



UNITED UNIVERSITY PROFESSIONS
Testimony on the
2023-2024 Executive Budget for Higher
Education

Presented To:
Senator Liz Krueger, Chair
Senate Finance Committee
and
Assemblymember Helene E. Weinstein, Chair
Assembly Ways and Means Committee

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Chairperson Kreuger, Chairperson Weinstein, distinguished members of the Senate Finance Committee and Assembly Ways and Means Committee, thank you for inviting United University Professions (UUP) to testify on the 2023-2024 Executive Budget for higher education.

My name is Dr. Frederick E. Kowal, and I am the president of UUP, the largest higher education union in the country. It is my honor to represent more than 37,000 academic and professional faculty at SUNY. Our members live and work in communities across the state of New York, serving hundreds of thousands of students and patients at 29 SUNY comprehensive, technical, specialized and university centers, SUNY academic medical centers and state-operated public teaching hospitals, and System Administration.

Before I begin my remarks on the Executive Budget, I'd first like to congratulate Assemblymember Pat Fahy on her appointment as the new chair of the Assembly Higher Education Committee. I have known Assemblymember Fahy for many years. She is an intelligent, passionate, and dedicated public servant who I'm certain will excel in this role. I also know she will be a perfect complement and partner to Chairperson Stavisky in the Senate. Sen. Stavisky has been an incredible advocate for public higher education and UUP members, and SUNY students are fortunate to have both of you as chairs of the higher education committees in your respective houses.

I also want to thank Assemblymember Deborah Glick for her years of exemplary leadership, advocacy, dedication and service to public higher education in this state as chair of the Assembly Higher Education Committee. UUP members and a generation of students all owe you a debt of gratitude, Assemblymember. Thank you for your hard work and commitment to public higher education in New York.

STATE OPERATING AID

Turning to the 2023-24 Executive Budget. I'd like to focus on SUNY's most crucial issue, the need for more direct state operating aid. Last year, the Governor announced her goal to revitalize SUNY to make it the best public higher education system in the nation. UUP fully supports that goal, and we have vowed to work with the Governor and the Legislature to make it a reality.

Critical increased operating aid (\$60 million), full-time faculty funding (\$53 million) and SUNY hospital debt service costs were included in last year's state

budget. Unfortunately for the neediest state-operated campuses—predominately our comprehensive and technology campuses—SUNY distributed just \$8.7 million to them in operating aid and only \$8.2 million in full-time faculty funding. These limited funds were spread across 17 campuses. The lion's share of this funding went to our four university centers, which are generally in a much better fiscal situation than our comprehensive and technology campuses.

We urge you to work with the Governor to ensure that the disbursement of state funding for SUNY's state-operated campuses is done in a more equitable manner than in the past and is based on actual campus needs. We must move away from the practice of enriching the wealthiest campuses at the expense of most of our campuses—which serve the vast majority of students. Still, last year's enacted state budget was a step in the right direction to begin to address the longstanding state underfunding of SUNY.

In the Executive Budget, \$60 million in additional operating aid is set aside for SUNY state-operated campuses and statutory campuses. In addition, \$53 million is provided for our four-year campuses and the community colleges for full-time faculty. It is unclear however, how much of that funding will be available to hire additional faculty this year and how much will be used to pay for fringe benefits of faculty hired last year.

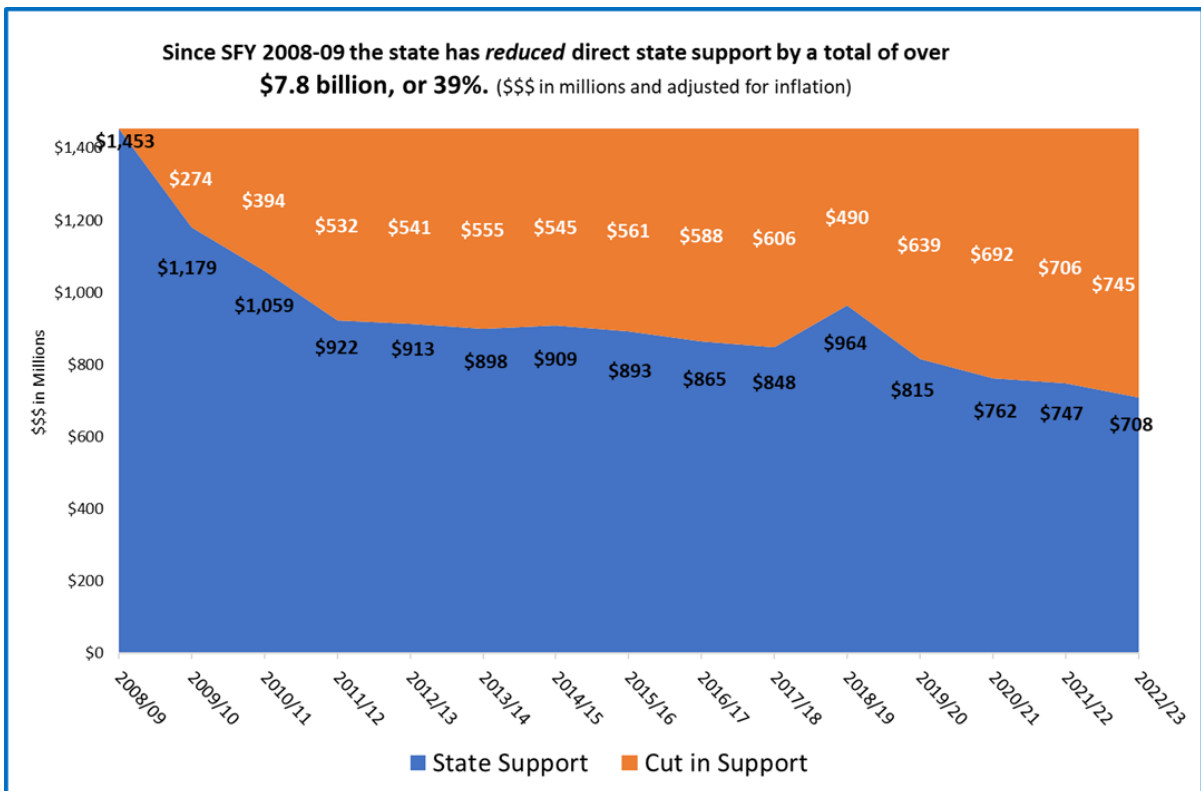
The proposal also provides \$75 million in nonrecurring SUNY transformational funding for the state-operated campuses, statutory colleges and community colleges. These dollars are for improving academic programs, increasing student enrollment, innovation and other initiatives. Moreover, up to \$500 million is available in state matching funds to establish an endowment fund for SUNY's four university centers. The fund will provide \$1 of state funds for every \$2 of private contributions to the universities' endowments.

While UUP appreciates this additional funding, much more is required to ameliorate a decade and a half of inadequate state funding for SUNY. Sustained underinvestment in SUNY has caused the unfortunate, unnecessary and untenable financial situations too many of our campuses and teaching hospitals find themselves in today.

FIGURE 1, on the next page, illustrates the disturbing history of direct state tax support (adjusted for inflation) for SUNY state-operated campuses from SFY 2008-09 through SFY 2022-23. This graphic shows a decline in direct state support of over \$7.8 billion, or 39 percent, over this period.

If you compare the current SFY with SFY 2008-09, there is a 51 percent decline. The numbers in white font reflect accumulated yearly losses (in millions) in direct state tax support compared to the level of state support in SFY 2008-09. Further, after examining the data in FIGURE 1, the obvious questions that arise are: How have SUNY campuses remained fiscally solvent and how have they been able to educate students?

FIGURE 1: SUNY’S HISTORY OF DECLINING DIRECT STATE SUPPORT [Excludes SUNY Teaching Hospitals]



Numbers in white represent the loss each year in millions of dollars in direct state support compared to the SFY 2008-09 amount of \$1,453.

The short answer is through the overreliance on student tuition and fees. This overreliance has negatively impacted the financial health and educational programs of too many SUNY campuses. In fact, 19 state-operated SUNY campuses are now facing structural deficits. These campuses are almost entirely in Upstate New York and in most cases, are the biggest employers in their communities.

FIGURE 2, below, shows the current structural deficits of these campuses—totaling \$160 million—and the disturbing history of direct state tax support since SFY 2008-09. When you compare the direct state tax support provided in SFY 2008-09 with the current SFY and adjust for inflation, there is a decline of 80.5 percent.

FIGURE 2: 19 SUNY CAMPUSES IN FINANCIAL DISTRESS

CAMPUS	CURRENT 2022-23 DEFICIT (IN MILLIONS)	2008/09 STATE APPROPRIATIONS (IN MILLIONS)		2022/23 STATE APPROPRIATIONS (IN MILLIONS)	PERCENTAGE DECREASE IN STATE APPROPRIATIONS	
		Nominal	Inflation Adjusted		Nominal	Inflation Adjusted
ALBANY	(\$15.0)	\$160.29	\$225.31	\$49.16	-69%	-78%
BROCKPORT	(\$9.9)	\$59.73	\$83.96	\$15.48	-74%	-82%
BUFFALO STATE	(\$19.3)	\$79.88	\$112.29	\$21.19	-73%	-81%
CANTON	(\$5.5)	\$19.77	\$27.80	\$5.52	-72%	-80%
COBLESKILL	(\$4.0)	\$21.83	\$30.69	\$6.03	-72%	-80%
CORTLAND	(\$10.9)	\$51.31	\$72.13	\$12.39	-76%	-83%
DELHI	(\$8.4)	\$19.41	\$27.29	\$5.66	-71%	-79%
EMPIRE STATE COLLEGE	(\$6.9)	\$50.81	\$71.43	\$7.69	-85%	-89%
ESF	(\$9.0)	\$36.50	\$51.31	\$19.98	-45%	-61%
FREDONIA	(\$16.0)	\$42.35	\$59.53	\$11.58	-73%	-81%
GENESE0	(\$9.1)	\$42.25	\$59.39	\$10.57	-75%	-82%
MORRISVILLE	(\$5.8)	\$26.75	\$37.60	\$7.14	-73%	-81%
NEW PALTZ	(\$4.0)	\$57.98	\$81.51	\$14.01	-76%	-83%
OLD WESTBURY	(\$8.0)	\$29.31	\$41.20	\$8.90	-70%	-78%
ONEONTA	(\$1.9)	\$46.48	\$65.33	\$11.36	-76%	-83%
OSWEGO	(\$5.0)	\$57.77	\$81.20	\$13.87	-76%	-83%
PLATTSBURGH	(\$7.8)	\$48.51	\$68.19	\$10.65	-78%	-84%
POTSDAM	(\$5.5)	\$39.50	\$55.52	\$11.12	-72%	-80%
PURCHASE	(\$8.0)	\$41.02	\$57.66	\$12.70	-69%	-78%
TOTAL	(\$160.0)	\$931.46	\$1,309.33	\$255.00	-72.62%	-80.52%

This troubling history of state funding has been a conscious policy decision made by former governors, which has ultimately caused harm to students, their families, and our members who teach and work in SUNY. The lack of adequate state support, despite rising operational costs and increased operational needs, have forced these campuses to raise tuition and fees and to offload services to auxiliary enterprises—which charge students and their families even more.

Students are now contributing \$2 for every dollar the state provides. The sustained over-reliance on tuition revenue has not been sufficient to enable these campuses to adequately enhance student programming. In fact, many campuses have found it increasingly difficult to maintain current levels of programming, which has affected their ability to remain academically competitive.

Furthermore, some campuses have had to take more drastic steps to balance their budgets by utilizing reserve funds or by cutting class sections and reducing program offerings. These actions have impeded their ability to attract and retain students. Reductions in enrollment have reduced tuition revenue, which has caused a downward spiral on the financial well-being of these campuses.

It's important to understand the issue and cause of declining enrollment. A great deal of emphasis has been placed on changes in demographics as the main culprit. While the pandemic and shifts in state population demographics have been factors in enrollment declines, sustained reductions in direct state tax support over the last 10 to 15 years are the main cause. Other factors have also been more impactful than demographic shifts, such as race and class.

For example, nearly half of all Black high school graduates and a third of Hispanic high school graduates are not enrolled in college. A third of low-and-middle income high school graduates are not enrolled in college. This is surprising when you consider the concerted efforts New York state has made over the last decade to expand access to underserved students. In addition, the issue of college persistence – completing a degree once enrolled – varies widely by race and social class.

According to the High School Longitudinal Study (a national survey that followed high school freshmen through college starting in 2009 with the last follow-up in 2016), only 61 percent of Hispanic freshmen and 57 percent of Black freshmen graduated with their high school class and enrolled in college. In comparison, 80 percent of Asian and 70 percent of white high school freshmen graduated with their high school class and attended college. By the study's end in 2016, only 40 percent of Black and Hispanic students were still enrolled or had completed degrees compared to roughly 75 percent of Asian students and 60 percent of white students.

This data illustrates the inaccuracy and danger of the demographic crisis narrative. As this narrative has become accepted, the state's public policy solution has been to raise tuition, which only exacerbates the enrollment problem by creating further barriers to access. We cannot simply "tax" our way out of this problem through tuition hikes on students. Rather, we must grow our way out of this problem.

This requires the state to financially recommit itself to SUNY. The state needs to remember the core mission of SUNY, which was created as a system of universities and colleges to provide any state resident – no matter what zip code they reside in—access to an affordable, quality higher education. Due to the lack of state support, as illustrated in FIGURES 1 and 2, too many of our campuses are struggling to carry out that mission. How can we expect students to put any value on, or financially commit themselves to our state university system, when the state clearly has not?

UUP members across New York are requesting that you prioritize additional funding for SUNY's state-operated campuses in this year's state budget. This funding will be crucial to providing the debt relief and ongoing operating aid to stabilize SUNY's campuses.

Specifically, UUP requests \$160 million for the establishment of the State University Financially Distressed Campus Fund. This fund would provide direct allocations to 19 campuses in financial jeopardy based on each campus's structural deficit. In addition, we call for an increase of \$110 million in general SUNY operating aid to enable campuses to invest in high-demand and growing programs and to increase and retain student enrollment.

I cannot overemphasize how critical this funding is to the future of our state university system. Nineteen SUNY campuses desperately need this funding for stabilization, and all SUNY campuses need an increase in general operating aid to remain academically competitive. Our 19 campuses are now at a tipping point and need an infusion of state operating dollars to keep them fiscally solvent. Without this aid, they will ultimately fail and the state will suffer economically, particularly in our upstate communities.

Census data clearly shows people are leaving our state for other areas. New York has experienced a precipitous drop in population over many decades and this outmigration has occurred primarily from upstate communities. Gone are many of the correctional institutions, the factories, mills and other industries that have historically made up the economic base for Upstate New York.

While there was a concerted effort over the last decade by the Cuomo Administration to provide billions of dollars in funding for upstate economic development projects, the results of those efforts have largely failed to achieve their stated goals. In fact, New York state and local governments spend nearly \$10 billion a year on economic development projects having little or no effect on the upstate economy, while outmigration continues. And New York lost another congressional seat because of the 2020 Census.

SUNY is a proven economic engine for the state and the communities it serves. It is well established that for every dollar invested in SUNY, eight dollars is generated in economic output. According to a 2018 Rockefeller Institute of Government report, SUNY's annual economic impact on the state is nearly \$29 billion. We know SUNY students tend stay and work in New York state after graduation. Currently, 1.78 million SUNY graduates are working in the state, and 34 percent of New York's educated workforce have SUNY degrees.

SUNY provides a great return on the state's investment. Yet, the state has ignored this fact by continuously and deliberately underfunding it. What will be left of the Upstate economy if our SUNY campuses are no longer financially viable? They have trimmed all they can from their budgets and are not in a good position to borrow money to pay for operational expenses. These campuses are also facing strong headwinds in terms of their general future financial credit outlook.

When examining the credit outlooks for the higher education sector, both Fitch Ratings and S&P Global see significant challenges ahead. In December 2022, Fitch issued its annual outlook, which was distinctly more pessimistic than their prior year's report. Although the sector-wide outlook is still "Stable," problems of inflation, poor enrollment, and labor pressures all preclude an improved rating. Fitch states that increased public funding, boosted enrollments, and slackening inflation will be necessary for an improved outlook. Also, it anticipates a "moderate but steady" increase in college closings and mergers. Fitch states that larger, selective institutions with a diverse revenue mix will perform much better than smaller schools that are reliant on tuition. It further declares that tuition as a revenue source has been mostly maxed out.

S&P Global issued a mixed outlook in January 2023, saying that the sector was generally stable but divided. Larger institutions (i.e., SUNY university centers) will enjoy continued good credit ratings because they can retain strong student demand and flexibility in pricing. Their outlook on smaller colleges (i.e., SUNY comprehensive and technology colleges), on the other hand, was more pessimistic stating ratings will erode as expenses grow faster than revenue. Like Fitch, S&P thinks the pandemic exacerbated the divide between the strengthening of larger institutions and the weakening of smaller ones.

This is the case in SUNY. The university centers are in a much better financial situation than the comprehensive and technology campuses due primarily to larger state appropriations and SUNY's internal budget allocation process. One of SUNY's greatest strengths is that it is an integrated system. The state should not pick winners and losers in that system. Doing so is economically counterproductive and contrary to SUNY's mission.

I urge you to provide the \$160 million to stabilize our campuses in financial distress and provide \$110 million to enable all campuses to remain academically competitive.

FULLY FUND SUNY TEACHING HOSPITALS

As with SUNY's 19 campuses in financial distress, I'm deeply concerned about the financial challenges faced by our three state-operated teaching hospitals. The 2023-24 Executive Budget fails to provide any critical mission funding or state coverage of debt service payments for the hospitals. While the Executive Budget does provide \$72 million in additional disproportionate share funding, it is unclear whether that funding will be available this year or over two years. Regardless, much more state support is needed to financially stabilize these vital public health care institutions.

UUP fully supports SUNY's budget request of \$175 million for critical mission funding (state subsidy) and I urge you to work with the Governor to approve this funding. We also urge the state to continue covering debt service payments for the hospitals' capital projects, as it does for all other state agencies. In addition, we request legislation be enacted in this year's budget that requires the state to permanently cover capital and fringe benefit costs going forward. SUNY hospitals are the only state public entities that incur these costs. This discriminatory practice is wrong, counterproductive and must stop now. We ask for your help in fixing this situation.

Our teaching hospitals in Brooklyn, Syracuse, and Stony Brook have provided more than 1.3 million New Yorkers statewide with high-quality health care, regardless of ability to pay or severity of cases presented. These vital public teaching hospitals were on the front line in the state's response to the coronavirus pandemic. Downstate was declared a COVID-only hospital, Stony Brook treated thousands of COVID patients, and Upstate, as the largest hospital in Central New York, took on the COVID surge and developed the first COVID-19 rapid test—a game-changer in the fight against the virus.

During this time, UUP members served under the most difficult circumstances often putting their own health, and that of their family members, at great risk. This effort continues even today as we have seen a spike in COVID-19 cases in recent months. Our state hospitals continue to struggle financially and are having difficulty in retaining underpaid and overworked staff.

Equally as unfortunate, the public health and teaching missions of these hospitals have gone largely unappreciated and taken for granted by the state over the last 10 to 15 years. These vital public institutions have been pushed to the brink of

insolvency, faced privatization efforts and have been treated inequitably when compared to other state public institutions. While some fiscal relief was provided in last year’s state budget (with the state covering \$69 million in debt service payments), this does not begin to scratch the surface of what is needed to financially stabilize our hospitals.

In reality, our SUNY hospitals have been teetering on fiscal insolvency for many years now. They have subsisted—and mainly survived—over the past couple of years on federal grants and loans. The loans, totaling almost \$400 million, were recently repaid, once again leaving our hospitals in an all-too-familiar precarious financial situation, with little to no help from the state. The dire fiscal situation faced by our hospitals, like those of the 19 campuses, are directly attributable to deliberate financial neglect by the state.

FIGURE 3: STATE CRITICAL MISSION FUNDING (STATE SUBSIDY) FOR SUNY’S PUBLIC HOSPITALS HAS FLATLINED

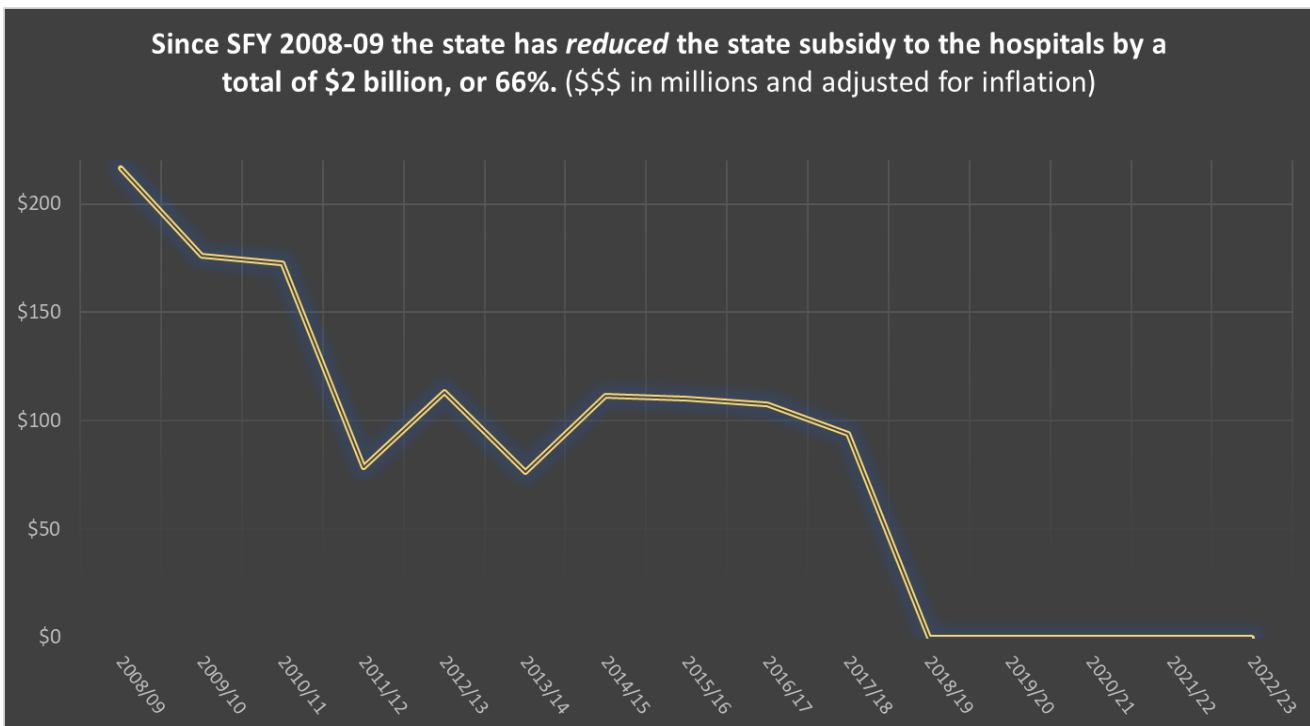


FIGURE 3, above, clearly shows the state’s disinvestment in these hospitals. When adjusted for inflation, from SFY 2008-09 to the present day, SUNY hospitals have lost nearly \$2 billion dollars in state funding. The Cuomo Administration eliminated state critical mission funding for our hospitals.

The data in **FIGURE 3** doesn't even account for the years where SUNY was required by the Cuomo Administration to pay for the state's matching share of federal Disproportionate Share (DSH) funding that should have been paid by the state. To make matters worse, the Cuomo Administration often kept portions of the federal DSH funding that SUNY paid the match for and used it for other purposes.

This state financial neglect is counterproductive and will have detrimental effects to our state's health care system if continued. This system has undoubtedly been severely strained by the pandemic—which has also exposed a critical health care staffing shortage.

It is abundantly clear: We are in dire need of additional health care practitioners in this state. This health care staffing shortage is not unique to New York, it's nationwide. It is a growing problem that has necessitated states to recruit medical professionals aggressively and openly from other states. Just as states competed with other states for personal protective gear during the height of the pandemic, the same competition is now happening between states for medical professionals.

States are paying top-dollar for the recruitment and retention of these professionals. Last year, Gov. Kathy Hochul put out a recruitment call to out-of-state nurses, offering financial incentives to come to New York. These staffing shortages are not only in nursing, but also in primary care physicians, emergency room physicians and laboratory technologists, among others. While many of these shortages have been dramatically exacerbated by pandemic pressures placed on our health care system, the problem was caused by systemic issues that predated the pandemic and will continue after the pandemic resolves.

Instead of investing in and seeking out-of-state solutions, the state should invest in and utilize our SUNY hospitals to help solve this growing problem. The SUNY teaching hospitals play a crucial role in educating and training the next generation of medical professionals. Their mission must be financially supported and expanded if we are going to begin to address the medical staffing crisis in this state. The state should take advantage of our own ability to produce these professionals right here at home. We urge the Legislature to make these strategic investments.

We are pleased to see that the Governor has recognized the need to invest in the capital infrastructure of our state's health care system with her \$1 billion statewide Health Care Facility Transformation Program proposal. This program would fund capital projects, improve health care delivery and finance information technology improvements. While Upstate Medical University and Stony Brook University Hospital would be eligible for this program, SUNY Downstate Health

Sciences University is not eligible due to its participation in the Health Care Facility Transformation Program: Kings County Project.

It should be noted Downstate was left out of funding opportunities that resulted from the One Brooklyn/Vital Brooklyn plan. We urge you to amend this legislation to make SUNY Downstate eligible for participation in this program. Not only was SUNY Downstate declared to be a COVID only hospital during the worst days of the pandemic (a serious unfunded mandate), it is also at the epicenter of a maternal morbidity crisis.

To deal with this crisis, UUP strongly supports the creation of a Center of Maternal and Child Care Services to be located at SUNY Downstate. This institution can play an integral role in researching and addressing maternal morbidity and children's health care issues. Eligibility in the Governor's statewide Health Care Facility Transformation Program would allow SUNY Downstate to apply for the funding needed to build the infrastructure for this Center. It would also allow the hospital to apply for funding to build a critically needed new emergency room.

To conclude, these public institutions answered the state's call during the pandemic and were lauded for their heroic public service—a service that exacerbated their existing unsustainable financial situations. I ask the state to answer SUNY's and UUP's call to provide the additional funding needed to stabilize our public teaching hospitals and enable them to continue to carry out their public health care missions.

STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY

Thank you for the tremendous focus and support you have provided to this extremely important issue in recent years. It is because of your collective efforts that thousands of economically disadvantaged students have been able to pursue their dreams of obtaining a college degree. As the president of UUP and a SUNY faculty member for 38 years, I'm proud of the array of student tuition assistance, scholarship and opportunity programs available to students. As with most things, there is always room for improvement.

I'll begin with the state's Tuition Assistance Program (TAP). In 2021, the state budget included language to freeze tuition at SUNY for three years. As a result, tuition costs have not increased. However, mandatory student fees have continued to increase over the last two years. The range of student fees for state-operated campuses is between \$1,260 and \$3,440. On top of mandatory fees, students still need to pay for supplies and books which can cost over \$1,000 per year. Most students also incur the costs of room and board, which

are higher than tuition. To help students with these continuing rising costs, UUP requests that the Legislature expand TAP to cover student fees and books.

Expanding TAP to cover these expenses would be a lifeline for many students struggling to pay for school. Many SUNY students are graduating with tens of thousands of dollars in debt, worsening the student debt crisis in this country. More state funding for TAP would also help address the racial wealth gap in our state. For example, while Black students make up about 10 percent of SUNY's total enrollment, 52 percent of Black students are Pell Grant recipients and 32 percent are eligible for TAP. In contrast, only 25 percent of white students are Pell Grant recipients and 19 percent qualify for TAP.

Education is the great equalizer and making the costs of student fees and books aid able is a commonsense way to alleviate some of the financial burden on our most economically challenged students.

UUP also requests that the Excelsior Scholarship be modified and expanded. Created in 2017, the Excelsior Scholarship has been touted as a free tuition program for middle class New Yorkers. The program has been underutilized however, due to many obstacles creating barriers for students to access the scholarship. More than \$400 million previously allocated to the program has gone unspent. Utilized properly, the Excelsior Scholarship can increase access and affordability to more New Yorkers. UUP is calling on the state to:

- Increase the family income threshold to \$180,000 annually to help more people qualify for the program.
- Reduce the academic requirement from 30 credit hours per academic year to 12 credit hours per semester. This would bring the Excelsior Scholarship in line with the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP).
- Expand Excelsior to cover student fees and books.
- Remove the three-year financial look-back.

Students should be able to focus on their education and not have to worry about paying back insurmountable amounts of student debt upon graduation. The state needs to remove barriers and make it easier for New Yorkers to access the hundreds of millions of unused dollars allocated to this scholarship to help offset the costs of college.

Turning to student opportunity programs, the 2023-24 Executive Budget reduces funding to the Educational Opportunity Program by \$1.3 million. EOP has been remarkably successful, empowering more than 78,000 students to earn a college degree, and consequently promoting upward social mobility and financial

prosperity. Nearly three-quarters of EOP students complete their bachelor's degree within 6 years and EOP students have an 82 percent retention rate. More than two-thirds of EOP graduates live and work in New York after earning a degree. With such high success rates, we believe cutting funding to this program is counterproductive.

We urge you to restore the Executive Budget cut and provide an additional \$4.5 million to this program. The additional funding would help expand current programs and support new programs and intensify EOP recruitment efforts.

UUP also requests that \$5 million be provided to expand the Medical Education Opportunity Program (MEOP). This program was provided \$1 million in last year's budget. This program presents SUNY with a unique opportunity to support the health care industry with its staffing shortage struggle that I touched on earlier. Providing additional funding to expand this program would provide life-changing opportunities for students who are seeking to pursue careers in medical fields that the state desperately needs.

Moreover, the state's health care system's staffing shortage is not limited to medical professionals. It's also in desperate need for additional mental health professionals. To help address this shortage, UUP is requesting the creation of a Mental Health Educational Opportunity Program (MHEOP).

This program would help increase the state's number of mental health professionals, and like EOP and MEOP, it would diversify these professions. There is a huge disparity between the demographic makeup of behavioral health professionals and the general population. The state must do more to recruit mental health providers from diverse backgrounds. This is especially crucial as many individuals' mental health struggles stem from trauma related to racism and economic distress.

UUP requests \$4 million to support students pursuing degrees leading to mental health professional careers. We also request an additional \$4 million to create the Mental Health Educational Opportunity Program within SUNY. We suggest that the \$8 million to fund this initiative come from the Governor's \$1 billion budget proposal to fix New York state's continuum of mental health care.

MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS AT SUNY

It is extremely important for the state to recognize and address the very real unmet mental health needs of SUNY students and staff. I thank Assemblymember Glick for holding a November 2022 hearing on this topic. At that hearing, I pointed out that the need for student mental health services has

been increasing for years. Between 2013 and 2021, college students' mental health has consistently declined, with a 135 percent increase in depression and 110 percent increase in anxiety. The pandemic and its aftershocks have dramatically exacerbated the need for student and staff mental health services and increased the urgency to take immediate and enduring action.

The International Accreditation of Counseling Services recommends a ratio of one psychologist for every 1,000 students. SUNY falls drastically below this standard. SUNY counseling centers are severely understaffed and underfunded. Student demand for services far exceeds the resources that campuses can provide. Too many students must go weeks or months waiting for an appointment, while others are referred to private providers, placing a financial burden on students to cover the cost for care. We cannot allow this to happen to students who may be experiencing a mental health crisis.

UUP requests \$7 million to hire 50 additional mental health counselors, which would bring every campus up to the recommended ratio. This would benefit students by increasing provider options, reducing wait times, and allowing for more frequent appointments. Hiring more counselors across the fields of licensed social workers, licensed mental health counselors and psychologists is essential to mitigate excessive workload and burnout among our current counselors, who work hard each day to support our students.

The funding for this proposal could also come from the Governor's \$1 billion budget proposal to fix New York state's continuum of mental health care.

PRIVITIZATION OF SUNY ESF

It has come to our attention that there are ongoing conversations regarding Syracuse University acquiring SUNY's College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF).

I want to be clear, UUP diametrically opposes the privatization of this unique SUNY doctoral granting research institution. While we have heard the argument that privatizing SUNY ESF is the only way to save this financially distressed campus, we strongly disagree. It is important to note that SUNY ESF's financial troubles are the direct result of the state's unwillingness to fund it properly and have nothing to do with the academic programs and services it provides to its students. In fact, student applications have increased by 41 percent this year.

Given its unique mission and the attractiveness of degrees associated with the environment and the climate crisis, SUNY ESF appeals to more students than the campus can currently serve. Due to years of state financial neglect, it is unable

to accommodate the increased enrollment demands. This campus is in dire need of additional faculty, lab space and other academic space, a dining facility, and increased operating funds to maintain their forest properties, which is vital for its educational mission and research.

There is no reason why SUNY ESF should not be the state's leading higher education research institution on climate change and environmental science while remaining a public college within SUNY. This college has produced cutting edge research throughout its history. For example, it was SUNY ESF's Huntington Forest data that yielded the science around acid rain.

ESF is one of the 19 SUNY campuses in financial distress and desperately needs state investment. UUP requests that the state addresses its structural deficit through the enactment of our proposed State University Financially Distressed Campus Fund. We also request targeted capital funding to the campus for the construction of a multi-floor high-rise building to accommodate its infrastructure needs.

In addition, while we understand that the Executive Budget proposes tuition increases and differential tuition, which are intended to provide financial resources for campuses, UUP is not in support of these proposals. If differential tuition were to be enacted however, we believe tuition at SUNY ESF should match that of the university centers. With its doctoral programs, extensive research capacity and given the size of the institution, it has much more in common with university centers than any other kind of institution in SUNY. It would also be far less than the tuition charged at the Syracuse University.

Privatization is not the answer. The state needs to place value on and invest in SUNY ESF. Increased state direct tax support and targeted capital funding would enable this campus to survive as a public institution in the short-term. With relatively small amounts of continued state investment, this campus would thrive as a leader in climate change and environmental science research in the long-term. We urge the Legislature to oppose any attempts to privatize ESF and instead support our requests for increased funding to this campus.

CONCLUSION

Gov. Hochul's goal of revitalizing SUNY and making it the best public higher education system in the nation cannot happen when all but six of its campuses are in serious financial jeopardy. It's counterproductive to financially starve these campuses. They are a proven economic engine for the state and the communities they serve.

With a surplus of \$8.6 billion, the state has the resources to stabilize SUNY's 19 campuses and hospitals. It's just a matter of priorities. UUP's campus and hospital funding requests can also be paid for with existing funds contemplated in the Executive's proposed financial plan. It's only a matter of reallocating existing appropriations. UUP has a proposal that relocates the \$500 million appropriation in the state financial plan for the SUNY university center endowment. We would be happy to share the details of this plan at your request.

Again, I urge you to provide the funding to stabilize our 19 campuses and teaching hospitals in this year's budget. It is critical for the majority of students who attend these campuses, the 67 percent of faculty and staff who teach and work in these institutions and for the upstate communities they mostly serve.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.