



March 6, 2017

Honorable Andrew Cuomo  
Governor of New York State  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Honorable Carl Heastie  
Speaker, NYS Assembly  
LOB 932  
Albany, NY 12248

Honorable John Flanagan  
Majority Leader, NYS Senate  
Room 330, State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12247

Honorable Jeff Klein  
Senate Coalition/IDC Leader  
LOB 913  
Albany, NY 12247

Honorable Brian Kolb  
Minority Leader, Assembly  
LOB 933  
Albany, NY 12248

Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins  
Minority Leader, NYS Senate  
LOB 907  
Albany, NY 12247

Dear Governor Cuomo, Speaker Heastie and Leaders Flanagan, Klein, Kolb and Stewart-Cousins,

The CUNY Rising Alliance, a growing coalition of 30 community groups, non-profits, unions, student advocates and faith-based organizations, thanks you all for your leadership in proposing policy and budget reforms aimed at making college more affordable for New Yorkers. The Alliance has called for about a \$2 billion increase in state and city funding for the City University of New York (CUNY), phased in over four years, to achieve the goals of free tuition, improved instructional quality and infrastructure, and additional academic and financial supports for all CUNY students regardless of income, credit course load or immigration status.

We write to provide detailed recommendations on how the state should improve existing proposals in the Fiscal Year 2018 State Budget as we collectively move toward a goal of an affordable, high-quality public higher education for all who wish to attend CUNY.

In January, Governor Cuomo, joined by college affordability champion Senator Bernie Sanders, announced a bold new program that would make public colleges tuition-free for all New Yorkers earning up to \$125,000 at all SUNY and CUNY colleges. The subsequent FY'18 Executive Budget detailed a proposed Excelsior Scholarship, a plan that aims to make college more affordable for New Yorkers. Similar proposals have arisen to expand access to the Tuition Assistance Program, address the student debt burden and ensure more families can attain a higher education. While all these proposals intend to make college more affordable, state leaders would be wise to take another look at Senator Sanders' "College for All" Act, which is a far better model to achieve higher education affordability and quality.

Below is a detailed analysis of the FY'18 Executive Budget. On page three the CUNY Rising Alliance recommendations, to make necessary steps toward the full funding with an initial investment of \$588.5 million achieve free and quality education for all, are described.

**Affordability and Eligibility:** Senator Sanders' 'College for All' Act promised to make tuition free at all two-year and four-year public colleges and universities. He also proposed a budget plan to fund the cost of the bill. All students would be eligible for the Sanders version of tuition-free education.

Governor Cuomo's Excelsior Scholarship promises to deliver a tuition-free education to certain students, not by making public higher education tuition-free for all, but by paying the remainder of tuition not covered by state Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) grants, federal Pell grants, tuition waivers, and other financial aid.

To qualify for the Excelsior Scholarship, students must take and pass 15 credits every semester, intend to graduate in four years at a senior college or two years at a community college and maintain a "C" average or better. (Both TAP and Pell grants define full-time status as 12 credits per semester.) Under current law, if a student is undocumented, part-time, or unable to receive TAP for any reason, they would be ineligible for the Excelsior program. Notably, the Governor's Executive Budget would enact the DREAM Act and extend TAP eligibility to include undocumented students. The Excelsior Scholarship program will be rolled out over a three year period. Families or individuals making up to \$100,000 a year would be eligible in the fall of 2017. Family income eligibility will increase to \$110,000 in 2018 and \$125,000 in 2019. By contrast, every individual who wants to attain higher education from a public institution would be eligible under the 'College for All' Act.

According to the Governor's office, more than 940,000 New York households earn less than \$125,000 per year and have college-age children who are eligible for the Excelsior Scholarship. But far fewer students would benefit from the scholarship. This estimate does not account for students who attend private colleges, students who already receive full financial aid packages, those enrolled and taking fewer than 15 credits per semester, undergraduates who do not fall within the definition of 'college-age' and students who take longer than four or eight semesters to graduate. Those who participate in the Excelsior program and later fail to meet these eligibility requirements, at any point, will have the benefits of the scholarship revoked for the rest of their college tenure and will be expected to repay the outstanding tuition. Of CUNY undergraduates, 59% come from families with annual incomes less than \$30,000. Consequently, college affordability, for many of these families, is relatively complex involving tuition costs and Metrocards, food, rent and childcare. These additional costs of attendance can be barriers to college access. The Sanders and Cuomo proposals present very different conceptions of free tuition and different visions for public financing of higher education.

**Support Services:** Funding provided by the 'College for All' Act could be used to expand academic opportunities and support services for students. With such an investment, programs like ASAP, CUNY SEEK and College Discovery would be able to assist a greater number of students. Bolstering these programs requires additional staff and resources. The Excelsior Scholarship does not contain any provision on student support services and the Executive Budget actually cuts funding for programs like ASAP, SEEK and College Discovery by \$10.5 million.

**Faculty:** The 'College for All' Act stipulates that 5 years after its enactment, at least 75% of instruction must be provided by full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty. This provision intends to limit an institution's reliance on low-paid and exploited adjunct faculty and to stabilize the teaching workforce. The Excelsior Scholarship does not include provisions to either strengthen the quality of instruction or increase the number of full-time faculty at CUNY. In addition, the Executive Budget offers no provision to increase the number of full-time instructors. Currently, only 47% of CUNY undergraduate courses are taught by full-time faculty. It would require the hiring of more than 4,000 full-time faculty to bring CUNY up to a 75% rate of full-time instruction.

**Infrastructure:** Under the 'College for All' Act, institutions would be prohibited from using funding to construct non-academic buildings. Funding could only be used to improve or build infrastructure that enhances the academic development of students. The Excelsior Scholarship provides no details on

strengthening infrastructure to meet the needs of students. The Executive Budget, however, allocates \$456 million in new funds for capital improvement at CUNY, including \$284 million for critical maintenance projects.

**Maintenance of Effort:** The ‘College for All’ Act would require states to maintain or increase operating expenditures each year, to address the growing demands on infrastructure and services in order to meet the learning needs of the existing and expanding student population. The Excelsior Scholarship provides no details about how to support the growing Maintenance of Effort or yearly additional costs of CUNY. The Executive Budget also fails to provide state resources to cover year-over-year increased costs like rent, heat, and contractual obligations. Nor does it provide public funding to increase CUNY’s capacity to serve new and increased cohorts of students who will likely be attracted by the promise of free tuition.

Finally, the Executive Budget includes a tuition increase of \$250 for each year over the next 5 years at CUNY and SUNY, which is a fundamental contradiction in relation to the promise of free tuition. For tens of thousands of low-income New Yorkers who do not qualify for the Excelsior Scholarship, tuition will increase \$1,250 during the next five years, which may also increase over time the TAP gap burden on both CUNY and SUNY. In its current form, the Excelsior Scholarship proposal doesn’t achieve its goal of making CUNY and SUNY tuition-free.

### **FY’18 State Budget Recommendations**

To ensure the Excelsior Scholarship proposal is strengthened to truly support all deserving New Yorkers, the CUNY Rising Alliance proposes the following recommendations, which reflect the needs of a growing, more diverse and non-traditional student population. Overall, we recommend a \$588.5 million increased investment for CUNY and its students in FY’18 (combined state and NYC) and similar increases in each of the next 3 years, to truly achieve the goal a free and fully-funded CUNY system.

1. **Fully fund and expand TAP while reducing tuition.** Increase the maximum TAP award so it covers the full cost of SUNY and CUNY tuition. Under current law, CUNY and SUNY must provide TAP-eligible students with a partial tuition credit, called a “TAP waiver credit,” which covers the difference between the full cost of tuition (currently \$6,330 at CUNY) and the maximum TAP award (currently \$5,165). Expand the TAP eligibility to include part-time and undocumented students. Allow every undergraduate to be eligible regardless of grade point average or number of credit hours taken. CUNY has spent more than \$180 million since 2012 on covering the unfunded TAP waiver. Those dollars might have been spent on the full-time instructional and support services students desperately need. **We recommend an initial investment of \$175 million, which includes \$41 million to cover the TAP waiver, \$36 million to freeze tuition at the FY2017 level and \$27 million to provide TAP to undocumented students. The remaining \$71 million would first focus on funding TAP for part-time students and other TAP reforms as part of the four-year rollout to provide free tuition to all students. This \$175 million would serve as the first installment of \$700 million to provide free tuition to all students in four years.**

2. **Boost the number of full-time faculty to enhance the mentoring, continuity and quality of education provided to students.** CUNY students are largely taught by adjunct faculty. Part-time faculty face structural issues of pay, workload and benefits that impact the quality of education provided to students. As the number of students increases, we must invest in instruction so every student has access to proper mentorship, instruction and research opportunities. **We recommend an initial investment of \$80 million to employ an additional 1,000 full-time faculty.**
3. **Expand services and programs that make college more accessible and affordable (including support for food, transportation, housing and other needs).** Successful programs like CUNY ASAP, CUNY Start, CLIP, CUNY SEEK, CUNY LEADS, the Black Male Initiative, Single Stop and CUNY Child Care Centers need to be expanded to serve more students in both two-year and four-year programs. Programs like these improve overall graduation rates, helping more students to graduate on-time. **We recommend restoration of the \$10.5 million in funding from FY2017 levels and an additional investment of \$40 million.** This amount would be used to hire 400 support staff members and we want to work with the State to identify support mechanisms to address food, transportation and other needs of students.
4. **Increase money for infrastructure and Maintenance of Effort (MOE), enabling equal access to facilities and resources.** The MOE must include year-over-year cost increases, which otherwise are borne by CUNY. If CUNY is not allocated these resources, the dollars available for full-time faculty and support services shrink. The infrastructure of CUNY must also be funded so it has the capacity to more quickly repair and upgrade physical spaces on campuses, which are often vital to including students with disabilities and establishing critical learning space. **We recommend an initial investment of \$283 million, which includes \$81.1 million for mandatory increases and \$201.9 million for infrastructural projects, above the new funds allocated in the Executive Budget.**

The CUNY Rising Alliance recommendations are outlined in a white paper report here: <http://bit.ly/2gliX1b>. Given how Senator Bernie Sanders approached funding the ‘College for All’ Act, there are considerable ideas to pull from that can generate the funding needed to turn these recommendations for truly free and quality public higher education into a reality.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration. We respectfully request a meeting to discuss our recommendations and ways to work together to achieve shared goals.

Endorsed By:  
Alliance for Quality Education  
Black Youth Project 100 NYC  
BALCONY  
Citizen Action  
CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities  
CUNY University Student Senate

Coalition for Educational Justice  
College Access Consortium of NY  
Cypress Hills Lower Development Corporation  
Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies  
Greater New York Labor-Religion Coalition  
Hispanic Federation  
Make The Road NY  
New York Communities for Change  
New York Immigration Coalition  
NYPIRG  
NYS Youth Leadership Council  
Professional Staff Congress CUNY  
Students for Educational Rights CCNY  
Strong Economy for All  
Urban Youth Collaborative  
VOCAL- NY  
Working Families Party  
Young Invincibles