



UNITED UNIVERSITY PROFESSIONS
Testimony on the
2021-22 Executive Budget

Presented To:

Senator Liz Krueger, Chair
Senate Finance Committee
and

Assemblymember Helene E. Weinstein, Chair
Assembly Ways and Means Committee

February 4, 2021

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UNITED UNIVERSITY PROFESSIONS

Chairperson Krueger, 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 2021-22 Executive Budget for higher education.

My name is Dr. Frederick E. Kowal, and I am the president of UUP. 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, I want to thank you for your strong support and tireless efforts to address the TAP Gap, your continuing fight to fully fund our public teaching hospitals, your support for the opportunity programs – and despite the governor’s proposed cuts – your unwavering and never-ending quest to make SUNY as inclusive and accessible as possible. Thank you.

CUTS TO SUNY

Now, after all that, we find SUNY in the crosshairs of a proposed five percent cut (or \$46 million) in general operating support in the Executive Budget. Added to that is the uncertainty of how much New York will receive in COVID-19 relief funding from the Biden administration.

One thing is certain: It is negligent to structure a budget that withholds and rescinds funding from the very institutions that generate economic activity and educate an innovative and skilled work force. SUNY is an economic engine in every region of our state.

This approach will decimate our already cash-depleted campuses. It is shortsighted and ill-advised. You don’t cut your way out of a depression; you take bold steps to invest in essential public services such as SUNY—a proven economic engine—to bounce back.

If the state fails to make such a commitment, SUNY's accessibility and affordability will be negatively impacted, and the system will be unable to sustain the high-quality education and patient care it is known for worldwide.

By significantly reducing aid to SUNY, the governor has chosen to hinder New York's rebound from the coronavirus-induced financial chaos it finds itself in, presenting the potential of layoffs and educational program reductions. He has essentially tied the well-being and future of SUNY directly to the outright uncertainty of the impact of the pandemic on New York.

REVENUE RAISERS

It does not have to be this way; there are a number of untapped revenue streams that, if approved by the Legislature, could send tens of billions of dollars in new revenue flooding into the state. New York could be placed on solid financial footing with the passage of a combination of revenue raisers targeting the mega-rich. These proposals would generate billions of dollars from those who have added to their fortunes each day during the coronavirus pandemic.

We cannot cut state services any longer. Our campuses, our schools and our communities cannot sustain any more austerity. They have been diminished to the breaking point. It is high time that New York's ultra-millionaires and billionaires pay their fair share. It's this simple: Tax. The. Rich.

We urge legislators to consider creating a tax on billionaires (raises \$23 billion in its first year, \$1.3 billion yearly after); approving the Share Act (raises \$2.5 billion); and instituting a progressive income tax system (raises between \$12 billion and \$18 billion).

UUP also supports the reinstatement of the state's Stock Transfer Tax (raises between \$14 billion and \$19 billion annually); a pied-a-terre tax (raises about \$650 million annually); a capital gains tax (raises \$7 billion); and an heirs' tax (raises \$8 billion).

The arguments against reasonable and progressive increases in taxes do not bear out in practice. Since the institution of the Millionaires' Tax

by New York, the number of millionaires in our state has grown. They have not left.

Businesses did not leave when counties incrementally raised their sales tax. The Stock Transfer Tax is essentially a sales tax paid by the trader—not the firm and not by the New York Stock Exchange.

The people that are leaving New York are the working poor and the middle class. They are the people who cannot pay their property taxes or have seen their schools decline because of lack of investment—in them and their communities—by the state.

A CALL FOR MORE: NY HEALS

The governor’s proposed cuts to SUNY will further exacerbate the impact of massive Great Recession-era cuts combined with years of flat state spending on SUNY. Direct state aid to SUNY dropped by about \$660 million from 2007-08 to 2019-20—a decrease of nearly 50 percent, or a third of SUNY’s core operating budget.

As I’ve said before, SUNY is not a “quasi-public” higher education system. We are the State University of New York—A PUBLIC higher education system. These are the PEOPLE’s campuses and the PEOPLE’s hospitals. This is the PEOPLE’s SUNY.

The People’s SUNY deserves more and that is why UUP is proposing NY HEALS (Healthcare, Education, Access, Leadership, Sustainability) our ambitious, wide-ranging legislative proposal that would provide access to healthcare and higher education; essential mission funding for our SUNY public hospitals; and a sustainable path forward for the state.

NY HEALS: HEALTHCARE

This brings us to the discussion of the public academic medical centers in Buffalo, Brooklyn, Stony Brook and Syracuse.

Our three public teaching hospitals, at SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University, Stony Brook University Hospital, and Upstate Medical University continue to be on the front lines of the coronavirus, nearly a year after the virus hit our state. Our health care workers have toiled tirelessly, dedicated to caring for the tens of thousands of New

Yorkers who contracted COVID-19. Our medical researchers are doing groundbreaking nationally recognized work on testing, allowing our campuses and our communities to more rapidly identify and isolate infected individuals.

Our members put their lives and the lives of their families on the line to work extra shifts and double shifts—especially during the height of the pandemic—to provide care and comfort for the thousands of people who survived and thousands more who didn't. Some of our members became infected. Some survived; others did not. We mourn them.

Yet, our valiant soldiers—yes, I refer to them as soldiers because they are at war with a virus that still rages unchecked across the country—haven't received hazard pay or any kind of tangible thank you for their efforts, outside of the gratitude so many of us have for them.

Further compounding this and adding insult to injury, is the delay in contractual raises for UUP members across the system. We are not blind to the financial struggles of our state. But when there are options available to increase revenue for our state and the governor has chosen not to recognize nor act on those options, he is then also choosing not to recognize those who have sacrificed so much for all of us, for all our communities.

Provide Hazard Pay for Frontline Workers

Speaking on behalf of UUP, I urge you to take action to provide hazard pay for our brave frontline workers. And we should go further; UUP supports a free SUNY education for all workers on the front lines of the pandemic. Public workers such as bus drivers, sanitation workers, EMTs, and health care providers who directly provided necessary services to the public should be rewarded for their dedication.

Let's give them the same kind of chance that GIs returning from World War II had: a free SUNY education for anyone who could not telecommute and kept our state moving during the pandemic.

The pandemic exposed the absolute need for the state to make a significant investment in SUNY's public teaching hospitals. Again, I point to SUNY Downstate, which was designated by the governor as a COVID-19-only hospital shortly after the pandemic began in March.

Our members did the best job they could do, battling an as-yet unknown virus that was killing hundreds of people each day at the pandemic's pinnacle in New York City—all while dealing with severe shortages of personal protective equipment such as N95 masks, surgical gowns, gloves and other protective gear.

UUP took quick action to help by sending masks, gowns, gloves and other PPE to our members at the hospitals. Our union purchased 100,000 isolation gowns and delivered those in May—and again last month—to frontline workers at SUNY Downstate, Stony Brook, Upstate, and our members at community hospitals in Buffalo.

UUP will always act to protect our members. However, our hospitals should have ample supply of protective gear for health care workers. These shortages—which should have never happened—are indicative of the state's continued disregard for—and neglect of—our public hospitals and the communities they serve.

Restore SUNY Hospitals' Mission Funding

The state's subsidy for SUNY's hospitals (which wasn't a subsidy at all, but critical funding for a state agency that has costs unlike any other), was cut by 75 percent between 2008 and 2017 and eliminated completely in 2018. The coronavirus pandemic has made it blatantly obvious that New York needs fully funded public hospitals.

SUNY's public teaching hospitals continue to battle the virus as cases climbed statewide through the winter and new, more easily transmissible strains of the virus threaten to infect more New Yorkers in February and into spring.

In addition, our SUNY hospitals are all engaged in crucial COVID-related research. Of particular note, Dr. Frank Middleton, a UUP member and researcher at Upstate developed an FDA-approved pooled saliva test which is being used across SUNY for widespread surveillance testing of students, faculty and staff. This test has allowed for early identification and isolation of infected, often asymptomatic, individuals, limiting the spread of coronavirus on SUNY campuses and protecting campus communities.

Critical mission funding is required for the continued success of our SUNY hospitals. SUNY hospitals provide care for everyone who walks through their doors. No one is turned away, even if they can't pay for care. At the same time, SUNY hospitals continue to be the only state agency or institution required to pay salaries, fringe benefits, and debt service for necessary hospital maintenance. The state covers these costs for every other state government entity. Mission funding for the hospitals was created in part to offset that burden. The state must provide the proper level of support to maintain the quality services delivered by these public hospitals every day.

Fully Cover DSH Funding

Disproportionate share hospital (DSH) payments were created as a joint federal and state program to support hospitals that serve large numbers of Medicaid and low-income patients. This payment is a reimbursement for the care provided to patients without health insurance or other means to pay. As a matching program, these payments are funded partly by New York state and partly by the federal government.

The state has arbitrarily and unilaterally imposed a cap on the amount it will match on federal DSH funds for the three SUNY hospitals. Removing the cap would preserve and continue the state's payment of the SUNY hospitals' DSH funding match—as required by the federal government—to ensure future eligibility for DSH funding.

UUP urges the state to remove the funding cap and fully match DSH funding.

Establish a SUNY Ambulatory Care Centers Network

UUP supports the establishment of a network of 25 SUNY-operated ambulatory care centers, set up in communities across the state to expand high-quality medical care in underserved areas. These centers would also serve as superior learning environments for medical students, interns and residents at SUNY's academic medical centers.

To establish these centers, UUP urges the state to allocate \$250 million each year through 2025.

Make SUNY Downstate Brooklyn's Center of Maternal and Child Services

Because SUNY Downstate is at the epicenter of a severe maternal morbidity crisis, UUP believes that the hospital's mission should be expanded to become the center of maternal and child services in Brooklyn.

Central Brooklyn, the community primarily served by SUNY Downstate, has one of the state's highest maternal mortality and complication rates, according to data from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. A 2017 analysis by ProPublica analysis found that SUNY Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn, where 90 percent of the women who give birth are black, has one of the highest complication rates for hemorrhage in the state.

UUP believes that SUNY Downstate should expand its maternal and childcare services. We also support the passage of the Chisholm Chance Plan (S322), introduced by Brooklyn Sen. Zellnor Myrie.

Create the University at Buffalo Medical Center

When we say ambitious, we mean what we say. NY HEALS calls for funding to establish the University at Buffalo Medical Center Hospital. The pandemic has amplified the need for world-class public hospitals in Buffalo and Western New York.

The creation of a SUNY teaching hospital in Buffalo would greatly enhance the level of care provided to the public. It would also allow future health care professionals at UB the opportunity to earn the same degrees students get at Upstate, SUNY Downstate and Stony Brook.

SUNY Hospitals Save Lives

The importance of SUNY's state-operated public hospitals cannot be overestimated. Without them, hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers across the state would not have access to the high-quality health care they deserve. Many patients with especially difficult, rare or hard-to-treat medical conditions are sent to SUNY's public hospitals, often referred by other hospitals and health care providers.

SUNY's public teaching hospitals provide a pipeline of doctors and medical professionals to New York City and the state. New York

students account for 85 percent of first-year medical students at SUNY medical schools, and many graduates stay and practice in New York.

Our public teaching hospitals are state hospitals in SUNY; they are governed by state rules and staffed by state employees for the benefit of the citizens of New York. These hospitals—as well as the care, treatment and safety of the hundreds of thousands of patients served by these facilities each year—is a direct state responsibility.

NY HEALS: EDUCATION

Eliminate the TAP Gap by correcting the formula used to calculate TAP aid

For SUNY to expand access to quality education, New York must fix the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) formula so that the true costs of a SUNY education are covered by this program.

TAP is an important program that provides accessibility to a public college education, which is still out of reach for too many qualified students. But the so-called “TAP gap”—the portion of SUNY tuition that campuses must waive for TAP awardees—threatens students’ access to education and the completion of their education.

The TAP Gap, which grows each year, is approximately \$70 million annually that SUNY’s state-operated campuses must absorb. At one point, the state used to cover 100 percent of TAP tuition; state funding cuts have caused the gap.

More than 40 percent of TAP students attend SUNY schools; over one-third of SUNY students at state-operated campuses receive TAP aid. About a quarter of students at state-operated campuses receive the maximum TAP grant of \$5,165. Campuses must waive \$2,070 of the current \$7,070 tuition amount for each of these students. Also, they must waive a prorated amount for each partial TAP-eligible student. This gap—tuition in excess of \$5,000—only increases at SUNY tuition increases.

The current TAP formula expires this year. Now is the time to eliminate the TAP Gap for good and fully fund our students’ future. Establishing a full TAP award equal to SUNY tuition would benefit individual

students by bringing an end to the campus penalty—campuses losing desperately needed tuition revenue for each TAP-eligible student they admit—which impacts the quality of education for all students at those campuses.

Allocate \$100 million to establish additional SUNY tenure track lines

SUNY must invest in educators. The success of SUNY students now and in the future depends on reversing a chronic shortage of full-time faculty positions.

The percentage of tenure track faculty at SUNY dropped by nearly half (60 percent to 39 percent) from 1996 to 2016. During the same period, bachelor’s degrees earned at SUNY rose by 40 percent while graduate degrees grew by 32 percent.

The state hasn’t provided additional funding in response, and campuses report that tenured positions vacated through retirements—due to the pandemic—are not likely to be filled unless more funding is available, further exacerbating the situation. Through this funding, opportunities would become available for part-time employees to become full-time employees.

Meanwhile, students are facing unprecedented challenges in their virtual learning environments; additional professional staff is needed to support students’ educational, physical, and emotional needs.

Remove the Graduate Admissions Requirement for the GRE or Equivalent Exam

The GRE/equivalent exam—required for admission to graduate teacher education and school leadership programs—is an unnecessary barrier to recruiting diverse candidates for teaching and school leadership professions. It is not a valid predictor of students’ ability to successfully complete graduate programs. There is no required score; it is simply a costly hurdle with no impact on the assessment of a student’s readiness for graduate work.

Furthermore, the cost of the exam is a barrier for low-income students. It serves as a deterrent for individuals who are changing careers (e.g., veterans, school paraprofessionals, and students from

underrepresented groups) who face difficulties in securing the time and resources needed to obtain graduate degrees.

UUP urges the state to remove the GRE/ equivalent exam requirement for admission to graduate teaching and school leadership programs.

NY HEALS: ACCESS

Double the funding to SUNY's Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)

Thousands of students, who may have otherwise been denied access to college have beaten the odds, earned degrees and secured jobs in their desired fields because of the highly successful Educational Opportunity Program (EOP).

The program counts more than 70,000 graduates, many of whom still live and work in New York.

Through the EOP, students—many of whom are from some of the state's most economically distressed areas—receive specialized advisement, counseling, tutorial services, and summer programs. These students, who are mostly underprepared for college work when they enter the program, thrive in the EOP.

The EOP graduation rate exceeds 65 percent, exceeding the national average for public higher ed colleges and universities. Nearly 35 percent of SUNY's state-operated campuses have EOP graduation rates ranging from 70 to 88 percent. Not surprisingly, the EOP is a program in high demand; SUNY annually receives more than 30,000 applications for just 2,500 available EOP seats.

It is not enough to provide funding to maintain the status quo. The EOP is a proven program that is in demand. We must look to the future and do all we can to open the avenues to a SUNY education to as many qualified students as we can.

We urge the Legislature to fully invest in the aggressive expansion of the EOP by doubling the number of students, staff and funding by 2025.

Allocate \$5 Million to Create a Medical Educational Opportunity Program (MEOP)

Studies show that there could be a physician shortage of up to 121,000 doctors nationwide by 2032.

The SUNY MEOP will draw students from underrepresented and under-resourced communities, providing them with the opportunity to study for a medical degree. The program will allow diverse cohorts of students studying to be doctors and other health care professionals will complete their degrees and care for patients in their communities.

To help fund the program, UUP advocates that 1 percent of revenue from legalized adult cannabis go to fund Medical Higher Education Diversity grants and to expand SUNY's medical school diversity program—which would include MEOP.

Waive Licensure and Certification Fees for New York State Frontline Healthcare Professionals

Many of the occupations that have been in high demand throughout the COVID-19 crisis, and will continue to be long after, are regulated in a way that increases the cost to the healthcare professionals for continued licensure and certification.

UUP urges the state to waive any state-imposed fees or other expenses related to renewal of job-related licenses or certifications for up to five years for healthcare professionals who worked at a public healthcare facility during the coronavirus pandemic.

NY HEALS: LEADERSHIP

UUP calls on the state to lead the way to a strong future for all New Yorkers with stable long-term funding and aggressive efforts to diversify SUNY.

Implement Revenue Raisers

The revenue raisers I discussed early on in this testimony are crucial for moving beyond the status quo. These proposals will be key for building a future for SUNY, for our students, for our communities, our nation and our world. They offer a path to help the state regain its financial footing, builds a foundation fortified by a strong, innovative

public higher education system, protects our environment, and expands SUNY's healthcare system, which will provide cutting-edge care to more New Yorkers than ever before.

Increase Funding to Advance Faculty Diversity

Ensure that at least 25% of faculty and staff positions in SUNY are filled by individuals who are African American, Native American and Latinx by 2025. The SUNY PRODiG ("Promoting Recruitment, Opportunity, Diversity, Inclusion and Growth") program launched in 2019 begins this important work, but we can do more.

Less than 9 percent of SUNY faculty are racially or ethnically diverse (as of Fall 2018), while underrepresented minorities made up 27 percent of total enrollment in Fall 2020.

Graduate program pipelines must be established to ensure the achievement of these goals. UUP urges the state to allocate funding for recruiting and retaining diverse faculty and staff at SUNY.

NY HEALS: SUSTAINABILITY

Allocate Funding for Broad Renewable Energy Options at SUNY

In 2021, SUNY should plan for and begin implementation of initiatives to meet the goals of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) passed in 2019.

SUNY makes up 40 percent of the state's real estate footprint. It is incumbent upon the University to embark on a wide range of renewable energy initiatives, with a goal of reducing its carbon footprint by 25 percent by the end of the year.

By retrofitting buildings to make them more energy efficient, using solar, wind and geothermal technologies to generate energy, and reducing wasted usage, SUNY should be able to meet the goals for a greener New York.

Establish a Pilot Program of Microgrids and Battery Storage at SUNY Campuses

UUP urges the state to dedicate funding for establishing a pilot program of energy microgrids and battery storage at SUNY campuses across the state.

Through the program, SUNY campuses and the communities they are located in would have the opportunity to be part of the microgrids and help capture solar energy, wind turbine-generated electricity, and other renewable energy sources.

The generated energy would be stored on SUNY campuses, providing hands-on experience for SUNY students in green energy programs. The potential exists to expand the program to all SUNY campuses, which would result in energy cost savings for taxpayers and millions of dollars that could be reinvested in SUNY.

Expand SUNY Degrees and Training/Retraining for Green Energy Jobs

UUP urges the state to provide the necessary funding for an aggressive expansion of degree programs across SUNY that will train the next generation of green energy experts. The focus should be on creating new degree and training programs at campuses across the state to meet the rising need for these professions.

Establish SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY ESF) as a World Leader in Climate Crisis Research and Mitigation

SUNY ESF possesses the expertise to be a world leader in researching the climate crisis and developing the necessary mitigation techniques to combat it. This does not diminish the excellent work being done at campuses across SUNY, especially at Stony Brook as well as other campuses.

However, this Syracuse-based college is uniquely positioned to study the impacts on environmental injustice in communities across New York. Providing ESF with proper support will assure focused and dedicated attention to this necessary work. UUP urges the state to dedicate funding for climate crisis research and mitigation at this college and other SUNY institutions.

CONCLUSION

NY HEALS is a comprehensive agenda that provides a plan of action and a path to a stronger SUNY and a stronger New York. We will do all we can to push for this positive change. We urge you to strongly consider establishing and funding these initiatives.

On behalf of our 37,000 members, I'd like to thank you all for the opportunity to address you today. Each and every year, you have proven yourselves as the strongest advocates for our SUNY, our students and our patients.

We greatly appreciate any help that you can provide to our hospitals and academic institutions.

Thank you.