismissal of lower income students, but also its inability to protect the people that strive for a better future of the city and the country," said the **Executive Committee of the Undergraduate Student Government of Hunter College.**

"The City College Chapter of NAACP believes in equitable and quality education for all students. CUNY's mission has been to provide a top of the line education that is accessible and affordable. It is imperative the CUNY upholds its mission through making proper budget adjustments that are in favor of its students. CUNY funding is essential because it provides students with educational opportunities and resources that are not easily accessible elsewhere. Students from various backgrounds rely on CUNY to help their dreams come true. A lack of funding will further perpetuate inequities that are not only present within our education system but within the various institutions that are systematically unjust," said the **CUNY City College Chapter of the NAACP.**

"New York's leaders responded to the last recession with deep cuts to higher education. We saw what that got us: a massive student debt crisis, and an underfunded public higher education system that

struggles to graduate low-income students of color. Cutting higher education not only undermines New York's ability to recover from COVID-19 — it is a betrayal to the next generation of New Yorkers, and flies in the face of the call for racial equity," said **Marissa Muñoz, Northeast Regional Director of Young Invincibles.**

"I love Hunter College and have made it my second home by building strong relationships with all the amazing people I've met here. It saddens me to see my friends and fellow hard working students be taken advantage of. When we pay for tuition, we expect professors that are paid enough, resources that will help us navigate this pivotal moment in our lives, and a high quality education. As President of the Photographers' Collective and Vietnamese Student Association, I'm writing on behalf of my members and myself that we deserve more," said **Theresa Vu, President of Hunter College's Vietnamese Student Association and Photographer's Collective.**

"I have been working with college students for the past 20 years, and have seen the devastating impact it has on a student when they can't afford their tuition or pursue higher education. I have witnessed students eating cans of beans from the dollar store or forgoing a meal in order to have enough money to buy books or supplies. It's unhealthy and unfair. When a student cannot pursue or finish their education due to lack of funding, there is a serious impact upon self-esteem, and it severely limits a person's ability to pursue their career choices. We know what works - robust support like that provided by opportunity programs. Now state and city elected officials need to increase funding to my school and boost financial aid for students to make sure all get the support they need," said **Jernee Montoya, LCSW CASAC advisor to Clean Cats College Recovery Community at Pratt Institute.**

Attachment: 1, Copy of the letter and list of signatories

Andrew Cuomo
Governor
Executive Chamber
Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12234

Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Majority Leader
State Senate
Legislative Office Building
Albany, NY 12247

Carl Heastie
Speaker
State Assembly
Legislative Office Building
Albany, NY 12248

Robert Ort
Minority Leader
State Senate
Legislative Office Building
Albany, NY 12247

William Barclay
Minority Leader
State Assembly
Legislative Office Building
Albany, NY 12248

Re: Urge budget decisions that protect higher education

Dear Gov. Cuomo, and Legislative Leaders Stewart-Cousins, Heastie, Ort, and Barclay,

We write to urge you to ensure that any budget adjustments made between now and the new year be done to protect the quality of higher education and the finances of the students who pay to attend those colleges and universities.

Our organizations are well aware of the state's difficult financial situation, largely the result of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic downturn. The Congress may fill some of that financial void, but we are concerned that if the federal assistance falls short of the needs of the state, that higher education will face additional budgetary problems.

Historically – and across the nation – economic downturns result in higher education facing the budget axe. Funding for public colleges drops off, support for the independent college sector dwindles, and students and their families are required to make up the difference, either through higher public college tuition and/or through reductions in financial assistance. Due to cuts, class sizes have been ever-expanding, while many support services that students rely on have been diminished.

This financial downturn simply cannot play out in that manner. Higher education is the state's investment in its future and cuts harm both the future economy as well as the state's civic life.

Moreover, financial assistance – primarily through the state's Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) – is the way in which many low income, working college students can afford a college degree. And it is these students who come from families that often include "essential workers," those who have had to endure hardships and health threats from COVID in order to keep our economy moving. It would be cruel to then make it harder for them to access the essential services needed to attain a college degree.

They have already paid enough.

Therefore, we urge that any state action to address New York's budget crisis meet the following goals:

The state enhances, not cut, its support for public colleges and universities. The State University of New York and the City University of New York are already grappling with financial stresses. One example, is the state's "TAP Gap," which adds financial burdens to colleges. The state should boost its financial support for SUNY and CUNY and do so in a way that not only closes the "TAP Gap," but adds

revenues to allow those institutions to freeze tuition. To maintain quality, state support should ensure that class sizes are not increased and colleges are fully staffed.

1. The state enhances, not cut, its support for public colleges and universities. The State University of New York and the City University of New York are already grappling with financial stresses. One example, is the state's "TAP Gap," which adds financial burdens to colleges. The state should boost its financial support for SUNY and CUNY and do so in a way that not only closes the "TAP Gap," but adds revenues to allow those institutions to freeze tuition. To maintain quality, state support should ensure that class sizes are not increased and colleges are fully staffed. Furthermore, particularly amid the COVID-19 pandemic, full funding for SUNY's teaching hospitals should be re-instated.
2. The state maintain support for independent higher education institutions. Many of the smaller, liberal arts colleges are teetering on the financial brink. State support should be advanced to make sure that no institution fails during this pandemic.
3. The state ensures that programs to maintain college affordability are strengthened. The TAP program should be expanded to ensure that students who are enduring financial hardship are not turned away from college. Many students have been waiting to hear about the status of their Excelsior Scholarship and depend on this aid to properly plan for college. This program cannot be cut while students are already attending classes. Opportunity programs need to be supported as well.

Of course, the money to pay for our recommendations need to come from somewhere. We urge that additional tax revenues be generated from those with the greatest ability to pay them and who have been able to withstand the worst of the coronavirus ravages due to their wealth. If it's a question of making the wealthy shoulder more of the cost or to cut services to essential workers and their families, we believe that choice is clear.

We appreciate your efforts to deal with the myriad of issues that have emerged over the past few months and we look forward to working with you to address the difficulties in these unprecedented times.

Sincerely,

Statewide and regional groups

NYPIRG
CUNY University Student Senate
Student Assembly of the State University of New York
Professional Staff Congress
United University Professionals
CUNY Rising Alliance
New York Communities for Change
New York Youth Climate Leaders
Young Invincibles

Campus-based groups

African Student Union, Hunter College
African Student Union, Syracuse University
Ahlul-Bayt Student Association, City College of NY
Alliance of Physical Education Majors Club, SUNY Cortland
ALPFA Brooklyn College, Brooklyn College

Alpha Xi Sigma, SUNY ESF
American Society of Civil Engineers, City College of NY
Artemis Hellenic Club, Hunter College
Asian & Pacific Islander's Association, SUNY New Paltz
Astronomy and Physics Society, Hunter College
Athletics, Queens College
Baskerville Chemical Society, City College of NY
Biomedical Engineering Society, City College of NY
Biomedical Informatics Club BIB, NYC College of Technology
Black Male Initiative, QCC
Black Student Union, Hunter College
Black Student Union, Pratt Institute
Black Student Union, SUNY ESF
Brooklyn Bahaadur, Brooklyn College
Caribbean Student Union, Hunter College
Catholic Medical Mission Board (CMMB X HUNTER), Hunter College
CCNY GREEN, City College of NY
CCNY Knitting Club, City College of NY
CCNY NAACP, City College of NY
CCNY Pre-Law Club, City College of NY
CCNY Women's Robotics Club, City College of NY
Chemistry Club, QCC
Chess Club, SUNY New Paltz
Chinese Student and Scholar Association, Hunter College
Chorus, Vocal Ensemble, and Chamber Choir Club, Nassau Community College
Circle K International, SUNY New Paltz
Clean Cats College Recovery Program, Pratt Institute
Climb CCNY, City College of NY
Cortland RPG, SUNY Cortland
Creative Writing Club, QCC
CUNY Black Male Initiative, Hunter College
CUNY EDGE Program, QCC
Dean's Advisor Panel, Syracuse University
Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), Nassau Community College
Educational Opportunity Program, Buffalo State College
Envirolutions, Pratt Institute
Environmental Alliance, SUNY New Paltz
Environmental Resources Engineering Club, SUNY ESF
Environmental Studies Student Organization, SUNY ESF
Environmental Task Force, SUNY New Paltz
Eugenio Maria de Hostos Puerto Rican & Multicultural Club, Hunter College
Evening Weekend Student Network, Queens College
Fashion and Design Society, Syracuse University
Female Force, SUNY Cortland
Feminist Collective, SUNY New Paltz
First Year Players, Syracuse University
Foreign Languages Society, QCC
Geography Club, Hunter College
Geology Club, SUNY Cortland
Graduate Social Work Association, Hunter College
Green Campus Initiative, SUNY ESF

Hillel at City College, City College of NY
Hillel, Hunter College
Hindu Students Association (HSA), Hunter College
Hooked on Stitches, SUNY New Paltz
In Living Color, SUNY New Paltz
Inclusive Education, SUNY Cortland
Japanese Visual Culture Club, College of Staten Island
JERK Magazine, Syracuse University
K-Pop Club, Hunter College
Kinks Coils n Curls, SUNY New Paltz
La Unidad Latina, Lambda Upsilon Lambda Fraternity Incorporated, SUNY New Paltz
Latino Medical Student Association, Hunter College
MALES/BMI, QCC
Minority Association of Pre-Medical Students (MAPS), SUNY Cortland
Music is Medicine, Hunter College
Music Society, QCC
Muslim Students Association, BMCC
National Honor Society for Dance Arts, Hunter College
National Student Speech Language & Hearing Association, Hunter College
NCC Outdoor Club, Nassau Community College
Nerdvana, Nassau Community College
New Paltz Cheerleading, SUNY New Paltz
New Paltz Students for Sensible Drug Policy, SUNY New Paltz
New York Water Environment Association, SUNY ESF
Nexis, Syracuse University
Non-Traditional Students Organization, SUNY Cortland
Nursing Club, Nassau Community College
Nursing Students Press, Hunter College
Nutrition Club, Hunter College
Organizational CSTEP, QCC
Outdoor Club, Nassau Community College
Percy Ellis Sutton SEEK Program, Hunter College
Percy Sutton SEEK Club, City College of NY
Political Science Club, Queens College
Pratt Disaster Resilience Network, Pratt Institute
Pre-Health Diaries Blog, Hunter College
Pre-Law Club, College of Staten Island
Pre-Law Society, Hunter College
Pre-PA Society, Hunter College
Pre-Vet Club, SUNY ESF
Pre-Veterinary Club, Hunter College
Psi Chi, Hunter College
Psychology Club, Hunter College
Psychology Club, SUNY Cortland
Radical University Professionals (RUP), SUNY New Paltz
Riverrun, Brooklyn College
Russian Club, Hunter College
SAFER, SUNY Cortland
Salsa Mambo Club, City College of NY
Saturday's of Service, SUNY New Paltz
Science Club, BMCC

Sexuality and Gender Alliance, SUNY ESF
Sikh Student Association, City College of NY
Slow Food SU, Syracuse University
Society for Conservation Biology - Central New York Chapter, SUNY ESF
Spanish Club, SUNY New Paltz
STEM Research Club, QCC
Student Activities Board, SUNY Cortland
Student Alumni Association, SUNY Cortland
Student Association, Queens College
Student Athlete Advisory Committee, Hunter College
Student Environmental Education Coalition, SUNY ESF
Student Government Association, BMCC
Student Government Association, NYC College of Technology
Student Government Association, Pratt Institute
Student Government Association, QCC
Student Government Association, SUNY Cortland
Student Government, College of Staten Island
Students For Access and Ability in College (SFAAC), SUNY Cortland
SU Danceworks, Syracuse University
Teachers of Tomorrow, City College of NY
The Accounting Society, Hunter College
The Andrew Goodman Foundation, Queens College
The Animation Appreciation, Anime Club, SUNY New Paltz
The Banner, College of Staten Island
The Campus Magazine, City College of NY
The Dominican Students Association, City College of NY
The Future Architects of the Middle East, City College of NY
The Knight News, Queens College
The Nautilus Society, SUNY ESF
The Paper, City College of NY
The Photographers' Collective, Hunter College
The Pre Health Organization, Hunter College
The Wildlife Society, SUNY ESF
The Yoga Collective, SUNY New Paltz
Undergraduate Student Association, SUNY ESF
Undergraduate Student Government, Hunter College
UNICEF Campus Initiative and Global Surgery Student Alliance, Hunter College
United For Israel, Brooklyn College
United Nations Association, SUNY New Paltz
United Students Government at Buffalo State, Buffalo State College
Vietnamese Student Association (VSA), Hunter College
Wall Street Club, Nassau Community College
Wilderness Adventures Club, Buffalo State College
Women Empowered to Lead, SUNY New Paltz
Women in Computer Science, City College of NY
Women In Science, QCC
Women's Robotics Club, City College of NY
Young Democratic Socialists of America, Hunter College
Young Democrats, SUNY Cortland
Zeta Phi Alpha, Hunter College