BEFORE THE NEW YORK STATE SENATE FINANCE
AND ASSEMBLY WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEES

JOINT LEGISLATIVE HEARING

In the Matter of the
2025-2026 EXECUTIVE BUDGET ON
HIGHER EDUCATION

Hearing Room B
Legislative Office Building
Albany, New York

February 25, 2025
9:36 a.m.

PRESIDING:

Senator Liz Krueger
Chair, Senate Finance Committee

Assemblyman J. Gary Pretlow
Chair, Assembly Ways & Means Committee

PRESENT:

Assemblyman Edward P. Ra
Assembly Ways & Means Committee (RM)

Senator Thomas F. O'Mara
Senate Finance Committee (RM)

Assemblywoman Alicia Hyndman
Chair, Assembly Higher Education Committee

Senator Toby Stavisky
Chair, Senate Higher Education Committee

Assemblywoman Jo Anne Simon

Senator John C. Liu

Assemblyman Robert Smullen

2025-2026 Executive Budget
Higher Education
2-25-25

PRESENT: (Continued)

Assemblyman Harvey Epstein

Senator Robert Jackson

Senator Lea Webb

Assemblywoman Monique Chandler-Waterman

Senator Dean Murray

Assemblyman Scott Gray

Senator Peter Oberacker

Assemblywoman Chris Eachus

Assemblywoman Karen McMahon

Senator Andrew Gounardes

Assemblywoman Sarah Clark

Assemblyman Matt Slater

Senator Shelley B. Mayer

Assemblywoman Rebecca A. Seawright

Assemblyman Al Stirpe

Assemblyman Steven Otis

Senator Patricia Fahy

Assemblyman David Weprin

Assemblywoman Dr. Anna R. Kelles

Assemblyman Kwani O'Pharrow

Senator Joseph Griffo

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PRESENT: (Continued)

Assemblyman Nader J. Sayegh

Assemblywoman Judy Griffin

Senator Rachel May

Assemblyman Sam Pirozzolo

Assemblywoman Marianne Buttenschon

Senator Julia Salazar

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CHAIR PRETLOW: Good morning. I'm Gary Pretlow, chair of the New York State Assembly Ways and Means Committee. Today we begin the 10th in a series of 14 hearings conducted by the joint fiscal committees of the Legislature regarding the Governor's proposed budget for fiscal year '25-'26. These hearings are conducted pursuant to the New York State Constitution and the Legislative Law.

Today the Assembly Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee will hear testimony concerning the Governor's proposed budget for higher education.

I'll now introduce the participating members from the Assembly. After that, Senator Krueger will introduce members from the Senate.

In addition, ranking Ways and Means Member Ra will introduce members from his conference.

Joining us today -- I have a list somewhere. Okay, sorry about that. Joining us today is the chairperson of the

Higher Education Committee, Alicia Hindman --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Hyndman.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Hyndman. I always say Hindman. Hyndman. This is Higher Education; I should say it right, right?

Assemblymember Clark, Assemblymember Eachus, Assemblymember Seawright, Assemblyman Stirpe, Assemblymember Epstein, Assemblymember Otis, and Assemblymember Weprin.

Senator?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Good morning. Hi, I'm Liz Krueger, chair of Senate Finance, and I'm joined by Toby Stavisky, our chair of Higher Ed; Senator John Liu; Senator Jackson; Senator Gounardes; Senator Webb; Senator Mayer; Senator Fahy.

And should I pass it over to my colleague Tom O'Mara to introduce the Republicans?

SENATOR O'MARA: Yes, good morning.

On our side we have ranking member on the Higher Ed Committee Senator Joe Griffo, and Senators Peter Oberacker and Dean Murray.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Ed?

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Good morning. We have with us our ranker on Higher Ed, Assemblyman Smullen, as well as Assemblyman Slater.

CHAIR PRETLOW: Thank you.

Those of you who have been following these hearings know that we have some fairly strict time limits. Governmental witnesses are allotted 10 minutes for testimony. Nongovernmental witnesses are allotted three minutes for testimony. The time limits are for questions and answers.

The chairs of the relevant committees of each governmental witness will get 10 minutes and a second round of three minutes if desired. Ranking members of these committees will each get five minutes. All other members of the relevant committees will each get three minutes.

All witnesses, please note we have your written testimony. So we would ask you that you not read your testimony, but summarize it, to leave more time for

questions.

To all legislators, please let myself or Senator Krueger know if you wish to question a witness or a panel of witnesses.

Everyone, please look around. We have several time clocks. When the clock winds down to zero, I will have to cut you off. Please note that when the yellow light comes on, you have 30 seconds remaining on the clock. Please try to summarize your answer if you're in that 30-second window.

Please be considerate and respect the clock so everyone has a chance to be heard.

Please note that these time frames for questioning include both questions and answers, as I just said. So members are respectfully requested not to commence a new question with insufficient time on the clock to permit a witness to answer.

Due to the length of our hearings, we have no alternative but to strictly enforce these time limits.

With that, I want to introduce our first panel: Chancellor John King and

Chancellor Félix Rodríguez.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Good morning.

I want to thank Chairs Pretlow and Krueger, along with Chairs Hyndman and Stavisky, for having us here today.

I'd also like to recognize Ranking Members Smullen and Griffo, Ra and O'Mara.

It's a privilege to come before you this morning to discuss SUNY's progress advancing affordability and excellence on behalf of the New Yorkers we are proud to serve.

Before I begin, I want to thank you for your confidence in SUNY and the record investments that you've made in our students, faculty and campuses over the last two years. The SUNY Board of Trustees and I are committed to ensuring that SUNY is the nation's best statewide public system of higher education, and the resources you are providing are integral to that success.

Last fall Governor Hochul announced the great news that total enrollment increased at SUNY by 3.4 percent. We've seen

enrollment gains in every SUNY sector for two consecutive years, marking the first time SUNY has experienced back-to-back systemwide enrollment increases in 15 years.

I'm especially pleased that in fall '24, roughly half of our first-time undergraduates were Pell recipients. This is truly a testament of SUNY's role as an engine of upward mobility.

SUNY is where affordability and excellence meet. While we're completely focused on building on this progress, it is clear that SUNY is on the move. I often say that there's a place at SUNY for every New Yorker, and maintaining SUNY's extraordinary affordability is vital to helping students and families find their perfect SUNY campus and thrive.

Fifty-two percent of in-state undergraduate students attend SUNY tuition-free, thanks to state, federal and institutional financial aid. I want to thank you for championing an expansion of the Tuition Assistance Program that is helping

more New Yorkers afford college even as we speak.

In addition, the state's new universal FAFSA law went into effect this year, and I want to express our gratitude. Filling out the FAFSA opens the door to financial aid, and this important law, in place in nearly a dozen other states, will help New Yorkers access all available financial aid. I look forward to working with you and Governor Hochul to continue this progress.

Since I became chancellor, there have been four pillars driving our work: situation success; research and scholarship; diversity, equity and inclusion; and economic development and upward mobility. I want to highlight just a few areas of progress.

One of our most important student success initiatives is to scale ASAP and ACE, the nation's most effective evidence-based strategies for helping students earn their degree. And we now have 4,270 SUNY students enrolled in ASAP and ACE at 25 campuses, and we are already seeing promising early results

in persistence and credit attainment.

SUNY is also expanding support to help every student succeed. Thanks to your support, SUNY is investing in services for students with disabilities, enhanced mental health support, and combating food insecurity. And we also have a homeless liaison on every SUNY campus.

Governor Hochul has charged SUNY with doubling research, and we are seeing extraordinary progress -- from artificial intelligence to quantum, climate action to biotech, health advances to semiconductors. SUNY is especially proud of the launch of the Empire AI research center for the public good, housed at the University at Buffalo and involving SUNY's four University Centers.

I want to emphasize our unwavering commitment to ensuring that our campuses are safe places to teach and learn and that they foster inclusive communities. From our funding, SUNY's mission has been to, quote, provide to the people of New York educational

services of the highest quality with the broadest possible access, fully representative of all segments of the population, close quote.

We have no intention of backing away from that mission and its inherent commitment to a diverse and inclusive university and society. There is no place at SUNY for antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of discrimination and harassment. And SUNY required all faculty and staff to participate in Title VI training this fall.

The final area of advancing SUNY's excellence is our progress toward the goal that every SUNY undergraduate participate in a high-quality internship. SUNY students are supporting veterans through the veterans enrollment and support internship program, conducting groundbreaking research through the Chancellor's Summer Research Excellence Fund. We've established an initiative for EOP participants to intern with state agencies, among many other internships made possible through increased state support.

In addition, this year SUNY launched Governor Hochul's Empire State Service Corps, funding 500 paid service positions for students in areas like K-12 tutoring, peer mental health support, addressing food insecurity and climate action.

Now, let's turn to the FY '26 Executive Budget. Governor Hochul and the Legislature's historic investments in SUNY over the past two years have been vital to keeping SUNY affordable and advancing our excellence. This includes the record $277 million increase over the last two years that has provided 20 percent-plus funding increases to every single state-operated campus.

And for community colleges, last year's budget included the first operating funding increase in nearly a decade, helping to prepare students for essential healthcare careers and funding additional mental health services.

I want to highlight just a few components that we're grateful to

Governor Hochul for including in the '26 Executive Budget and eager to work with you to advance. The Executive Budget includes 114 million in additional funding for our state-operated campuses, which supports the well-deserved state-approved collective bargaining agreement with our faculty and staff and is absolutely essential for maintaining SUNY's momentum.

We're especially thrilled about Governor Hochul's plan for free community college. Building on successful programs in Massachusetts and Michigan, Governor Hochul's proposal provides free tuition, fees, books and supplies for adults age 25 to 55 who pursue an associate's degree in high-demand fields.

This investment is in addition to maintenance of the 100 percent community college funding floor, which will avoid $76 million in lost direct state tax support.

The Governor also announced plans to expand the nationally recognized ASAP and ACE retention and completion programs that I

described. Thanks to Governor Hochul's budget, we'll be able to scale these programs on the path to 10,000 students in the next two years.

In addition, the Executive Budget includes $550 million for critical maintenance upgrades for state-operated campuses and $130 million for the community college capital funding match.

The Governor has also proposed a $25 million SUNY green energy loan fund that will help transform SUNY's buildings to be more energy efficient. This investment will help advance SUNY's newly adopted Climate and Sustainability Action Plan, as well as our campuses' work developing clean energy master plans.

To help SUNY double research, Governor Hochul is proposing the $200 million New York State innovation fund for capital investments in cutting-edge laboratory facilities. And the Executive Budget makes historic capital investments in SUNY's hospitals, with essential support for

SUNY Downstate's future and for Upstate Medical to deliver needed services to the region.

Finally, I want to recognize the many questions as we work to navigate the directives coming from the new federal administration. Let me just say that our institutions have the unique power to bring Americans together across all lines of difference -- geography and race, region and income, politics and nationality. Students who live together, who learn together, who talk to each other will have a better chance of understanding each other and finding commonalities throughout their lives.

That is why I continue to wake up every morning believing deeply in the unique power of higher education to strengthen the lives of our students and the health of our democracy. And I go to sleep each night proud of the work we are doing to tangibly deliver on these aspirations for the students we are privileged to serve.

Thank you, and I look forward to your

questions.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: So good morning, and delighted to be here joining Chancellor King. And I bring you greetings on behalf of the City University of New York, our 25 campuses, our 390,000 degree-seeking and continuing education students, and our 40,000 faculty and staff.

I want to thank Governor Hochul and all of you, our friends in the State Senate and Assembly, for your commitment to public higher education, and for your support for our ability to continue delivering on CUNY's promise as one of our state's most potent economic engines. Please know that your support is not taken for granted at a time when some seem interested in undermining our progress.

This past year we have welcomed more students and introduced more programs to help guide them to degrees and careers. We had a banner year as a research institution and celebrated our best year ever for major gifts

from our generous philanthropic donors, including the two largest in CUNY's history. And we completed 73 capital projects totaling 760 million, a critical advance in our ongoing project to modernize the university. All of this has helped broaden CUNY's reach as New York's most impactful public institution and advance the goals of our strategic roadmap that I shared with you in 2023.

One of the key indicators of our impact is enrollment, as it reflects that more New Yorkers are accessing opportunities for a brighter future. For the second consecutive year the CUNY student body has expanded, adding nearly 12,000 students over two years, representing a growth of 5 percent. And we're not slowing down. This past fall, more than 55,000 New York high school seniors applied to CUNY colleges during our four-week fee-waiving period, an initiative that we started in 2023 with Governor Hochul's support.

During this period CUNY also sent

letters to New York City high school seniors, accepting them to community colleges and encouraging them to apply to our senior colleges. It's part of an ongoing partnership with the New York City Public Schools that this year drove a 13 percent year-over-year jump in applications completed during the fall semester.

All of our students benefit from CUNY's continuing growth of career-connected programs that also strengthen our city and state. One example is York College's Aviation and Aerospace Academy, a new STEM education partnership with the Port Authority. Another is a program at Bronx Community College that is the first in New York State to award on online certificate in nuclear medicine technology, a field with a severe shortage of technicians in our state.

This year we have built on our momentum in partnering with employers and doing more to connect classrooms to careers. We now have more than 31,000 employers in

every in-demand field actively recruiting in the CUNY system. And with support from public and private partners, we have connected more than 16,000 students directly to paid internships in the last three years, in addition to students who landed internships on their own.

Meanwhile, over 100 of our academic departments have begun incorporating career-infused degree maps to help students reach milestones tailored to their majors as part of their course planning. And at the heart of these efforts are our faculty, who are integrating career connections into their own classrooms.

This spring we are preparing to launch CUNY Beyond in the fall of 2025, our campus roadmap for career success connecting classrooms to careers throughout our students' academic journeys. This wide-ranging strategy makes CUNY the first system in the country that will scale up approaches that we know work at every step of a student's academic journey. These

approaches include working with high schools to offer career-connected college courses, introducing career discussions in orientations and first-year seminars, embedding careers in curriculum, expanding paid internships, and growing our engagement with employers.

We began the current spring semester with the rollout of the CUNY Transfer Initiative, a sweeping reform that would eliminate longstanding obstacles to credit transfers when students move from one CUNY college to another. The new system will streamline the transfer process and smooth the road to a bachelor's degree. We expect to save students an average of $1,220 in excess tuition costs with this initiative.

Looking beyond our campuses, our more than 10,000 faculty researchers garnered $672 million in external funding for research, training and other sponsored activity -- an all-time record high for the university for a second straight year.

To give you just a few examples of

CUNY research that improves the lives of New Yorkers, our scientists are advancing a new diagnostic tool to treat breat cancer patients whose tumors are elusive. They're revolutionizing quantum technology to bring ultra-broadband internet to New Yorkers. And they are pioneers of an emerging technology that tracks infectious diseases through wastewater.

At the same time, as you know, these are challenging times as we continue fighting antisemitism, bigotry, and the rise of intolerance and hate in all forms. It is a special obligation for a university as diverse as CUNY, and we have taken strong action in the year since I last appeared before you.

Now let me turn to the Governor's Executive Budget. I'd like to express my deep gratitude to Governor Hochul for an Executive Budget that provides significant new operating and capital funding for CUNY, which builds on additional funding for CUNY that Governor Hochul, you and your colleagues

appropriated over the last few years.

For CUNY's operating budget, there is an increase of $96 million in operating support for our senior colleges, which will almost fully cover wage increases for fiscal year 2026 associated with the contract agreement we signed with our faculty union in December. An additional $34 million is needed to fully cover the cost of those wage increases, and we look forward to working with you in the weeks ahead to include this funding in the enacted budget.

We are also grateful for the Executive Budget's adding of one-time funding of $192.2 million to cover one-time payments for the retroactive wage increases and the lump-sum ratification bonus.

We are pleased to see that the community college funding floor is continued at 100 percent of the previous year's funding. We're also appreciative of the continuation of $5.3 million in community college general operating support first enacted last year, which will further help

shore up the colleges' finances.

The funding provided for our senior colleges to support CUNY's labor costs, coupled with operating support for our community colleges, will mean that CUNY will not need to absorb a big chunk of mandatory costs which would undoubtedly exacerbate the university's structural deficit.

Regarding that structural deficit, we have made significant progress in reducing it -- from a high of $234 million in fiscal year 2022 to a projected $62 million at the end of this fiscal year, thanks to expense reduction strategies, enrollment growth, and additional operating aid that you enacted. Our goal is to sustain our momentum, and we ask for your assistance in fully funding the university's mandatory needs, including fringe benefits and inflationary increases.

We applaud the Governor's inclusion of $18.8 million for the New York State Opportunity Promise Scholarship program to provide free community college tuition, $8 million for our ASAP and ACE programs, and

$5 million for artificial intelligence initiatives.

And let's build on that strong foundation with:

• a $7 million investment for CUNY Beyond, the first-of-its-kind systemwide Career Success Campus Model that I mentioned earlier;

• an additional $4 million investment to extend the Opportunity Promise Scholarship;

• an $8.9 million investment for STEM, Health and Arts programs to help defray their higher instructional costs; and

• a continuation of $4 million for CUNY's School of Medicine.

Turning to the capital budget, the Executive Budget provides critical infrastructure investments to modernize our 25 campuses. The plan allocates nearly $500 million in new capital funding for our four-year schools and community colleges. This support will enable us to maintain our campuses in a state of good repair and make

strategic investments in research facilities.

To conclude, the budget season presents challenges for all of us responsible for public education in our state. While the specifics may vary, our objectives remain consistent.

This year, as we confront new uncertainties, I recognize the presence of steadfast allies and true supporters of higher education and opportunity within this room and in Albany. Your commitment has been demonstrated repeatedly, and I am confident that we can rely on you during this crucial time. I extend my most sincere gratitude for your continued partnership and support, and I look forward to your questions.

CHAIR PRETLOW: Thank you.

Assemblyman Otis. Three minutes.

ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: Thank you, Chair.

And thank you, Chancellors.

Chancellor King, love you to talk a little more about what the growth has been on the AI consortium, which is so focused at SUNY Buffalo and other SUNY campuses. And

just if you could expound a little more in detail beyond your testimony about the progress in the last year.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Sure. Thank you. And thank you, Assemblyman Otis, for coming with the Science and Technology Committee to visit UB.

The great news is the project is moving very rapidly. Thanks to support from the Simons Foundation, we were able to launch an alpha version of the supercomputer. So we've marshaled $400 million in public/private investment to build what will eventually be one of the largest supercomputers on any higher ed campus.

But we were able to start with the alpha version, thanks to the Simons Foundation. And we already have researchers across our institutions pursuing AI research for the public good on that alpha version -- questions like how can we leverage AI to better treat disease, how can we leverage AI to better tackle issues of climate resilience.

So we're excited that the project is moving well and the partnership is working well, with CUNY and with our private institution partners as well.

ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: I want to thank you for our road trip of the Science and Technology Committee to Buffalo. And I think what was most outstanding: The presentations that your professors made about how multifaceted the AI work is. It covers AI to assist students in learning. You mentioned the medical research and a whole host of other endeavors.

What is your forecast for the next year in terms of continuing to grow out based upon the AI Consortium model?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: You know, we're very excited about the momentum. You know, one of the major federal grants that University at Buffalo has is focused on leveraging AI to provide better services for students with disabilities, particularly students with speech language issues.

So we're excited about that work. We

have a lot of eager faculty across our four University Centers to take advantage of the opportunities. The Governor has an additional $90 million in her budget for the expansion of Empire AI to give our SUNY researchers more access, as well as to bring in some additional partners, particularly from the Rochester area. So we're excited about the direction.

The one risk is that the federal climate around federal research is complicated at the moment, to say the least. But when I talk with members of Congress on both sides of the aisle, they believe strongly in the need for federal investment to ensure the U.S. leads in artificial intelligence vis-a-vis our international competitors.

ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: That's great.

Chancellor Rodriguez, in terms of CUNY, CUNY's involvement in AI, if you could share some of that with us.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Yeah, thank you for the question. We are

partners in the Empire AI --

(Time clock sounds.)

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: And that question won't get an answer, unfortunately.

ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: We will connect later.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: We'll bring you on a tour to the city, and then I can answer all your questions.

ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: I'm there. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Hi. And actually probably all during the day there will be questions that you either don't have the time to answer, or you may need to actually get back to us. We two chairs would be appreciative if you put those answers in writing, and we'll make sure everybody gets the answers.

So thank you. And I'm going to turn it over to Chair Toby Stavisky for 10 minutes.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you. And thank you, gentlemen, for coming from various

parts of the state.

First let me start with Chancellor King. The Upstate and Downstate medical schools and hospitals have been a concern, particularly down -- I know Upstate has issues also, but focusing on Downstate, this has been going on for quite a while.

How long has it been on the radar where Downstate has some very serious problems? And the focus of my question is how are you implementing it, at what rate? Is there a timetable for the board to make recommendations and so forth? Can you bring us up-to-date on that issue?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Thanks for the question, Senator.

So, you know, Downstate is a very important institution. Particularly the Health Sciences University is such a key provider of diverse doctors and healthcare professionals for New York State.

The hospital has been struggling financially for two decades or more, particularly intense struggles in recent

years. And when I was before you last year we were headed towards running out of cash by the summer and struggling with a building with significant disrepair and real risk of failure that would harm patients.

So fortunately, thanks to the leadership of folks in this room and Governor Hochul, last year the state committed to cover the deficit, $100 million, and committed $300 million in capital. This year the Governor proposes another year of deficit funding during a transition period and an additional 450 million in capital. So nearly a billion dollars invested.

Last year's budget created a community advisory board, which is meeting currently. We actually have a public hearing later this week. And that community advisory board is going to make recommendations by April 1st -- that's the timeline that was in last year's budget -- on a path forward that will involve inpatient and outpatient services to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the hospital, I'm hopeful that we will have such

a plan by April 1st.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you.

A totally different topic -- and I do have questions for CUNY also. Last year we had, as you said, record increases in TAP, particularly in the income eligibility, where we raised it from -- family income from $80,000 a year to $125,000 a year.

I don't know if you have the numbers available. But how did that affect -- in that cohort of income-eligibility students, how did that affect your enrollment? Did you see an increase as a result?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: You know, we think there are a multitude of factors in our enrollment increases this year. But there's no question that the expansion of TAP helped. I'm very grateful to you for your leadership on that.

We projected last year that it would be upwards of 40,000 SUNY students who would benefit directly from the TAP expansion, either because of raising the income threshold or doubling the minimum award. We

don't yet have final numbers for this year's impact, but we believe that that 40,000 was a good projection.

SENATOR STAVISKY: For SUNY alone.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: For SUNY alone.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Good, thank you. Those are students I believe who would have gone perhaps out of state if it weren't for that increase.

Lastly -- because I do want to ask our chancellor from CUNY some questions -- there was a story in the newspaper, in the New York Times about a week or so ago talking about the potential for federal cuts to the research, to the sciences particularly, the health sciences. How is that -- those projected cuts, either at NIH or any other of the agencies, how is that going to affect the research capabilities at SUNY?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: We are very worried about potential federal research cuts. The proposed cuts at NIH would have meant reductions in research on treatment and cures for Alzheimer's, cancer, treatment and

monitoring of 9/11 first responders. It would have cost $80 million, roughly -- 79, $80 million to the SUNY system, just the NIH cuts alone.

Fortunately, Attorney General Tish James and 21 other attorneys general filed litigation which secured a temporary restraining order, so those cuts are not moving forward currently. But we're working hard to remind certainly the members of our congressional delegation how much federal research matters for the SUNY system. It's upwards of $700 million each year that we get in federal research funding.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you.

Now, turning to CUNY, a real quick first question I always ask is what is your faculty-to-student ratio and the number -- the percentage of adjuncts for CUNY systemwide?

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: So systemwide, it is 61-39 in terms of full-time faculty to part-time faculty.

And I know you also were wondering

about the class size ratio. And that has gone down from about 27 students per class in 2019 to 23.

SENATOR STAVISKY: So the ratio presumably is improving for full-time faculty.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: And that has been in large part thanks to an investment and support that we received from you about two or three years ago. We had about 700 new faculty lines that came into the system through the support in the budget process.

And that clearly has begun to shift us to being less dependent on part-time faculty and have more full-time faculty, which is a goal which, you know, we aspire to keep improving and I know is an interest of this body too. So thank you for that question.

I also have TAP numbers and I have research numbers, if you want those too.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Sure. Yeah, you can get them to us.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ:

Okay.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you. You know where to reach me.

(Laughter.)

SENATOR STAVISKY: You mentioned capital investments. I serve, and Assemblymember Seawright -- we both serve on the CUNY Construction Fund. And I've asked a lot of questions at the meetings. How many new buildings are under consideration compared to the critical maintenance that much of the money is devoted to?

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: So the DASNY allocation last year was 523 million in terms of the projects. We are working with DASNY very aggressively to create a better timeline to be able to get to projects and build them faster.

We have a goal of improving our state of good repair up to about 60 percent, where we are. As you know, many of our buildings -- and many of you not only have visited our buildings but, you know, there's meetings of community leaders and community

groups that use our facilities. So you're familiar with the campus.

So we are really trying to renovate those campuses that are showing the wear and tear of age, investing in some of the critical infrastructure for them, which might not be at some times the most sexy: HVAC, elevators, escalators, all those things. But those are the -- you know, the spine that makes all the buildings work and to keep them safe.

So we can give you a list of some of the new programs. We have about 800 construction programs right now open all throughout our 25 campuses, to give you a sense of that scope. But we can give you a breakdown, campus by campus, of both critical maintenance and what's new.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Yeah, I'm troubled by the lack of new construction. Some of the buildings where I took classes as a graduate student a very long time ago are still being used. And a lot of this money is going for HVAC repairs or replacements.

One other question, real -- well, I'll have to save it. But could you tell us about your career success model. And we can continue in the second round if you don't get to finish.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: So thank you for your interest.

So with your support we've been able for the past five years to do a number of pilot projects in several campuses in this effort to connect students to be thinking about careers from even before they step on our campus and all through their four years.

We want to do it in a systematic way. So the program that we're proposing is putting all those things together and making sure that it's CUNY-wide. And I'll be happy to talk more about it.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you.

CHAIR PRETLOW: Thank you.

Assemblywoman Hyndman. Ten minutes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Thank you, chair. I get 10 minutes.

(Laughter.)

CHAIR PRETLOW: You get 10 minutes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Oh, I don't know what to do. It's good being a chair.

So thank you both for your testimony. It's been very productive meeting with you and your staffs over the last couple of weeks. So I have several questions, and you can -- they apply to both of you, so you can answer in any order.

The Black Leadership Institute, the Asian Leadership Institute. And in light of the president's "Dear Colleague" letter, are these programs exempt because they're not -- because they're professional programs and not for undergraduate or graduate programs?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: The key thing for those three programs is that they are open to all applicants. So they were created with a particular focus to ensure diversity across our leadership, but each program is open to all applicants.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Okay, great.

Chancellor Matos Rodríguez, I think a year or two ago the City Council in New York

City added money for programs to increase those students who had left college but had some college credits. And I just wanted to know is that -- how is that program going? Particularly because I know there was a spike in numbers of students who actually reenrolled.

If you could tell us how that program is going.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Well, thank you for the question. And, you know, greetings from the 4,500 students who are in your district from CUNY, 10,000 in Senator Stavisky's district, and 500 in Assemblyman Otis's district. I just want to make sure that everybody feels the love of your constituents.

And you're asking about CUNY Reconnect.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Yes.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: We're very, very, very proud of that program. We've brought over 40,000 students over two years. And it's part of our ongoing

strategic enrollment growth strategy.

There are close to a quarter-million New Yorkers over the age of 25 that have some college and no degree. Some of them might be CUNY students who for different reasons were not able to complete, but they're hungry for the skills, the degrees particularly in in-demand fields that we have. And CUNY Reconnect has allowed us to be able to go to them, talk to them, expose them to different new fields, bring them back, provide support -- in some of the cases it's childcare for some of those that are older and have started their families. For some of them it's a schedule that combines more part-time kinds of studies.

But it's been incredibly successful. It's also been I think a great tool for us to learn how to better serve those students, right, to continue, to tap into that demand.

So we look forward to continuing that program. And like I said, one of the additional things is that as we engage that population more, we keep adapting the way in

which we do things, servicing our students, what do they need, to actually have less students that will need to not be retained, right, and go there.

So incredibly successful program. And now we have the opportunity, with the Governor's, you know, scholarship program for community colleges, to continue to build on that model of bringing, again, adults that have stepped out of higher ed to come back and go into fields that are high demand and finish quickly and contribute to the economy.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: You also in your testimony said that this past fall more than 55,000 New York high school seniors applied. Of those seniors that applied, how many were admitted? And how many had to take remedial courses, which sometimes is the case?

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: So I have to get you the specific number of how many sort of ended up applying and coming to CUNY. Just on average, about 56 percent -- I mean 26 percent of all the students that come

into CUNY require some kind of remedial assistance. That number is about 56 when you talk about the community college. So I can give you a breakdown there.

But let me tell you that one of the most encouraging things when you need sort of to be energized about the work that we do, was going to some of those high schools and handing out that individualized letter to the seniors saying: You already have a place at the City University of New York. Now you have to do your part, complete your application, do that fee waiver, finish and graduate, and there's a place for you.

The amount of pressure that our high schoolers feel about connecting to higher ed I think is something that our generation didn't experience. And it's phenomenal to be able to see them have a clearer path to CUNY. And -- you know, and the numbers of applicants increase significantly, and I think they're part of the enrollment growth that we saw.

I think also part of the dent that we

did in navigating the FAFSA debacle was that we have started earlier in engaging those students so it allows to -- when FAFSA was running slow, to stay with them and be supportive. So we want to continue to build on that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Okay.

Chancellor King, the ACE and ASAP programs, the Executive Budget cut some of that. Do you want us to restore so that you can add staff or counselors, or is this just to maintain what you already have?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: So in the Executive Budget the Governor proposes 12 million for ASAP and ACE, which makes the funding permanent. Because we originally funded those programs through the Transformation Fund, which was one-time funding that we got two years ago. And so it's -- we're encouraged that that funding is permanent, and that will allow us to grow the program. And the Governor has conveyed that she intends to allow us to grow it even further next year, given the track record of

improving completion.

Where we did see a cut is the EOP program, which was cut by $1.9 million. That is a program where we would love to see that restored. And we would also love to be able to grow the EOP program.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: I visited Queens College last week, and a couple of the students said that with the ACE and ASAP they feel that there's more work that needs to be done as far as increasing the number of counselors. They said on the front end when they enter the program they feel they have a lot of support, but as the years go on -- a couple of them were in their second year and they felt that they needed to expand the number of counselors.

Is that something that that funding would allow you to do?

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: In our end, absolutely yes. And I want to thank you for that question and answer that in two ways.

In our case -- the funding that is in

the Executive Budget for ASAP and ACE, in our case we probably use it more towards stabilizing ACE. Our 3,000 students that we have on ACE now are paid for in a combination of state funding and philanthropic dollars. We got investors to say this is a worthwhile program, give us some of that money. Eventually the state will come in and take over that.

So we want to go back to that promise and do that to stabilize particularly ACE. It is a great practice, right, to be able to attract philanthropic donors in that manner.

The other thing, Assemblywoman, that we're also thinking about is how do we learn from all these programs which cause those students to have additional support. You were talking about advisors and counselors, right. And how do we learn from that so that it is not just the students who belong in those programs that can benefit from what we have learned in supporting those programs that we do can do that on scale across the system. Right?

So it's a very pertinent question and we're working very hard on that. But it is an issue. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Thank you.

And lastly, the Governor's Opportunity Promise Scholarship, do the community colleges have the capacity and resources to take on these additional students? And I think -- I ask that because a lot of the community colleges have said that they need additional help. It's not just the tuition for them, it's also building these programs up to capacity.

And I don't know how much -- you know, if you can't answer fully in the time allotted, I'd appreciate a follow-up.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: They're ready. One of the great things in the way the funding was constructed is that there's funding there to support the students but also to support us in being able to get faculty, counselors, the additional infrastructure to do it right.

I think the community colleges are

really, really happy about this opportunity.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: I'd say our community colleges are excited about the opportunity. We are ready to serve more adult learners.

That said, our Board of Trustees proposed additional operating dollars for community colleges to help with the development of these high-cost workforce development programs. Take, for example, nursing. There's a lot that you need to invest in equipment, in the faculty.

And we certainly look forward to a continuing conversation about the operating needs of the community colleges.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Next is our ranker, Senator Griffo.

SENATOR GALLIVAN: Good morning, gentlemen.

Chancellor King, we heard you talk about -- and I respect the need at Downstate Medical Center. And we heard you talk about almost a billion dollars in investment that's

being made there, between modernization, revitalization and operating funds.

When Commissioner McDonald was here, he talked about the unique and specific needs of Upstate Medical Center, and the unique role that they play as a critical access as well as an academic institution. And while he was showing his love, he couldn't show the money.

So what I would ask you today is what will you and can you do to advocate for that parity and to include more additional resources for Upstate Medical Center in this budget?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Thanks, Senator Griffo. So the good news is that, you know, the Governor includes $200 million in her Executive Budget for a project that we proposed together with Upstate which would allow them to build a $450 million annex to replace their emergency room, which is severely out of date, to add additional operating room capacity, and to add a new burn unit.

We think that's an important project. I actually joined the Governor for a visit to Upstate about two weeks ago. She walked through the emergency room, she sat with President Dewan and the hospital CEO and talked through the plans for the annex. She understands the need. And we're going to continue to advocate for Upstate. It's a crucial healthcare provider, as you know, for all of Central New York.

I will say one thing that would be helpful in the short term, the Governor's budget does not include covering the debt service for our hospitals, and that is a very concrete step that could be added, as it has been by the Legislature in recent years. That would be incredibly helpful.

SENATOR GRIFFO: But I also think we need additional financial resources there this year, based on that. And hopefully you understand that, as well as Commissioner McDonald, and in consultation and cooperation, maybe we can see that additional money as the final budget is presented.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Yes, I would say the Department of Health has an application before them for funding that would help Upstate. It's about a $200 million project, a partnership between Upstate and Oswego Health. And so I hope the Health Department will take the opportunity to contribute to the effort at Upstate.

SENATOR GRIFFO: Commissioner Rodríguez, last fall Judge Lippman, at the request of the Governor, submitted a report that outlined 13 recommendations for CUNY to embrace campuses to make changes to make it safer for Jewish students and faculty.

Have you implemented those changes?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Well, thank you for the question. And obviously, you know, we are extremely concerned about issues of hate, antisemitism, students not feeling safe on the campus, so we welcomed the review by Judge Lippman.

Some of the recommendations were things that we had been working on even before the recommendations came. And we have

embraced the 13 recommendations. To give you some examples of some of the things that we have done, a big thing on the judge's report is centralizing of the system to issue complaints against discrimination and harassment, the quick turnaround in the investigations associated with that. Bigger uniformity and training for the different campus staffers that navigate those responses -- chief diversity officers, the investigators who participate in that.

All of those things we've done. We launched the Center for Inclusive and Equal Opportunity that is centralizing all that. It would allow us to be more efficient in responding to all the other complaints, have better data and monitor it to be able to be accountable to you and to others on the work that's being done, and to be much more effective in uniform training all across the system.

So we're very much working on that. Thank you for the question.

SENATOR GRIFFO: Thank you.

And one quick question for both of you to end this. You all were -- your optimism on enrollment is encouraging, but we still see campuses facing significant deficits. So do you foresee or anticipate, either one of you, any potential consolidation or closure of campuses in the upcoming year?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: We do not. And we're completely committed to the 64 communities where we have SUNY campuses.

And I would say the handful of campuses we're most worried about are making real progress. Potsdam, for example, a campus that lost a lot of enrollment, saw growth last year and has cut their deficit by about 62 percent over the last two years.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: And I'll echo that on our end, we had nine schools of high fiscal concern when we began this journey on the structural deficit. We're down to five.

On the enrollment front, even though some folks talk about demographics, I keep quoting that quarter-million of New Yorkers

with some college and no college degree -- plenty of people out there to benefit from higher ed.

SENATOR GRIFFO: Thank you.

CHAIR PRETLOW: Thank you.

We've been joined by Assemblymember Kelles, Assemblymember Sayegh, and Assemblymember Simon.

I'm now calling on Assemblymember Ra, as ranker on Ways and Means, for five minutes.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: And before you start the clock, if I can acknowledge we've been joined by Assemblymembers Gray and Pirozzolo.

Good morning, gentlemen. Thanks for being here with us.

I do have a few questions, but Chancellor King, I do want to quickly mention -- I know you're aware of it -- me and several colleagues wrote another letter to you last week about Nassau Community College. We've been without a full-time president for many years. The board has expressed a very clear intention to keep

Dr. Conzatti, who has been with the institution for many years, is an alumnus of the institution.

And I really would urge you again to take action with regard to that, because we need a full-time president. I know that there's been some communication that, you know, after a certain amount of time that the person would have to be removed or not considered. But I would urge you to approve her because the board has expressed a very clear preference for her.

With that said, I want to talk about what my colleague was mentioning. In particular, I was speaking with my local community college a few weeks ago about this Opportunity Scholarship. And we all know that our community colleges have experienced a decline in enrollment. It's coming back up, which is a positive. And this is an opportunity, I think, for them to get more students in.

But as my colleague had mentioned, some of these programs that are part of this

are very expensive programs to operate. And when we look at our funding, as you know, the traditional community college model in a lot of the state, there's the third local, the third state, the third student. And that student third is probably 40 percent or more right now.

So how can we better have parity in terms of the support we are providing to the community college student with what we're providing to the students that are at four-year SUNY institutions?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Look, additional operating aid for community colleges would be very helpful. I look at last year's example; it's the first operating aid increase in nearly a decade, $8 million. We were able to deploy $5 million of that to expanding healthcare workforce development programs. Some of our community colleges were able to dramatically increase the capacity of their nursing programs -- Rad Tech, other areas of real need for our hospitals and healthcare providers. Three

million dollars we put towards mental health services, which is a critical need at our community colleges.

The SUNY Board proposed a $30 million operating aid increase for the community colleges, with a focus on programs like advanced manufacturing, healthcare, cybersecurity and IT, renewable energy jobs. That additional operating support would help the community colleges reach even more adult learners.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Again, we -- in our case, the partnership is with the City of New York, and we face some things there that have been challenging in terms of support for the community colleges. Enrollment is growing, which is -- was a concern. I mean, there was a sector that was most effective because of the pandemic nationwide and in both of our systems.

We've been getting a lot better, bringing a lot more of those adult learners and folks who have been out of the workforce and sort of coming back. And so I remain

very optimistic about the capacity to sort of be able to build up our enrollment in that way.

I also believe that the scholarship program that's been proposed by the Governor is going to be a very good marketing tool that's going to bring us, you know, more students of every kind coming to the community college. And when you think that in our case 75 percent or so of the community college students de facto go tuition-free, between TAP and Pell, right, we feel that any student that comes our way, either because they're curious about the new program or they end up going to another area, we're going to be able to service them well.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you, and especially mentioning the nursing. Obviously it's beneficial to everybody. It's a field that we know there is a shortage of professionals in right now.

Lastly, I just want to reiterate what Senator Griffo was talking about with the Lippman report and the implementation.

Chancellor Matos Rodríguez, the feedback I get from constituents, whether they're on the faculty, staff, students, is that not enough is being done and they continue to not feel safe as Jewish professors, students on campus. So we really need strong action to make those students feel safe on our campuses.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Fully committed. Thank you.

CHAIR PRETLOW: Thank you.

Senator John Liu.

SENATOR LIU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Chancellors, for joining us, as always.

Chancellor King, I have some follow-up questions from some correspondence we had earlier this past year, and I had not gotten any satisfactory response from you and your team.

The questions surround the -- this no-bid contract that SUNY entered into with a major publishing company. The concerns were that, number one, entering into this kind of

major contract on a no-bid basis leads to -- certainly encourages certain kinds of monopolistic tendencies. And that's something I think we would agree we do not want to see in academic publishing.

The second concern is that this major publisher has been accused of and in some ways shown to have acceded to censorship by foreign governments. And, you know, that obviously raises a huge amount of questions and concern.

Has there been anything done with regard to this particular no-bid contract? And has your office looked into whether this contract may be promoting a monopoly and if the -- whether the censorship concerns are founded?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Thanks, Senator, for the question. A couple of pieces of context.

One, we don't have a contract where we are making purchases from this company. It's a setup where we have done a contract with them to create pricing for our campuses that

can choose to purchase from this company so that the prices are lower --

SENATOR LIU: But it's the only company that all 64 campuses have ready access to. So while it's not a strict requirement, it's really a very strong inducement for all campuses.

I mean, SUNY is not -- it's not a fast food franchise where you're trying to lower costs for all your campuses, right? You want to make sure that there's a long-term preservation of academic freedom.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Certainly strongly support academic freedom. And our campuses are purchasing textbooks and articles from a variety of sources.

The company that you're describing is the sole publisher of several academic journals that are widely used throughout higher education.

SENATOR LIU: And some of those publications have been changed to accede to demands by foreign governments in terms of some of the content. Is that something

you're aware of?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: I'm aware that that has been alleged. And that's really a State Department issue more than it is a SUNY issue.

SENATOR LIU: You mean a United States State Department? I think --

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Yeah.

SENATOR LIU: -- it's a SUNY issue. I mean, if you have materials, academic materials that are being censored by foreign governments, that's a consideration that SUNY should take into account when spreading all this -- or disseminating this material to all 64 campuses.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: The contract that we have has gone through all of the state processes. What you're describing is a foreign policy question, not a state contracting question.

SENATOR LIU: Okay. Thank you.

CHAIR PRETLOW: Assemblyman Eachus.

ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Thank you, Chair Pretlow.

Chancellor King, you have already mentioned about the federal Congress looking at AI money. You also talked about the federal research money and the possibilities of those being there or not being there.

With this totally absurd outlook by the federal government on DEI, have you calculated how much money possibly we could lose in that situation?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Well, you know, in many ways, given SUNY's mission, the work on diversity is core to who we are, what we do at SUNY.

The federal government issued, the president issued these executive orders that have been challenged in court. There was a preliminary injunction that was granted on Friday night which has stopped action on those.

We think that our work on diversity and inclusion is 100 percent consistent with our tradition. And the missives from the federal government to date have not been consistent with the law.

ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: So you're as lost as the rest of us are on what's going to happen.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Look, that --

ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: All right, thank you.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: That's -- for the whole higher ed sector, that's right.

ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Yeah. You talked about these, but I just want to go back to it. I believe last year we talked about 17 to 19 campuses that were in fiscal jeopardy. You mentioned Potsdam has improved.

What about all the others, how are they doing?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Yeah, so the 17 is a list that is not ours. I mean, we identified -- in our Long-Term Enrollment and Sustainability Report that we provided to the Governor and the Legislature in December of '23, we identified five campuses that we felt had significant structural deficits that needed to be addressed.

Potsdam, I mentioned, has cut theirs

by 62 percent. Fredonia has taken important steps on financial responsibility and has cut their deficit in half. SUNY Delhi has eliminated their deficit, now has a surplus, and has seen significant enrollment growth.

Buffalo State is earlier on in their financial sustainability initiative, but they did identify 37 programs that they're discontinuing that enroll, between those 37 programs, a total of 34 students. When they complete that process, they will be in a much better position. They've cut their deficit by a quarter. We think they're going to make rapid progress.

And then there's SUNY Maritime, which actually had an operating surplus this year. And the key for SUNY Maritime is our work together on supporting the Summer at Sea, which is a unique feature where the students at SUNY Maritime who are pursuing licensure have to pay additional -- the additional cost of a summer at sea. And we're working on a revolving loan fund to help address that.

ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: You should take

credit for those. Thank you very much for leading the way with that.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Thank you. Thank you. Appreciate it.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator Oberacker.

SENATOR OBERACKER: Good morning. Welcome to Albany, Chancellors.

And my first question of course is for Chancellor King, you know, as someone who has a rather large footprint of SUNYs in my district -- six that are directly in my 51st Senate District, two just outside, for a total of eight.

I've got a quick question, and it really applies more to the technology side. What are SUNY's plans for securing additional capital budget support for its technical colleges?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: The capital needs are significant at SUNY. You know, we have -- and Chancellor Matos Rodríguez mentioned this for CUNY -- at SUNY we have a $9 billion critical maintenance backlog. The

Governor's budget proposes 550 million for critical maintenance and 200 million for a lab innovation fund.

We're grateful for that. But if we want to ensure the long-term success of SUNY's institutions, including our technical colleges, we need more capital investment. You know, at SUNY Delhi, as you know, and I know you care deeply about SUNY Delhi, they could expand significantly their mechatronics program, but they need space to do it.

And so we -- our Board of Trustees proposed a five-year $10.7 billion capital plan that would address critical maintenance, clean energy and lab space.

We used to have, at SUNY, a five-year capital plan before the 2008 financial crisis. We think it's time to go back to that kind of long-term planning.

SENATOR OBERACKER: Great. And thank you for the shout out to SUNY Delhi. I am a SUNY Delhi alumnus -- go, Broncos -- so anything that we could do, I'd be more than happy, Chancellor, to take that into my

51st Senate District if you have any extra billions hanging around.

So -- and quickly to Chancellor Rodríguez, as a member of the Minority Conference, and I am on the -- yeah, I'm trying to think of it. Isn't that great when the -- when it comes down. I am on the Antisemitism Task Force, and I just wanted to thank you for your continued response to those issues on your campuses. Anything that we could do to of course maintain the safety is by far I think priority one.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Well, thank you. And like I said, back to the question, we're committed to the Lippman Report provided a good blueprint, right, of a number of things that either we were doing that we need to continue to do -- that is a personal commitment of mine.

And again, we are in very polarizing times and we need to find ways to bring people together. And this is one particular thing also that, given the history of CUNY and the Jewish community, is of particular

matter to me. So thank you.

SENATOR OBERACKER: Thank you for the job you're doing.

CHAIR PRETLOW: Thank you.

Assemblymember Clark.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Thank you.

And I will address my questions to Chancellor King, who I actually first want to thank for your commitment to Monroe Community College in my district, particularly on creative solutions around hunger and ensuring that the students there are getting their basic needs met, which we know is a increasingly growing problem that we are all looking for more and more ways to address. So first want to thank you, and now some questions.

I want to echo -- and I know it's been brought up on these very expensive programs. From what we're hearing in community colleges, I think we all agree that finding ways to get more people access, particularly in high-demand fields, is something we all want. And we have talked a little bit about

the expense that -- what we've been told by the community colleges is that just covering the tuition alone is going to make them operate at deficits every day because they're such high-need programs, they're lower-ratio.

I know you've already sort of captured that that is an issue and something that you've flagged.

Is there a way to get a number for us as we start developing the budget about what really giving the needed dollars to support those programs would be, so that we can adequately ensure that our community colleges aren't losing money every day when they start operating these at a bigger --

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Yeah, appreciate the question, Assemblywoman. And thank you for your support for the work that we're doing on basic needs, including at Monroe.

Look, our SUNY Board of Trustees proposed a $30 million operating aid increase with detailed plans for how that would create more slots in healthcare, advanced

manufacturing, the semiconductor industry, renewable energy and green jobs, and IT and cybersecurity. And that's investments in both faculty and equipment to support those programs.

I will say, you know, our hope is that the Governor's free tuition proposal will drive an enrollment increase that will bring new revenue with it. When Massachusetts implemented a similar initiative, they saw an 8 percent enrollment increase. So we're encouraged by what the Governor is proposing.

And you're right, there are additional operating support needs at the community colleges.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Our big concern is that if the tuition isn't covering what community colleges need to operate that program every day, even by increasing it two-, threefold isn't going to solve that problem. And that we all want to be cognizant of it as we start figuring out final numbers for the budget and what we need to do.

My final quick question -- and it's on room and board. We've done a lot around TAP, we've done a lot around tuition, ensuring people have more and more access, more families get access. As someone who is the parent of a child currently in a SUNY college, but looking even across the country, room and board in New York State is considerably higher at our universities. So as we've done a lot to cap tuition, I still feel like this is an access point that's really hindering our kids.

Is there anything being done around it?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Yeah, look, our campuses are very sensitive to trying to keep the costs of room and board down. But it is a challenge. I do think additional state financial aid for students would be helpful, particularly for our lowest-income students.

CHAIR PRETLOW: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator Rachel May.

SENATOR MAY: Thank you.

Chancellor King, thanks for being here and for answering our questions.

I have two, of a thousand, but I'll keep it to two.

Just a couple of weeks ago when NIH announced that it was planning a change to F&A reimbursements, you estimated that that would cost SUNY $79 million. That one is on hold, as I understand it now. But what are you doing to plan for a federal government that wants to take us back to the Dark Ages when it comes to scientific research?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Yeah, look. you know, in the short run we are definitely leaning into the litigation strategy. We worked very closely with the Attorney General to prepare the materials for the litigation that got the temporary restraining order.

In the long run, it will be very challenging to replace these federal dollars. The federal government is one of the crucial investors in healthcare research across the country. And if we don't have those funds, we will ultimately be unable to continue many

of these research projects. And it will make --

SENATOR MAY: Are you engaging with, say, Republican lawmakers in parts of the state where it's going to affect their constituents as well, to get them to push back against what's happening?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Yes. And I went down to Washington the week before last to meet with members of our delegation, both sides of the aisle, to talk about the ways in which the research dollars not only drive important advances in healthcare but also ensure jobs in their districts. So we're going to keep making that case.

SENATOR MAY: Let me get to my other question, which is I was startled when I was talking with SUNY -- ESF staff and students that they were saying that being part of the SUNY system comes with a lot of obligations in terms of hiring, tuition benefits they can offer, various things like that -- overhead -- but not the kinds of benefits that you might expect. So being able to have

subscriptions to academic journals that are being done systemwide, bringing down the cost in various ways.

What are you doing to make sure that the campuses feel the benefit of being part of the system and not just the restrictions?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Yeah. So over the last two years we've been very committed to growing shared-service arrangements. The first was around our Office of General Counsel, where we added additional staff at SUNY system, and we've been able to produce hundreds of thousands of dollars in savings on the cost of outside firms by bringing that work in-house and having it shared across the SUNY system.

We are launching --

SENATOR MAY: While I have just a couple of seconds, tele-mental health is one of the arenas where they shouldn't have to come up with separate contracts.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: That's right. That's right. And we've been doing telepsychiatry through Upstate Medical,

actually, which has been very helpful to campuses.

SENATOR MAY: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

We've been joined by Assemblymember O'Pharrow.

And next on my list for questioning is Assemblymember Smullen, five minutes.

ASSEMBLYMAN SMULLEN: Thank you, Chair.

The first question is for Chancellor King. We talked a little bit about the capital plan that SUNY is in the process of building or rebuilding. It only makes sense; strategic planning is how you plan for the future that will inevitably be here in five, 10, 15, 20 years. This year is 750 million or so that's in there.

One of the concerns I have is that some of the other mandates from the state, from the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act for electrification of the campuses. SUNY has about 40 percent of all the state buildings in New York State. How

are you dealing with the inflationary costs?

And how are you dealing with the actual nuts and bolts of translating money into capital projects and then having to deal with this electrification issue?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Look, our work over the last few years as we've done critical maintenance projects, we've been trying to shift over to clean energy in order to realize the energy cost savings over time. And that has worked. You know, we will hit -- we are on track to hit the --

ASSEMBLYMAN SMULLEN: For efficiency it works.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: That's right.

ASSEMBLYMAN SMULLEN: I wouldn't agree with the production of electricity, but --

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: So from the standpoint of our planning for our construction work, we are trying to think about how can we gain long-term energy savings. And we will hit our 40 percent reduction in greenhouse gas targets by 2030 at our current pace. So we're excited about

that.

There are some great opportunities to realize additional savings like geothermal networks, which we can do very efficiently at SUNY because you don't have to negotiate with every individual property owner, we have a whole community of buildings that we can move over to geothermal.

But that takes up-front capital investment, and that's part of why we need this long-term capital plan, so that we can embark on those kinds of projects.

ASSEMBLYMAN SMULLEN: Okay. Well, thank you.

Now, I've heard both of you express reluctance about complying with federal directives having to do with federal research dollars. That's actually a requirement by the law. And you've expressed that you're, you know, hopeful that the litigation is going to prevent you from having to comply with federal statute.

What happens when you lose that? For the CUNY chancellor, a lot of the issues have

to do with antisemitism on campus and making sure that federal laws are actually complied with. How is CUNY dealing with its amount of research dollars? How many research dollars does it have at risk? And what are you going to do if you lose that lawsuit?

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: So let me -- do you want --

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Just quickly. Respectfully, Assemblyman, I think one of the reasons the temporary restraining order was granted so quickly is that the law is clearly on the side of the federal government following through on what Congress appropriated and the clear language that Congress provided about NIH funding. So --

ASSEMBLYMAN SMULLEN: It's not all NIH funding, though. I know --

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: No, I'm just on that NIH issue.

ASSEMBLYMAN SMULLEN: -- there's a variety of funding sources.

I'm saying as a whole the federal funding to state educational establishments

is set by the federal government. And if they say it has to be a certain way, then you have to comply unless you're directed otherwise by a court. So that was my question to the CUNY chancellor.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: So thank you for the question.

So, I mean, your first question was what would be sort of the -- we receive about $200 million in federal grants and contracts.

ASSEMBLYMAN SMULLEN: How much is that out of your total budget?

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: That is -- it's a significant chunk. How's that in terms of --

ASSEMBLYMAN SMULLEN: I mean, is it 10 percent, 20 percent? What's your budget?

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: I mean, it's 4 billion on the state side, so --

ASSEMBLYMAN SMULLEN: Thirty-five percent.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: So you can do the math. So it's 200 on the federal side in terms of direct grants and

contracts, right? So a significant chunk of the work that we do.

Again, on dollars from NIH and those grants, we're actually following the law. And the law right now says the courts are deciding it and the path will be shown forward.

On the money around indirect, a couple of things. A, there was bipartisan support for the indirect formula in a prior attempt to lower it in the Appropriations Committee in Congress, right. So this is something that folks have embraced historically, to your point about thinking about long term.

And the "Dear Colleague" letter is a guidance letter that we are in compliance with all federal and state laws. If there's a clear sense of someone that says that we don't, then we'll make the change when that moment happens. But until that happens, we've been working around all applicable federal and state and city laws.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN SMULLEN: I urge you to

comply. Thanks.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator Gounardes.

SENATOR GOUNARDES: There we go.

Good morning. Thank you, both chancellors.

I want to start by asking you both the same question as it relates to the Governor's community college Opportunity Promise Program, it's my understanding that there are some programs at both institutions that are not currently eligible, even though they offer associate's degrees similar to a community college at a senior college, that are currently not eligible for that.

Can you speak to that and how many programs at each of your institutions are not eligible for the Governor's proposal?

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: So on our end we have three campuses that grant associate's degrees: The College of Staten Island, New York City Tech, and Medgar

Evers College. In my testimony we respectfully ask that as the process in the budget goes, that additional funding is provided so that the associate degree programs in those three schools would be -- the same rules will apply to them that would apply to the community colleges.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: And for us, the issue is really the technical colleges. So it's Delhi and Cobleskill and Canton and Farmingdale and Alfred State and Morrisville.

So we think it's between $1 million and $3 million in additional funding each year to cover the costs of including those campuses in the free tuition.

SENATOR GOUNARDES: So 1 to 3 million for SUNY.

And for CUNY, Chancellor Rodríguez?

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: I think it's 4 -- let me just -- it's in the testimony, 4.8 I think is the number. Give me a sec. Four million.

SENATOR GOUNARDES: Four million, okay. So $5 million, ballpark, including all

associate-degree programs that meet the course of study criteria. Thank you.

Chancellor King, you had mentioned in response to Senator Stavisky about Downstate. I'm skeptical of the timeline. The advisory committee that was formed in last year's budget was just convened in December. They met for the first time last month. We're talking about coming up with a final plan by April 1st. That's six weeks away.

Is that an adequate timeline to actually ensure the future stability of this incredibly crucial institution to Central Brooklyn?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: We are working towards that deadline that was agreed to last year.

I do think we can put forward a plan by April 1st that balances inpatient and outpatient activities and the goal of financial sustainability long term. But we'll work within the schedule that is agreed to by the Governor and Legislature.

SENATOR GOUNARDES: Okay, I'm

skeptical we'll meet that goal, but hopefully you guys can prove me wrong.

And Chancellor Rodríguez, in my last few seconds or moments here, can you talk a little bit about the issue about transfer eligibility with students? I know some of the students I had last semester actually raised this issue with me directly, the confusion over transferring credits, et cetera.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Well, that's going to be gone. With the transfer initiative now beginning, every -- if you're a community college major, all the courses, you know, transfer immediately, not just gen ed. Everything that you did transfers to the senior colleges. And that is addressing a big concern --

SENATOR GOUNARDES: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: -- that's very good.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: -- of the over 6,336 members in your district.

SENATOR GOUNARDES: Thank you.

CHAIR PRETLOW: I hate to cut you off, Chancellor, but I've got to move along. The yellow light means something: 30 seconds. When you see the -- you asked the question too late.

(Laughter.)

SENATOR GOUNARDES: They were so good at their answers.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Epstein.

ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Thank you. And thank you both for your work.

Just to both of you, the students with disabilities, we have about over 100,000 in our campuses across the state. We've seen some money directly to SUNY. The Governor cut back on money, the $4 million we had in the budget. Will you help and support in trying to increase money for students with disabilities in this budget?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Look, there's certainly more need than we have resources. We were able, because of the support from --

ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Chancellor, you

know I have only three minutes. So is the answer yes?

(Laughter.)

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: The answer is yes. Just want to make the point that we were able to put $10 million in ongoing recurring funding towards support for students with disabilities, thanks to the support -- your support and the support of the Governor.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: And we've asked for 4 million in our budget request.

And the transformational work with our CUNY Accommodate, the new system that is revolutionizing how we serve those students, is only going to generate additional demand. So fully supportive of that.

ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: So we've heard a lot from students about the ability to stay in school. We talked about expanding paid internships as well as the MetroCard proposal I've seen Chancellor Matos Rodríguez put together. Do you think that's going to --

can we move forward on those this year to try to get more money for students so they can actually finish school?

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Well, I mean, we're fully supportive -- I mean, in the budget request I think it's about half a million dollars that our Student Senate leadership put together to do a pilot to sort of continue to expand.

We've seen the results of what a MetroCard can do in terms of not just to students being in school, but also participating. So we're fully supportive of that pilot.

ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: And paid internships as well, expanding paid internships?

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: As you know, that is -- patron saint of paid internships. That is huge on our end.

ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: So can I ask you on the capital, just on 17 Lex, $250 million you put in for 17 Lex, is any of that capital covered by the Governor increasing capital

that she's proposed in the budget at this point?

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: That was like one of those commercials going too fast. Can you repeat the question again, please?

ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Seventeen Lex, you'd asked for 250 million in capital. Of the proposed 500 million the Governor's proposed increasing capital by this year, is any of that going to 17 Lex?

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: I mean, we try to -- we're committed to that project. We have to see at the end of the journey how much capital we end up with at the end and then distribute it. But it's a priority to get that building ready for Baruch.

ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: So you need more capital, is that what you're saying?

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Always.

(Laughter.)

ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Okay. Thank

you. And just -- so this issue of -- we talked earlier about antisemitism on campuses. We've seen the growth of antisemitism. Are you both committed to doing what we can at this moment in our time -- we've seen the rise in the last year and a half -- to do what we can to put resources to combat the growth of antisemitism across our campuses in New York?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: One hundred percent committed to making sure our campuses are safe and supportive climates for our Jewish students.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: And absolutely. And we had a very productive meeting yesterday with a group of Assembly and Senate leaders, and the commitment from my end and the entire team is there.

ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: And just on the PSC CUNY, I know there's a contract. Does that money that's in the budget cover the increase needed in the contract? The increase that they need for the contract.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: We

need an additional 34 million.

ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Above what the Governor proposed.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Yes, sir. Yup.

ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Thank you.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Next up is Senator Webb.

SENATOR WEBB: Good morning. Thank you both for being here.

So my questions kind of stem around the continued efforts we're making as a state to make higher education more affordable. And so I was concerned to see in the budget, you know, cuts to the Educational Opportunity programs, which have a proven track record for helping students to graduate and go on to be successful. Similarly with cuts to Bundy Aid, continued cuts to Bundy Aid. And also with regards to the proposal for operational money, which we know is critical for all our SUNYs, especially our community

colleges.

So I was hoping that if either of you could speak to these particular issues and some plans to go in a different direction with respect to those challenges.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Sure. Quickly on EOP -- and just appreciate all your support for SUNY always.

The EOP program has an incredible track record over decades of producing incredible leaders, including folks in this room. We think the funding should be increased. So there was a $1.9 million cut. Our Board of Trustees had actually proposed a $4.5 million increase so that we could both grow the number of slots, serve more students, but also increase the award for individual students. Because we know, even with EOP support, there's often a gap in terms of students' financial needs. So we'd like to increase those awards as well.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: And we also ask for additional support for SEEK and College Discovery programs, which are

deeply embedded in the fabric of the City University of New York. We are also being good stewards of that funding. We've done some internal work so that we can be more efficient in the way that those funds can be allocated.

We're also being additionally creative. We for the second year now have our STEM Summer Academy. We want many of those students who are participating who are low-income, many come from communities of color which are underrepresented, for example, in STEM fields and the sciences, to give them a leg up. So we created this summer program -- very, very well received -- to make sure that we have a lot more of those students succeeding -- not just graduating, but graduating from all these fields in high demand and with high-paying jobs.

SENATOR WEBB: And then my last piece, just with regards to community colleges. Chancellor King, you and I have had several conversations about the need and the role that community colleges play.

You know, I am concerned that what the community colleges will need in terms of operational aid, that what's being proposed is most certainly not enough. So again, hoping that we can see an increase there. But also with other SUNYs, there are several that are high-needs that are facing deficits, like SUNY Cortland in my district, that's looking at an $8 million deficit with regards to operational aid.

So I hope we can continue to move in a positive direction with increasing funding, especially for operational costs.

Thank you.

CHAIR PRETLOW: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblymember Weprin.

ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Chancellors, for your testimony and your accessibility on a regular basis. We truly appreciate that. And for what you're doing on combating hate,

antisemitism and other hate across all campuses.

I'm going to address this question to Chancellor Matos Rodríguez. In the Governor's Executive Budget CUNY received 96 million for general operating support, which I understand is 34 million short of what is needed for the recently ratified contract with the Professional Staff Congress.

How does the lack of full funding for collective bargaining in the Governor's budget impact CUNY? And what potential consequences could arise from the funding shortfall? How will this affect your structural budget deficit?

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Well, thank you for your question and thank you for your support and care of all CUNY, and particularly the schools in Queens.

As I mentioned before, we need an additional 34 million to be able to have the full funding for the contract that we signed with our colleges and the PSC in December.

We have invested a lot of work and I've been here reporting to you about it, the work that we have done in showing you that we are good stewards of the resources that you allocate in that direction, trying to cut the structural deficit. And we've taken sometimes painful and difficult measures, but we've been doing that and the progress is clearly there in going from, you know, 260 to 64 and having now less schools that continue to be of high concern. And those schools continue to make progress.

If we don't get that 34 million, it's like the rock of Sisyphus. Right? You keep pushing up to try to get out of the structural deficit. And when you're getting closer, the rock comes back down. Right?

The reason why we have a structural deficit is because for years those mandatory costs were not covered. Right? At some point they were covered with tuition increases. We have not increased tuition in our four-year schools in five years. We have not increased tuition at the community

colleges in nine years. Right? So that funding has to come from somewhere.

The Assembly and the Senate have been very supportive of that historically. Governor Hochul has been historic in supporting that work. But if we don't get that, we go back to the reason why we had structural deficits to begin with. Right? So for us to be able to have our house in order, we need that base of support. So I really appreciate your question.

ASSEMBLYMAN WEPRIN: Good. Thank you, Chancellor, both of you.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Jackson.

SENATOR JACKSON: Good afternoon, everyone. And Chancellors, welcome.

I'm curious, Chancellor King, to the commitment that's made to Downstate Medical Center. As you know, our colleague Zellnor Myrie has been at the front, as far as I'm concerned, dealing with that. I am hoping that you will fulfill your promise. When I

say "you," the government, as far as your office and the Governor, Kathy Hochul, of Downstate Medical Center, which is a huge center especially in the Downtown Brooklyn area. And many people of color are the ones that go there. And so I'm curious about your response to that matter.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: You know, look, I'm very appreciative of the Legislature and the Governor coming forward with this nearly billion dollars in additional investment in Downstate. It has put us, I think, on the trajectory to creating a financially sustainable plan for Downstate, in partnership with the other hospitals that are located nearby in Central Brooklyn.

But, you know, we're going to have to watch closely the federal changes. If there were to be significant federal cuts to Medicaid, that would be a tremendous threat to our plans for a sustainable future for Downstate.

SENATOR JACKSON: Chancellor Rodríguez, I'm curious as to the whole

situation with the unions not having enough, when they settle a contract, that they can't fulfill the contract.

Are you sure that you as the chancellor for CUNY feel that you can pull the resources together in order to agree with PSC on this agreement that they've put in place?

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: So I mean, first, we're delighted that we were able to reach an agreement with our friends from the PSC in December. We have been really encouraged by the trend in this Executive Budget and in the budget that you all approved last year, which began to correct a long-term trend of not fully funding the contracts for both CUNY and SUNY.

Doing that, as I said, the starting point of the Governor by putting 96 million in this budget for us is a step in the right direction, and we hope that the ongoing support and conversations with this body will bring in the additional 34 that we have to be able to have no issues there.

And we also want to be appreciative of the 192 million that is also included in the Executive Budget that goes to cover the retroactive pay and the ratification bonus.

SENATOR JACKSON: Thank you.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman Seawright.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Thank you, Chairs Krueger and Pretlow. And thank you to the SUNY and CUNY chancellors for your testimony today. As a proud parent of two children who graduated from SUNY and one that's completing his advanced degree at SUNY, I'm especially appreciative of your devotion and all that you do in higher education.

I have a question for Chancellor Matos Rodríguez. As the new chair of the Aging Committee, I'm interested to know about classes at your campuses that senior citizens can audit. And also if a senior chooses to return to college, what programs exist? Is

there any senior citizen discounts if a senior returns to complete an unfinished degree or wants to start a degree program?

And then also I wanted to mention I attended a CUNY-wide adaptive sports basketball game at Queens College. It was absolutely fabulous.

And for Chancellor King, do you have a a SUNY adaptive sports program that exists?

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: So thank you for your question and for your support. And 959 constituents in your district attend CUNY. And hopefully we can get a lot more of those aging ones also to attend.

Many of our campuses are open to seniors and others to come and audit classes. I think that those policies tend to vary by campus. And we've had -- through CUNY Reconnect, we have brought in some older adults to come back to our campuses. That at times requires a little work because if somebody's coming back after being gone for five, six years, probably the assigned

courses, the curriculum was the same. Sometimes you have someone who's been away for a very long time, and creating the kind of equivalency that is appropriate takes additional time and, at times, creativity.

So that's something that we're trying to work with at campuses to do. But we're clearly open to what they bring to the campus.

And I want to leave time for Chancellor King to answer about adaptive sports.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Yeah, and I would say our community colleges especially have a variety of programs for seniors, which are very valuable, including some microcredential programs that seniors will take advantage of.

We do have adaptive sports activities. I don't know that we have a league, but we have adaptive sports activities and I can get you more detail on some of the ones that take place on campus.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Last week

the Foundation for Senior Citizens of New York testified about a home-sharing program that they have in a partnership with NYU.

Would CUNY and SUNY be interested in possibly doing that, where you match students that don't have housing up with a senior citizen for the home sharing program to help keep seniors in their home?

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Sounds like a win/win.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Yeah. Love to hear more about it.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Yup. Yup.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senator?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator Murray.

SENATOR MURRAY: Thank you, Chairwoman. And thank you, Chancellors, for being here.

A couple of questions. First, the easy one I think is Governor Hochul's

New York State Opportunity Promise, so the free tuition to those 25 to 55.

Is there any provision -- many times we give great education, great training, the students graduate and take it to other states. Is there any provision in there that requires them to at least stay or work in-state for any length of time?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: I don't believe there's a requirement there for staying in-state. But I will say the vast majority of SUNY community college graduates not only stay in-state, they stay in the region where they attended community college.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: And even higher for community college students. I mean, it's very high for CUNY. I think over 90 percent over time.

And I also think when you consider these are going to be mostly adults that are probably established in a community, have families, I think the chance of that is a lot less.

SENATOR MURRAY: Okay. I'd like to

see that tracked once that's in place.

But switching -- and I'm glad we're in Higher Education, and forgive my ignorance, but hopefully you can educate me a little. On Long Island recently, over the past couple of years, there's been some questions about school districts and their reserve funds, how much they're holding in reserves, how many reserve funds they have.

On the college and university level I would equate that to the endowments. You hear about Harvard with $50 billion. I believe the University of Michigan, 19 billion. So I got curious; I looked up Stony Brook University. And as of the last fiscal year, it was just under $600 million.

But I wanted to know how it's being spent, so the latest report I found unfortunately was about five years ago. It was the fiscal year 2021. And it said they brought in -- they were sitting at about 463 million at the time. They brought in 18.1, but the endowment distributed 8.46 million for impact purposes. How do I

sell to the public when you're coming asking for more tax money and more tax money while you're sitting on endowments with that much money and spending what appears to be a small fraction of that -- what do I say to them?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: You know, our goal is to grow our endowments at the University Centers because they are often a particularly valuable lever for research and supporting research activities, recruiting new research faculty, investing in new areas of research like, as you know, Stony Brook is an incredible leader in quantum. As a cutting-edge area, you want to be able to provide additional support.

So we're fortunate that through the endowment match that Governor Hochul and the Legislature created two years ago, we've been able to get some endowment commitments, including the incredible $500 million from the Simons to Stony Brook.

SENATOR MURRAY: Right.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: And we look forward to that helping us lead in these

important research areas.

SENATOR MURRAY: Thank you.

CHAIR PRETLOW: Thank you.

Assemblyman Stirpe.

ASSEMBLYMAN STIRPE: Good morning to both of you.

Real quickly, I want to get back on community colleges. You know, it's nice that they continue to have a base throughout the years. Unfortunately, that base was established with 2020 funding, which was not the greatest ever, so they already started at sort of a structural imbalance on that. And the fact that we're still funding them on full-time equivalents while so many more of them are coming in for certificates, you know, microcredentialing and things like that, makes it even harder to get proper funding.

And I do agree we should at least provide another $30 million in order to help them take care of things. Because now with this new program, 25 to 55, you have people who have not been in school for a long time.

So as far as support services, I've got a feeling it's going to be more than what they had before when they're taking high school graduates in who have been in classes, et cetera.

So I'm just hoping that you'll continue to advocate, as we will, for some additional funding.

The other thing is about the hospitals. I don't begrudge Downstate Hospital receiving almost a billion dollars. If that's what they need, that's what they need. But I think only giving Upstate Hospital 200 out of 450 million that they say they need is probably -- doesn't look good to anybody. And I'm hoping that you'll stand with us.

And I know Upstate is very grateful for the 200 million. And if we can promise them that next year they'll get the other 250 million they need, that would be great. The fear I have is what's happening over here in Washington may greatly affect what happens next year, and all of a sudden they say,

Well, we don't have the funding for it. So that would be a really terrible outcome.

So, you know, I'm hoping that you continue to push, as we will continue to push.

And also I want to thank you for partnering with Syracuse University and their InclusiveU program, and helping to bring that, you know, throughout the SUNY system. Because I think, you know, we'll have lots of great benefits from that.

Thank you.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Thank you for your support on all three of those areas, and we'll continue to work together on them.

ASSEMBLYMAN STIRPE: Okay.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Fahy.

SENATOR FAHY: Thank you. And thank you to both chancellors for being here. I really appreciate it.

Chancellor Rodríguez, if I could just quickly start with a question about your Career Success model, which I know you've been launching. And both of you mentioned

the importance of internships, and thank you for supporting a bill that I pushed over the last few years and we got it across the finish line to do a plan on internships, because the stats are so overwhelming.

When we get a student an internship, we get them a job and largely we end up keeping them here in New York, which is an added huge bonus.

So the Career Success model, can you just please quickly mention that, and the costs on what it might take to implement it and why it's so unique.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: So thank you. Our request in the budget was 7 million to begin a pilot with six schools and then sort of build that up.

We're also building private support for the initiative so we're not just knocking on the door of the state and the city for that. Because we know that to be able to do this at scale and in a comprehensive way is going to cost a dime, but we think that is exactly what students are demanding, what

their parents are demanding in terms of the kind of embedding thinking about careers from the moment the student gets to the campus in orientation, in the work that we do with them.

Even in some of the Early College, they combine advising, right, so you get advising not just on the courses but on the mapping of the things that you're going to be thinking about in your career, working with employers. Adding, for example, paid internships into the curriculum, right, so it's not something that you do separately and on your own, that it's more embedded in what the students do.

We have seen this working all across our campuses. We think it's time now to take it to scale. And that's why I'm very supportive and interested in that initiative. So thank you for asking me. And obviously happy to talk more to your team about it and present the model to you.

SENATOR FAHY: Well, thanks to both of you for prioritizing this. I think it's so

critical. Again, it's a win/win -- win for the student and win for the state, on both fronts.

With regard to the community colleges, also so pleased with the Governor's initiative. Thank you to both of you for embracing that. And I do support more initiatives -- or more operating dollars for community colleges, as my colleague mentioned.

Chancellor King, in addition to the community colleges, we know we need capital dollars, right? We know we need these innovation funds at all the colleges, but in particular the University Centers. I'm a little biased because I have one right here in my backyard with UAlbany.

And can you talk about that importance? And if you would, while answering, please mention this -- what we're all looking at, at the federal level. There's a huge fear with cuts right now, and there's so much on hold. I'm hearing it from UAlbany and others. Please.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Yeah. Thank you for your leadership on TAP and internships. Really appreciate that.

We had hoped that we would have 800 million in the Innovation Labs Fund so that we could dedicate at least 200 million to each of the four University Centers to create research-focused labs that will help us secure research dollars and lead at those institutions.

SENATOR FAHY: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

Assemblywoman Kelles.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Hi, thank you. Thank you to you both.

I'm going to direct my questions to Dr. King. A couple of things. One, I wanted to add my voice to yours as well for restoring the EOP. I absolutely agree.

And you have started a pilot program and I'd love to hear you talk about it briefly. We've talked, you know, throughout many of our hearings of a huge lack of

workforce on mental health workers in every sector, and you started a mental health EOP pilot program. Could you talk briefly about the interest in that program and what it would provide if we expanded it and made it a real program?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Sure. So we modeled the EOP Mental Health Program after our EOP Premed Program, where we bring students together and help them make that transition into a career that they're passionate about.

I think we have five campuses now that have committed to participate in the EOP Mental Health. If we had additional resources to put towards that program I think there'd be --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: What would you need?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Well, look, ideally we'd have funding both to run summer programming and to create internships that would be at least in the summer and ideally year-round. We desperately need a more

diverse mental health workforce, and the EOP program can help contribute to that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Okay. And switching gears to the SUNY capital that was talked about, just briefly disagreeing with one of my former colleagues. You know, brief studies that I'm reading online, a small, tiny, tiny liberal arts college in New York City is saying $2.4 million per year savings in operating expenses with their geothermal system.

You have 2800 buildings, 62 campuses. Have you estimated what the actual cost savings would be if you could put the geothermal -- and I understand that your sustainability director did a study estimating the capital cost would be about $12 billion, which is essentially the upstate's MTA, right? It's our infrastructure. We should think about it that way. We do need a multiyear capital plan.

But what savings would that give us if we're looking at 2800 buildings?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: We can get you a more precise estimate. But it's certainly on the order of hundreds of millions of dollars in energy savings over time across all of our campuses.

We are also very well positioned to make progress here. Each of our state-operated campuses has a clean energy plan that would take them as close as possible to net zero. We just need the up-front capital to get there.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: I think that we should look at this, because we talk a lot about the need for operating expenses to increase. We do need more funding to the community colleges, absolutely operating expenses. They absolutely need more for faculty, for administrative, for cybersecurity, for all different things.

That money could come from this. We need more funding for faculty, we need more funding for the really at-need colleges. You know, we need more funding I think for the two campuses that we have that are the direct

campuses, senior campuses. All of that could be redirected, and it would be zero cost to the state. Right? So I think it's a smart move.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator Salazar.

SENATOR SALAZAR: Thank you.

Thank you both for your testimony today. Good to see you.

I have first a question for Chancellor King regarding higher education in prisons. As you know, higher education in prison has many benefits: Reduces recidivism, increases employment opportunities for people upon their release. And SUNY has many degree programs in our state prisons. Thank you for your support for them.

What support can we provide in the state budget this year to expand SUNY's degree programs that are offered, expanding to more facilities, potentially, or/and

expanding the existing programs that are already offered in facilities in terms of the degrees or courses offered?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Thanks so much for that question and for your leadership on this issue.

You know, we are the largest provider today in prisons in New York State, but we only have programs in just over half of the correctional facilities. So we would like to expand to every prison in the state because these programs do reduce recidivism, they improve the climate in the facility, and the students are more successful when they come home.

We also would like to offer more programs in each facility. Oftentimes the options around majors are quite limited. We need to be able to invest in equipment at the correctional site so that students can take a broader array of subject areas.

I know there's a Senate letter that has been circulated that proposes $9 million that would support the expansion of higher ed

in prison as well as reentry support, so that we make sure we help people enroll in school when they come home and complete their degrees. That would be incredibly helpful.

We are grateful for the restoration of TAP a few years ago, and certainly the federal restoration of Pell. But a small additional investment could produce big savings in terms of folks who are successful when they return home and don't end up back in prison.

SENATOR SALAZAR: Excellent. Thank you.

One quick question for either or both of you. I'm hearing concerns from constituents about proposed cuts to STEP and CSTEP programs, which increase access to STEM, health and license fields to students from underrepresented backgrounds.

Could you weigh in about any justification for those cuts or, alternatively, what plans exist to ensure that students from those backgrounds, underrepresented in these fields, are

entering careers in STEM-related fields?

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Well, I mean, I haven't heard about the cuts, although I'd love to hear more from your team about them to be able to be responsive.

But I've been talking about careers a couple of times here, so we're very, very committed to that, very committed to making sure that in STEM fields, right, particularly with their growing and good-paying jobs, that you have a lot more representation of underrepresented groups -- women, folks of color.

We've been building on that pipeline, so anything that we can work with your office to make sure that those programs maintain, we'll be supportive of that.

SENATOR SALAZAR: Thank you, Chancellor.

CHAIR PRETLOW: Thank you.

Assemblyman Gray.

ASSEMBLYMAN GRAY: Thank you, Chairman.

Chancellors, great to see you today.

Thank you for being here. Chancellor King, thank you for your aggressive and active schedule to get out and visit all the campuses. That is very much appreciated.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN GRAY: So I just want to talk -- the Executive Budget continues the workforce development, the emphasis on that, the apprenticeship program, the microcredentials, specifically with the Opportunity Promise program, right.

And are we better off -- so community colleges, and I know some of my colleagues have mentioned that today -- community colleges are traditionally underfunded by the state. They're running at about 24 percent, where statutorily it's a third, a third, a third. So what that ends up being is that's more pressure on tuition.

Are we better off funding community colleges fully and relieving some of the pressure on tuition?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Look, we'd love to build on the Governor's Opportunity

Promise program with additional operating support for the community colleges to support those very high demand workforce fields where employers, as you know, are desperate for well-trained folks.

ASSEMBLYMAN GRAY: And what about -- so technology colleges, they're not included in the opportunity programs, and they have a desire because they do some of the same education and training that the community colleges do and the preparation for the workforce.

Is there a reason that they were not included in that program? And are you looking for -- would you support them being put into that program?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: You know, I think the Governor's focus was on community colleges for the overall initiative.

But, you know, a place like SUNY Canton is functionally the community college for their immediate region, providing the path to an associate's degree.

So it would be about another one to

$3 million added onto the cost to include the tech colleges. But they'll be able to deliver high-quality programs for sure.

ASSEMBLYMAN GRAY: Okay. Thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Sayegh.

ASSEMBLYMAN SAYEGH: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

And, Chancellors, always a pleasure to see you here in Albany.

Three areas of concern that involve higher education. We recently passed the "Grow Your Own" initiative that promotes more diversification in the hiring of faculty and staff.

And, secondly, the need for more full-time professors. As a product of both SUNY and CUNY over the years, I've noticed over the years and decades there's been a decrease in full-time professors. And I know that with funding and legislation, there's been an interest in increasing that.

And the third area, the availability of seats for premed and medical school, as

with the shortages that exist we're looking to increase those.

If you can give me your comments on the three areas.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Sure. Let me start with the full-time faculty.

You know, it's been very helpful to have the $53 million in recurring funding that was committed to grow our faculty across our institutions. We've been able to do that. Our split is, I think, roughly 55/45 full-time/part-time. Particularly at the community colleges there's a greater reliance on part-time faculty.

But we want to continue to grow the number of full-time faculty because they can contribute so much to the campuses. So the support of the state is critical to being able to do that.

In terms of the healthcare workforce, we are eager to grow, particularly in the need for nursing where we know we're going to see a 40,000-nurse shortage in a short amount of time. And we hope the Governor's

Opportunity Promise program helps to contribute to that.

I'll leave you some time to --

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Thank you.

And great to see a CUNY alum, and 300 students in your district.

Clearly we are committed to finding more full-time faculty to be in front of our students, and we all know that that is beneficial for them. I think also as we move forward -- we've been talking a lot today about increasing our capacity to teach areas of high-demand and areas in STEM. And I think that we might need, moving forward, to be more sophisticated in how we track. Because for some of those areas we might want to have a large number of adjuncts that have very particular expertise in areas. Right? And they come from industry to help us to teach, right?

So we wouldn't want to be saying that we don't want that talent. We've had great success in the last year in bringing those

practitioners to our campuses, so we want to do that. So I think in the future we need to begin to dissect that a bit more.

CHAIR PRETLOW: Thank you.

Assemblywoman Simon.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Hi. Thank you very much. I have lots of questions for both of you. I'm sure you're really excited to know that.

(Laughter.)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: So I want to thank you for your testimony and for all the work that you've been doing to really keep New Yorkers educated.

So I have a question that -- you're going to be surprised, for both of you -- that -- and as you know, I'm now chairing Mental Health. And so one of the things that we know really sets kids on the path to mental health is being taught to read. Because they have good self-esteem, they feel confident, et cetera.

And we've been working together on creating a state action plan, which is now

created, with you folks as well as the Governor's office and State Ed. But it's not -- the funding needed to get that critical element off the ground in assessing education prep programs is not in the Governor's budget. I'm concerned that we may have a case of arrested development of our plan.

And so I would like to know if you could comment on how important this is to move forward with.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: As we've talked about many times, I am a passionate supporter of implementing the science of reading. We've got our microcredential program at SUNY New Paltz in the science of reading that has now been completed by more than 6,000 teachers.

So we're excited to pursue that work. And I think the state's continued support for the science of reading and giving feedback to our higher ed institutions about where their programs are is crucial to that effort.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: And

I echo what Chancellor King says. I mean, in our case you're very familiar, Brooklyn college being our main campus on that space, and I know that that's very dear to your heart and to your advocacy. I know that it is a high priority for the Governor and her team.

And I think also Chancellor King and I have been on the record that we are more than willing to be knocking on some doors about philanthropic dollars to also support that work too, so it's not just dependent on what the state might provide in terms of {unintelligible} -- how important that is for all the reasons that you say about the impact that it has on so many things in higher ed and in employment and mental health.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Thank you.

CHAIR PRETLOW: Assemblywoman Buttenschon.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: Thank you.

And Chancellor, thank you for being here today. As you know, clearly I represent the Utica-Rome area and the concerns of many of the great institutions. But want to draw the attention to Upstate and the concerns that we have there. And clearly they have a plan that has been put forward that needs to be supported.

My question to you is in regards to that plan, have you seen it? And has your team worked in a manner to move forward with how to implement that?

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Yes, thank you, Assemblywoman for the question. Thanks for your partnership on Poly and many other efforts in your district.

On Upstate, we work together with Upstate leadership on their plan for the $450 million new annex that will provide emergency room, additional operating room capacity and a new burn unit. It's the right plan. We're grateful that the Governor included $200 million in her budget that will move us forward on that project. And we look

forward to ultimately getting the full 450 that we need to complete that project.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN BUTTENSCHON: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: All right, follow-up for Chair Toby Stavisky, three minutes.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you.

First, Chancellor Matos Rodríguez, we thank you for your annual Gold Sheet. It's a -- I carry it with me so I can answer the questions in the district.

Following up on some of the questions that were asked earlier, I thank you for your accessibility and your willingness to meet with so many legislators on a personal basis, including yesterday's meeting, which I thought was helpful. Concerning the hate crimes, particularly as outlined in Judge Lippman's report, there were, I think, 15 or so recommendations. Can you provide us with the response of each one in just a couple of sentences, such as accomplished by such-and-such? It's sort of hard to figure out from what you gave us yesterday the final

results of your responses to the Lippman report. And if we could have it within --

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: We'd be delighted to provide that to you, Senator, and to the members of the committee.

SENATOR STAVISKY: I'm sorry, what?

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: That we'll be delighted to provide that --

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: -- to the members of the committee.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Can we have it, let's say, by May 1st or some such date?

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: No problem, yes. Whatever date is -- works for you.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you.

Just a brief chart so that we can see where -- what you've done and what still has to be done.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: And a lot of the work, I think I shared with the group yesterday, will launch the center who's going to be the main hub for the

centralization for the work on supporting victims, which is something that is mentioned in the Lippman report, the training that is done, the working with the faculty.

So I'll be more than happy to go through the 13 and provide you that.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Yeah, thank you.

And Chancellor King, following up on your responses on the financial stability of SUNY, a couple of years ago you had a list of 19 distressed colleges. Are they still in financial potentially precarious positions? In 20 seconds.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: So we think it's those five that I mentioned that are -- that had the real structural deficit issues. Year to year there can be variation in levels of deficit spending on a particular campus using their reserves.

But it's those five that we're most concerned about.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you. And congratulations on your fiscal report that came out last week.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Chair Hyndman, for your three-minute follow-up.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Thank you, Chair Pretlow.

Like Senator Stavisky said, the Gold Sheet, I think everyone I've met with pulled out a Gold Sheet. So your college --

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Happy to hear that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Your college presidents are doing the work.

As I said, I've met with Dean Green of the medical school, and glad that has been separated into standalone and -- I know you're grateful for the $4 million. But when I met with the dean, she asked for more. So I just wanted to know what additional avenues or what would that additional money be used for?

And also to Chancellor King, if we were able to fund the Innovation Fund, increase it, what would you build?

So I only have a few minutes.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Let

me just say that I am shocked that you met with one of my college presidents or deans and they were asking for more money for their school.

(Laughter.)

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: I find that to be highly irregular.

But listen, the medical school is a gem. And the model that we have there of taking students who begin at City College as freshmen and go through, has proven that it breaks a lot of barriers in having probably the most diverse medical school that we have in the state, and one producing a record number of physicians of color to work in underserved communities with all the issues that we have there, and also many students who are dedicated to primary care.

Before the allocation last year of 4 million that was provided in the budget, there was no support from the state for medical school. And we think that that is something that needs to continue to be built over time. We believe being secure in the

base of 4 million is a way to begin and move forward.

We're also working on advancing philanthropic partners, which are very interested in the mission of the school. So we think that all those things will build up the kind of support that the medical schools need, and we're fully committed to that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Thank you.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: You know, if we were able to get 800 million in that Innovation Lab Fund, we've identified projects at each of the four University Centers that would help with our leadership in health sciences and biotech.

So for example, at UAlbany they have a new Health Innovation and Research Building that would allow them to build on their partnership with Wadsworth and their leadership in leveraging artificial intelligence to address issues of disease treatment and cures.

So we think it will be an investment, because that $800 million in labs would help

us then produce research that would draw federal research dollars as well as corporate research dollars, and hopefully develop new ideas, new patents that could drive economic development for the state.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: I want to thank both of the chancellors, and we're going to close this section of the hearing. But I just have two comments.

To Chancellor King, I think you have to make better deals with the real estate on your campuses. We had the discussion -- because I know there is excess property on a lot of campuses and it's being used for senior housing. But I think you got a raw deal in that one.

And Chancellor Rodríguez, I'm on a quest --

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: -- for the clock.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: The Queensborough clock.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ:

We're on it. That was reported to me in the conversation, and we have a full team looking for answers for you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: I appreciate that.

Thank you very much, gentlemen.

(Laughter.)

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And also I didn't ask questions because I've had opportunities to talk to you both. And I've been texting some of your staff behind you with questions all during your testimony.

So thank you for being here today.

CUNY CHANCELLOR MATOS RODRÍGUEZ: Thank you.

SUNY CHANCELLOR KING: Thank you both.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Dr. Guillermo Linares.

(Off the record.)

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Hi, if everyone could take their conversations outside and then regain your seats if you are staying with us.

And legislators, bother the chancellors out of this room, not in the

room, so that we can continue the hearing.

(Off the record.)

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Ready.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Good morning, Chairs Krueger, Pretlow, Stavisky, Hyndman, and esteemed members of the Senate and Assembly. I am Dr. Guillermo Linares, president of the Higher Education Services Corporation, HESC, joined by our HESC executive vice president, Doris González.

Today we are pleased to discuss the 2025-'26 Executive Budget recommendations and our collective commitment to ensuring all New York State students have access to education. Through financial support and diverse opportunities, the commitment of Governor Hochul and this Legislature to students' success remains steadfast and visionary. As HESC president, I'm proud to work alongside Governor Hochul and the Legislature to empower students across New York State.

At HESC, we make education affordable by administering over 30 grant, scholarship,

and loan forgiveness programs, supporting nearly 300,000 students annually. Key initiatives like the Tuition Assistance Program, TAP, and the Excelsior Scholarship enable over 182,000 New Yorkers -- 58 percent of full-time resident undergraduate students -- to attend SUNY and CUNY tuition-free. This includes 53 percent at SUNY state-operated campuses and 66 percent at CUNY senior colleges.

Governor Hochul's 2025-'26 Executive Budget continues to strengthen our state's higher education system with 1.03 billion for HESC financial aid programs, including over 850 million for TAP.

The expansion of TAP over the past two years is remarkable. The adjustment last year to increase TAP's eligibility thresholds opens the door to education funding for approximately 93,000 more students, including 48,000 students newly eligible for TAP. Added to that are previous expansions that made students in non-degree programs at SUNY and CUNY community colleges, and part-time

students taking at least six credits, eligible for TAP.

In this budget, Governor Hochul is simplifying access to college aid by consolidating the state's three financial aid programs for part-time students and expanding part-time TAP eligibility to those taking as few as three credits per semester.

While these new investments aim to open doors for more students, it's also vital to reflect on the lasting impact of TAP. Our May 2024 TAP Difference Report highlights that TAP recipients are more likely to enroll in four-year institutions, complete their degrees quicker, and graduate, compared to those who did not receive TAP.

We are seeing firsthand its impact. Joshua, a recent graduate of SUNY Albany who now works as a SUNY admissions recruitment advisor, refers to his TAP award as "a lifeline." Joshua comes from a low-income background and said that without this vital grant he wouldn't have been able to go away to college. He said that his college

education isn't just about a degree, but rather a gateway towards empowerment.

His success represents the kind of outcomes we want to replicate thousands of times over.

Building on the success of expanding access to higher education through TAP, the Executive Budget takes another significant step forward by investing in free community college programs tailored to meet the needs of both students and New York's future workforce.

The Executive Budget includes $47 million to offer free community college at SUNY and CUNY, covering tuition, fees, and books, for students ages 25 to 55 who are pursuing first-time associate's degrees in high-demand fields like nursing, teaching, technology, and engineering, sectors vital to New York's future workforce needs.

To elevate educational access and workforce readiness, we also must address another critical component of higher education success: Ensuring that families

can access the financial aid they need. By investing in initiatives like Universal FAFSA completion, we aim to bridge the financial gap for thousands of students across New York, ensuring that no opportunity is left untapped due to unclaimed aid.

In 2024, HESC led statewide outreach through initiatives like FAFSA Ready; hosted 65 FAFSA-related events and 211 financial aid workshops with 10,700 attendees, and introduced the first-of-its-kind New York State FAFSA Ready Training Program, equipping counselors and community-based partners like the Boys and Girls Club and the New York State Library Association with the skills to help students with FAFSA and TAP applications.

Our strategy is working. As of February 7th, New York State ranked fourth nationally for the percent of the Class of 2025 high school students who submitted their FAFSA applications. Over the last 15 years, New York has never ranked higher than eighth in this category.

We have also expanded our communication efforts with more than 52,000 students who are now receiving text messages reminding them about financial aid deadlines. In the past year alone, 3.2 million users have visited our website.

Kellie, mother of Binghamton University student Emma, shared the importance of those messages: "Getting text reminders about important deadlines has been a game-changer for our family. With Emma's busy schedule at Binghamton and everything else going on, those timely texts have made sure we never miss her renewal application. It’s such a relief!"

Expanding outreach is crucial in reaching our students, but we recognize the need for a more modern, efficient system to better serve our students, families, counselors, and financial aid professionals. With chamber support, HESC remains focused on modernizing our financial aid application system. We redefined our approach to award work in a more incremental, segmented way,

rather than issuing a large, multiyear contract to one vendor.

This will allow HESC to meet the evolving needs of students, parents, and educational partners. We look forward to keeping you updated on this work.

Thanks again to Governor Hochul for her commitment to New York State students and State Operations Director Kathryn Garcia, Deputy Secretary of Education Maria Fernandez, and New York State Budget Director Blake Washington for their support.

With continued support from the Governor and Legislature, New York leads in equitable access to higher education, building a stronger and more inclusive state one student at a time.

Thank you, and I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you, Dr. Linares.

Assemblywoman Hyndman, 10 minutes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Thank you, Dr. Linares. Always good to see you.

I have two questions for you. HESC administers several scholarships and loan forgiveness programs that incentivize professionals to study or work in New York. How does HESC promote these programs so that the general public knows about them?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Well, we're fortunate to have a redesigned state-of-the-art website that, as I said in the testimony, allows for millions of contacts from students, families and New Yorkers at large.

We also have strong partnerships with both university systems, public university systems. We work closely with CICU and APC. We also have a strong connection with lower education, the commissioner of education, because they are the conduit for not just high schools but through the superintendents and particularly the guidance counselors.

So we engage aggressively in spreading the word. We shifted our agency from being a processing agency in the last few years to focusing primarily on reaching out to

students and families and, by extension, communities. We work very closely with nonprofit organizations serving communities and families.

So our strength is really in that collaboration but also in leveraging all the contacts that we have and the approach that we have, with the very strong committed team that we have at HESC.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: So no social media yet.

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: No, we have social media.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: You have social media?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Yes. Yes, we do. We do have -- we have text messages. We receive about fifty -- we receive about 52,000 --

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: Fifty-two thousand students.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: -- students contacting. We reach out to students and we ask them to provide their contact

information, their phone or their email, to inform them, be updated -- update them on any changes that we have.

So that has been a game-changer when it comes to reaching out to students and, by extension, families.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Okay.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: We are on all social medias that you have.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: I've gotta make sure I follow you.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Which is very, very important, because all students are connected to the little tablet.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: As are we, right?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: And my last question is being that the federal government is in constant change and sending out memos and so forth of what changes they'd like to see immediately, and the talk has been around the -- dissolving the Department of Education. Even though we know it was an act

of Congress, there has been talk of an executive order.

What if the FAFSA was done away with, students weren't able to fill out the FAFSA form? How would HESC be ready for the State of New York to make sure that students on the state level could have access to all of the scholarships, particularly TAP?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Let me -- let me respond in this way. In the past years there's been an effort to simplify the FAFSA, and that has brought many, many challenges nationally, but including our state.

It required for us to go to a different level of engagement with students and families and with our partners in making sure that students would engage in filling out the FAFSA, and with the changes that we have. Improvements have been made, but I must say that one of the things that we -- that has helped is the Universal FAFSA effort, with taking such an effort that, as my testimony indicated, with being so successful in filling out the FAFSA.

In 2023 we lost $225 million with money left on the table because the FAFSA was not completed. So I'm highlighting that because right now if you want to get TAP or if you want to get any other federal help, through loans but especially the Pell program, you need to fill out the FAFSA.

So I would say right now we are prepared, with the experience we have, with the changes to FAFSA, to really leverage our experience. But I'm very proud of the work that not just my agency, but across the board, and with the help of the Legislature and the Governor's office -- with being able to leverage, to bring that money back.

I think what's important is the federal funding that we get is critical for education, especially higher education. So I am confident that we will continue to see that funding coming our way. In the meantime, we are leveraging every single dollar that we get from the Legislature and the Governor to get students to take advantage of it, as we open wider the doors

of higher education through the TAP program and also through the expansion of TAP and all the other programs we have.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Okay, thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Chair Toby Stavisky.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you. And thank you, Dr. Linares, for your service. I know you sat on the other side of the microphone as an Assemblymember and had a distinguished career as a City Councilman and with the mayor's office. So we thank you for what you're doing at HESC to help our students.

A couple of questions. I think you said that there were 93,000 new applicants or applicants in that group of family income between 80 and 125,000.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: All of the increases with the threshold and with 93,000 students benefiting from the threshold, including 48,000 that are newly eligible students because of the threshold increase.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Right. Right. No, I think that justifies the increase and the potential that these students have.

And Chancellor King testified that -- to a certain number.

There are additional CUNY, I guess the independents and the proprietary. Could you at a later date just provide me with the numbers in that category?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Yes, we'll be happy to provide you with a breakdown.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Yeah, I just think it justifies the investment, money comes back many times over.

A couple of other questions. Oh, yeah. How long does it take -- once the application is complete, how long does it take you to process and notify the student of the acceptance or rejection of their application for TAP?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Well --

SENATOR STAVISKY: Approximately.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Yeah. Once an application is submitted, we engage with

the college that has admitted the student and the college then needs to certify that the student has fulfilled all the requirements of the college level, and they would give us then a sense of whether the student has been admitted.

Obviously there is -- there are requirements that the students must meet in order for them to be admitted, and once that is done, their college certifies, then we proceed then with our commitment to fund the students once admitted.

I'm going to have --

SENATOR STAVISKY: Just roughly.

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: I just wanted to add, Senator, that there's a lot of variables. HESC provides estimated awards, so it's not a final number. Because obviously students, you know, come in and say at the -- you know, they'll file an application in October but it's not until like March that then the student decides where they will be attending school.

Also there are variables that even

once an application is submitted and completed, as Dr. Linares says, that there are -- colleges need to certify the student's enrollment, that they decide to go to the school that they initially said they would, and they may need to make changes to that.

And also the certification is done after, you know, the last drop date for those classes. So there are a lot of variables that go into -- from the beginning of an application to when the student gets the ultimate award.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you.

Real quick, the Opportunity Programs. I know you administer some, SED administers others, et cetera. But the Governor proposed I think it's a $9 million cut to the Opportunity Programs. What do you think will be the result on the number of students who are able to attend college as a result if this funding is not restored?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Yeah, happy to look into that and give you a response.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Assembly.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblymember Clark.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Thank you, Chair Pretlow. And thank you, Dr. Linares, for being here.

A couple of quick questions based on sort of the Governor's proposed budget.

The first is there is a big cut in the Excelsior Scholarship proposed in her budget. Is that due to just lack of people trying to apply for it or use it?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Well, I can say that the Excelsior Scholarship has been a tremendous success in so many ways. We now have close to 27,000 students participating to help cause the -- you know, it's a last-dollar program, so the cost is $121 million. I think it's --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Are you seeing a drop in people applying for it, though, at this point?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: I will have

to look and see. But it's been, on average, 27. It was a little higher before, but right now it is up there, it's a robust and very successful program --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: I just think it would be good to know what enrollment numbers are looking like, given the fact that there was a proposal to cut it.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Yeah, we can provide that to you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: That would be fantastic.

Do you work -- do you ensure all colleges have a plan in place to ensure TAP students stay on course in terms of making sure they, you know, meet the demands of what the TAP parameters are so that they stay in and receive their money every year and then end up graduating? Do you work with colleges to ensure that they have a plan to stay on TAP students to complete their degrees?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Well, we have a seamless process of engaging colleges with the process of the payments due to them --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: But also making sure those students stay in the right major classes, that they're matriculating what they need to do to continue --

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: We're very focused on the commitment that we have to help them fulfill their financial obligations and also to comply with a mandate to help pay for college with the funding that each student qualifies for.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Are you hearing more from students as we've raised TAP eligibility income and awards but there's still now this group that's not Pell-eligible, that is going to maybe receive some TAP money, that things like room and board and others have just gotten so supportive that it's been harder to, you know, make college work for them?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: All that we have received is really positive news --

(Time clock sounds.)

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: -- about the increment, you know, into the funds.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: I know they're going to yell. Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator Robert Jackson.

SENATOR JACKSON: Thank you.

And Dr. Linares, thank you for being here, along with your vice president. Good to have you both in front of us.

And it seems like you're doing a lot, based on the statistics that you've put in your statement, and I appreciate that. But how can we increase it even more? With respect to many of my colleagues who put out a weekly update electronically about things that we have done for the week and things that are coming up in the near future, how can you get involved in that process or are you involved in that process so more people are aware of what's available through the New York State Higher Education Services Corp.?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Well, the main platform that we have to raise awareness of the existence of the over 30 programs that we have is the completely renovated website

that we have.

We also have aggressive outreach connecting with colleges and universities, both public and private. But we also interact very closely with lower education to help inform families and also students in trying to prepare to enter the halls of college. We do that working closely with the commissioner of Education.

We have one program that is highly successful, the GEAR UP program, which goes to students in the seventh grade, about 7,000 students prepare to engage in entering college. And we take those 7,000 students through their first year of college.

We engage in that fashion with the stakeholders in communities and nonprofit institutions as well. The guidance counselors are key, the social workers, if we could have more, even more important.

But our partnership with superintendents through the Department of Education but also with our partners in higher education, we're taking that to new

heights. Because, you know, unless we have a seamless process of preparing students from early years in schools, we're not going to see that pipeline reach college.

The other thing we're doing is it's not enough to get a student, with the support of the family, to enter college. We want to see them finish and get their degree.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

SENATOR JACKSON: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Ra, five minutes.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

Good afternoon. Dr. Linares, I want to ask you about a program -- we've had conversations about this many times in the past -- the Child Welfare Worker Incentive Scholarship and the Child Welfare Worker Loan Forgiveness Program.

But before I ask the question, in the past your office has provided us with some numbers in terms of the number of applications that are coming into these programs. So if you're able to, after the

hearing, follow up and give us up-to-date numbers on that, that would be appreciated.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: I'd be glad to share with you all the specifics with your question.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Great.

As you know, in the past they were funded at $50,000 each. Last year the Child Welfare Worker Incentive Scholarship was funded at $150,000, which was $100,000 more than the Governor's proposal. So that information I think would be helpful to us when looking at, you know, what a proper amount is so that we are meeting the need and the demand for those places. Because these are individuals, obviously, that we are trying to recruit into a field that certainly needs workers.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: The other issue that has come up is with regard to constituents trying to contact your agency.

My understanding is that you book appointments in advance over the phone to

assist students, but I was told as of February 20th the online system had no availabilities till March 6th. Does the agency -- is it staffing? Is it technological? What can we do to make sure students are able to contact the agency in a timely manner to get assistance?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Well, I thank you for the question. We are currently working with the OCFS, the Office of Children and Family Services, to bring online once again the first-level call center. This would allow us to double the type of response that we have. We get about 130,000 contacts on an annual basis. This would bring, with a call center, that level to 260,000 contacts.

And so we're working now to really have this established shortly.

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: Can I add --

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Please.

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: -- to that? Yes, that we are -- our goal is to this year, with the support of the OCFS contract, the Level 1 support, is that we will once again

be an agency that will accept incoming calls. So that will greatly reduce the frustration that I think a lot of students felt last year.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Great. That's great to hear. You know, obviously we've made I think great strides in the state in terms of a lot of our aid programs, and I just want to make sure we can help those students sign up, so.

Excelsior Scholarship. The Governor has a proposal to combine the Excelsior Scholarship and the Excelsior Tuition Tax Credit payments to SUNY and CUNY to simplify and streamline the award payment.

Do you know, are there any eligibility requirements that are changing, or is it just basically streamlining these programs together?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: It's simplifying. Right now I believe we do two payments and we want to simplify it to make it one payment. There is no budgetary impact of this, it is simply making it easier for

schools.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. And as you know, you know, the Excelsior Scholarship, while it was sold as, you know, something that was going to benefit -- you know, and it benefits a good number of students. But it really is TAP, at the end of the day, that is what is providing essentially, you know, a free tuition experience for our students.

So do you know at this point, though, what -- I believe it used to be somewhere around 200,000 students were going to SUNY basically tuition-free under TAP, and maybe 10 percent of that number under Excelsior. Do you know what those numbers are at this point?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: I had mentioned 27,000 students benefit currently from the program.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: I've run out of time, but thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator Webb, are you here? She sent me a note saying she wanted to ask; I guess

she hasn't gotten back in the room.

Then I'm going to take my time now. Thank you.

So do we track what the rate of default on loans is now and how we are doing in comparison to previous years?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Are you referring to -- I didn't hear the --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: The default rate on student loans.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Oh. We shifted, as a guaranty agency, to our portfolio. So that's being closed out as of March 31st. So that was transferred, all the portfolio was transferred to Trellis through the Department of Education, so we're no longer engaged with -- we're focusing primarily, our main emphasis is on the administration of the grants and scholarships loan focusing program.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So you don't have an ability to track the data on whether the default rate is going up or down or on what kinds of colleges? You think that would be

the Department of Education?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: As we transition we can look into -- we can look into that to share any information that we have. But we're no longer, at this point, engaged as a --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I knew you were no longer the structured entity --

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Yeah. Yeah. But we can look -- we can look and see --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And you're suggesting the State Education Department would know that? Is that what I heard you say?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: No, I'm saying -- no, the Department of Education at the federal level.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: The federal level, okay.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Yes. Yes. Yes.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And in the same vein, do we know what the debt rate of the students graduating colleges in New York are,

and whether that's going up or down?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: We don't have that, but we can look and get back to you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And would that in theory also be federally tracked only, not tracked here in the state?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: We -- we -- when we were a guaranty agency, that was something that we would handle because it was with a default service contract that we had, as a guaranty agency.

But we no longer engage --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: That's why I'm asking, because I remember from years ago we used to be able to get that kind of data. And then I was listening to my colleagues asking you questions, and we met the other day, and I was thinking, Oh, we never see data like that anymore.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: We're no longer a revenue-generating agency at this point.

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: Yeah, and we are scheduled as Dr. Linares said, to finish

the transition by the end of March, March 31st. And like what we're doing right now, I know it sounds like why aren't you done yet, but there were a lot of materials that had to be reviewed so that we had the accurate information to transfer over to the agency that's going to, you know, take over this part of it.

So we're right now just doing cleanup.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And that's supposed to be the federal Department of Education.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Yes.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Except we might be losing the federal Department of Education.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: No, the Department of Education at the federal level has been engaged with -- we had the, you know, the contract and that was transferred completely through them.

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: And it's the Guaranty Agency Financial Report that we're going to be submitting to USDOE by the end of

March. So they'll have all the information.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And again, not a fair question for you, but if I read the papers right, we might not even have said federal agency to accept a report or track any of this data going forward, which I think should be a bit of a concern for all of us.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Yes.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And I guess I will ask similar questions of the chancellor when she comes up next, because God knows what's happening at the federal level. But I think that those are reasonable questions for us here in New York to want to know, right --

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Yes. Agreed.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: -- are students facing larger or smaller default rates on student loans, as it might get harder and harder to get them, and are we seeing our students graduating with larger or smaller debt levels than in comparison to the past? Because we know that that is a huge burden on college students, affects whether or not they decide to go to college, stay in college,

choose different career paths based on how large a debt they face.

So I think it's really important data for us all to have and be able to use --

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: I agree.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: -- in thinking through policy for the future.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: I agree a hundred percent.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you for your work.

Assembly.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

We've been joined by Assemblywoman Chandler-Waterman and Assemblywoman Griffin.

And the next person is Jo Anne Simon.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you.

Thank you for your testimony. And it's always good to see you -- classmates, as it were.

So I have a question for you along the lines of some others. But as you know, the

U.S. Department of Education used to have all these different loan servicers and now they've consolidated many more of them. But on February 14th the acting deputy secretary for civil rights sent out a not so love letter to institutions really kind of turning the 14th Amendment on its head and applying the Harvard admissions case to all manner of claims.

I'm very concerned that this will impact the availability of money in the system and repayment terms in the servicing of those loans. Can you tell me what you think might be in store?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Any reduction of funding from the federal level is bound to have an impact on our mission collectively to really help educate our students. notwithstanding all the efforts on your behalf and on the Governor's to increase funding, particularly with TAP.

But, you know, when I highlighted all the efforts that we took to make sure that we bring to New York the 225 million that we

lost in 2023 simply because the FAFSA was not being filled out, it goes to respond in how critical every penny, every cent is to really get a student that enters college to the finish line without having to borrow. Which is, you know, the biggest challenge that we still have because, you know, the money that we have available can only take you so far based on your family income.

So anything that will diminish what we're getting from the federal level will have a big impact on our efforts.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Because the banks make the loans, the guaranteed student loans. So my question is I guess whether you think the banks will start reducing the amount of loans that they give because of their concerns.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: That's -- that's quite a question. That's a question that is hard to respond to. But still it will be detrimental, because at the end of the day if the only thing standing between a student is a small loan that they will make,

it will be impacted. They won't get the degree unless they get it.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senator?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Webb.

SENATOR WEBB: Well, now it's afternoon. Good afternoon.

So I just wanted to -- and thank you for all of your work. I wanted to lean in -- I know we've been spending a lot of time in the Legislature most certainly trying to expand access for workforce development, especially in the area of healthcare and of course agriculture. In the Governor's budget there's a proposal to decrease funding for the nursing faculty scholarship program, and then also with 50,000 for the New York Young Farmers Loan Forgiveness Incentive Program.

Given how critical those two service areas are, can you talk about what the impacts of those decreases would be?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Well, if I understand your question, the faculty --

SENATOR WEBB: The nursing faculty --

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: The nursing faculty. We have 90 students receiving funding for -- through that scholarship, and they upon graduation will become faculty in the school. So that is set to proceed based on what the scholarship provides.

Do you want to add anything?

SENATOR WEBB: But the decrease, what will that effect look like with the decrease in funding for that program?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Well, right now we proceed with the allocated funding that was designated by the Legislature and the Governor. So we implement the program. And it involves 90 students.

SENATOR WEBB: So at the most, 90?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Students, yeah.

SENATOR WEBB: And for the New York Young Farmer Loan Forgiveness Program, how many students would that decrease of $50,000 in funding -- how many students would be impacted by that proposed cut?

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: I will get back

to you with the number of students currently participating. But it is a very small -- very small number.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: It's very small. It's limited to $50,000.

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: It's a tiny amount.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Yeah. That's limiting as it is.

SENATOR WEBB: But I would say just given, you know, most certainly some of the federal cuts that we've been seeing, especially in the area of agriculture and most certainly in healthcare, any investments that we can make that move us in an increase is always appreciated.

In my area I have a number of farms in my district, not exclusively, but I definitely wanted to lift that up. So if you could get those numbers to me, that would be great. I'd appreciate it.

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: Yeah.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: I would say also that's where the expansion of the

part-time program and the emphasis on the Opportunity Scholarship comes in, in responding to that concern that you share.

SENATOR WEBB: Okay. Thank you both.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman Griffin.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: Thank you, Chair. And thank you to you both for being here.

I have a couple of questions. On the Excelsior Scholarship, did you say that only 27,000 students are in that program in the state? Is it only 27,000?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: I'm sorry?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: Did you, before -- Assemblyman Ra asked. And was that correct, did I understand it correctly that only 27,000 students are on the Excelsior Scholarship in the state?

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: For '23-'24 yes.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Yes, the '23-'24 academic year we had 27,000. Which is consistent with how the program began.

It's been maintaining itself at that level, yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: And is there -- I have never met a student in my district who is part of the Excelsior program. Can we get any information like on the amount of students who are in that scholarship program in our district?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Sure. We can look into that and provide you information on it.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: Okay, terrific.

And then my other question is with the -- you know, the changes in TAP, which were welcome, you know, the TAP increases, I just wondered, do families and students know about all of the options they may have, like Excelsior, TAP, like all the different options?

And does Higher Ed ever come to any of the school districts or sometimes it's regional, sometimes like I'm -- I represent 8021 on the South Shore of Nassau County.

Sometimes there's a countywide College Day, or sometimes there's a College Day for both counties on Long Island. And I wondered, does Higher Ed -- I have four kids, we went to those. I don't remember if Higher Ed was there. Do you ever go to those and you're there to provide information to families?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: We do.

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: Yes.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: We engage in offering training. We also engage in attending events, particularly large events. We're a smaller agency, but we have a big heart and big outreach. That's why we rely a lot on our collaboration, especially with the State Department of Education, because they have the large network and the superintendents and so forth.

So we also engage with digital meetings and connecting. We have different types of ways of approaching directly students and families. And we also engage with guidance counselors and college administrators at the same time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: Okay. Thank you very much.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Sure.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

Assemblywoman Seawright.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Thank you.

It's great to see both of you today.

I have a question for Dr. Linares. How is your agency helping senior citizens? Is there assistance with them applying for aid? And does TAP apply?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: On your second question, definitely they qualify for TAP, as most New Yorkers, as long as they meet the criteria.

We engage particularly with the vulnerable populations, which, you know, seniors are. Whenever we see a senior get back into the classroom in higher ed, I think that's celebrated like by everybody.

So we do take note of this, particularly working closely with our partners, to make sure that they receive not just the information that they need but also

they're aware of the options available to them.

We do that also with those who have disabilities, and also with those who have limitations with language as well. So we're sensitive to vulnerable populations.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: That was my next question, people with disabilities.

Thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

Assemblywoman Kelles.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Thank you so much.

I have a handful of questions; I'll try to get through them quickly.

My understanding is that HESC uses an applicant's income from two years prior to the school year in determining TAP. Is that right?

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: So is there a mechanism in place to adjust TAP funding when their income changes, a family member loses a job or, you know, some unforeseen issue

happens?

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: There is a way to do that, but it depends where they are in the process. So, you know, it's hard to say exactly when it would happen --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: But not for eligibility.

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: Excuse me?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Not for eligibility? Like if that happens within that two-year period, they are --

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: There are changes that can be made, but it will depend on where that application -- you know, where it is in the process.

So if it's at the end of the school year and the student has been certified by the college or the university, then, you know, that's their final -- that's going to be their final --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: So we don't really have a mechanism. Okay, thank you.

And in 2023 we made the part-time TAP eligible for microcredentials. I'm curious

to hear how that's going, if we have seen an increase in participation in microcredentials.

You don't have to answer that all here, but I'd love to see some data on usage of TAP for microcredentials.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: The part-time, the part-time students?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Correct.

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: The non-degree.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: The non-degree? I believe we had 4,200 students receiving --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: We can follow-up. Three minutes go by really fast.

Another question. What happens to someone's TAP or Excelsior funding if they take a leave of absence? My understanding is that they have a set number of -- period of time and we assess whether there's like, progressing. But we've seen a significant amount of increase of mental health issues, physical health issues.

So do we adjust? Do we allow for time

for them to take a leave of absence? Or do they get penalized because they're still within a restricted period of time to be eligible for Excelsior?

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: It would be reviewed with the college on a case-by-case basis, I would say.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: But we do actually allow for room for adjustment for that? Or is there a set number of semesters that --

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: If there are extenuating circumstances impacting the students?

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: Yeah.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Yeah.

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: I will confirm with you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: We can follow up on that. Thank you so much.

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: Sure.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman Chandler-Waterman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN:

Thank you, Chair.

And thank you to the panelists today.

I just wanted to know, like with -- because I have four kids, two in college, one graduated from college, and there's always some challenge where it's very stressful for the students to go through the process of TAP, FAFSA, these grant applications.

What coordinated efforts between you, the school, and your jurisdiction do you have to make to simplify, you know, certain things that's happening more readily than others that can make it more easier for a student going through this process?

Because these are wonderful grant programs, but if you don't -- if you're having problems navigating or, you know, how you putting things forward may not be presented in the best way for -- to get these applications, how do you support or recommend support in these areas?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: We place a lot of emphasis in engaging on an ongoing basis with school counselors and also when

the students are in college, also connecting with the college advisors as well.

We do that on an ongoing basis because we understand how important it is to try to inform students about the options that they have, but also to make sure that they are getting what they're entitled to in terms of what we have available in terms of funding for them.

But it is key that we continue to engage with those who support -- or sometimes it's not just the guidance counselors, it's sometimes through the family, connecting with the family as well. Because the family is a tremendous support to those students with whatever challenges they face. And with that also, all the institutions that support in the community, we -- we emphasize a lot in connecting with the network of support, nonprofit institutions that support families within the neighborhoods or the regions where those students are attending.

So it's an ongoing process. We also work closely with social workers when there

is that connection made with them. But again, we rely on the relationships and the partnerships that we have with both systems, the public and the private.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN: Okay. Is there a catalog of services written down to support families and students, like something in writing? I know you're saying that there's a lot of supportive systems. Is that in one place?

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: We'll be glad to provide to you the multiple trainings that we have geared for students and families.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN: All right, thank you. I look forward to seeing that.

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: I would add that if students can sign up for text messages, that's the best way.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN: Okay, thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you. Thank you both. This ends this section of the hearing. And I want to thank you for all

that you do, Dr. Linares.

HESC PRESIDENT LINARES: Thank you.

HESC EX. VP GONZÁLEZ: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: And for her second time, Dr. Betty Rosa.

(Laughter.)

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: The encore performance.

(Pause; off the record.)

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Good morning. No? No, good afternoon. No, it's not evening, don't be ridiculous, although you don't know in this room.

Hi, everyone. Thanks for being with us. And Chancellor, do you want to introduce everyone or do you just want to speak and roll along? Whichever you like.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: I'm going to do the introduction in the testimony -- I mean in the (showing).

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I understand.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Okay.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Ten minutes for the chancellor.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Okay. So first of all, thank you for the opportunity. So I'm going to say good afternoon, Chairs Krueger and Pretlow, Stavisky and Hyndman. So good afternoon to all. I'm Dr. Betty Rosa, New York State Commissioner of Education -- I'm still called "chancellor" a lot of times.

I'm pleased to be joined today by Senior Deputy Commissioner of Educational Policy Dr. Jeffrey Matteson, to my left; Deputy Commissioner of the Office of Special Education and Access Ceylane Meyers-Ruff, to his left. It's important to note that ACCES-VR at this time -- I just want to make a comment -- and Office of Special Education are now one unified office working to ensure that school districts and transition coordinators are knowledgeable about vocational rehab services, so let me state that right up-front.

Deputy Commissioner for the Office of Higher Education Dr. William Murphy. And Dr. David Hamilton, OP, assistant

commissioner for the Office of Professions. And also Dr. Christina Coughlin, who will be looking at some of the issues and questions about our fiscal health.

The overarching goal of the Education Department -- and I also want to acknowledge -- I know that our Chancellor and our Board of Regents are watching, so I do want to acknowledge not only their support, but the overarching goal of education and the Board of Regents is to advance educational equity, access and opportunity for all New York State students. Our budget requests are built to deliver on this urgent mission.

The Executive Budget proposal includes the College in High School Opportunities program, which expands dual-enrollment programs that allow high school students to take college courses, saving time and money. The proposed budget allocates 14 million to create a new College in High School Opportunity Fund, significantly expanding these programs statewide. New programs will require partnerships between districts and

higher education institutions, offering students a chance to earn at least 12 credits aligned with degrees and careers with high-quality academic support.

Currently the state funds three dual-enrollment programs but fewer, and I want to state this, fewer than 2 percent of New York high school students participate in Smart Scholars, Smart Transfer and P-TECH.

The Executive Budget proposes to transfer -- I just want to state right upfront -- the oversight of licensing of certain health-related professions from the department's Office of the Professions to the State Department of Health. We strongly urge you to reject this proposal and stand with us as we work to uphold our commitment to safeguarding public health and safety. We have been absolutely working with our commissioner partner Department of Health, Jim McDonald. And we will continue to do such.

Now we move to the proposals we are advocating for that were not included in the

Executive Budget.

We requested permission for the Office of the Professions to allocate 1.6 million in additional revenue from existing fees. This funding will support the success of the modernization program, which also enables the office to continue its core responsibilities in licensure, registration and discipline, ensuring public protection.

We're also requesting a 16.9 million increase for additional Opportunity Programs, which provide critical pathways and support for our students. This includes the Science and Technology Entry Program for high school students and the Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program, both designed to increase the number of economically disadvantaged students prepared for college and careers in math, science, technology, health and licensed professions.

The Liberty Partnership Programs, LPP, offer comprehensive pre-college and dropout prevention services to youth in urban, rural and suburban communities across New York

State. The Higher Education Opportunity Program, HEOP, supports students who would otherwise be unable to attend a postsecondary educational institution due to their educational and economic circumstances.

We are also requesting an additional 2 million to enhance support and services for students with disabilities in postsecondary education. This investment will not only ensure their academic success but also help create greater employment opportunities for them. We stress this because a lot of times our students with educational needs need to transition from high school, which a lot of them have IEPs, to being in college but need the kind of support in order to be successful.

The State Education Department, in addition, requires adequate funding for maintenance, enhancement and repairs. Our building has been in tremendous need. We recently had a serious situation in terms of water damage, and we are still living with that and had to relocate staff. While we

appreciate the 20 million allocated in the Executive Budget for these repairs, a more accurate estimate of the necessary work is closer to 40 million.

Moving on to the Bureau of Proprietary School Supervision, the department needs additional staff to effectively oversee these schools and ensure the quality of education and safety of the students who are enrolled in these programs. SED is requesting authorization to transfer funding from the Tuition Reimbursement Account to the Bureau of Proprietary School Supervision Account, at a maximum of 750,000 per year. This funding would pay for seven staff that would increase our ability to identify schools that are in danger of closing due to financial deficit, and also to ensure the quality and compliance of direct health training and meet the Department of Health program requirements.

IT. In order to support all areas of the department's work, including higher education, we are requesting funding for the next phase of the department's IT

transformation, including upgrades to our state aid and data systems and funding for staffing that will enable us to serve schools, institutions of higher education, and licensed professionals more efficiently and effectively.

Finally, the New York State Museum and the Office of Cultural Ed are making significant strides to advance critical projects even in the face of the serious challenges posed by an outdated and unpredictable funding model. This financial instability has led to a persistent multi-million-dollar deficit projected to exceed 7 million by March 2026.

We have proposed alternative sustainable funding methods to safeguard the State Museum, Library and Archives. We urge you to consider adopting either one of these options.

Higher education has a significant impact on the cultural landscape. We are actively exploring opportunities within our own Museum to expand research and teacher

preparation programs, drawing inspiration from a successful model at the American Museum of Natural History, which we met with the president yesterday. And we have been continuing to work with him and the staff to ensure that the teacher residency program is one of those that is part of our conversations. With our public programming thriving, we look forward to building on their success and leveraging our unique resources to create additional new and innovative programs.

I also would like to say that in the last two weeks, especially last week during -- when schools were closed, our students had opportunities, and our families and our communities, to really get to the Museum, and we have some displays and obviously a brochure to share with you of how our children's focus is an active, exciting part of this conversation. So more than glad to share, at the end of this presentation, how we are turning this into a community, an active focus for children, parents and this

community.

I thank you for this opportunity.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you very much.

And in the absence of Chair Pretlow, we will be starting with the Assembly Education chair for 10 minutes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Thank you, Chair Krueger. Thank you, Dr. Rosa, to you and your team. I feel like my colleague who's not here, Khaleel Anderson: I have a bill --

(Laughter.)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: -- regarding the transfer to funding for the Tuition Reimbursement Account. I know everyone knows my history regarding BPSS and the work that they do, and so I've been told by staff that the "no" that we received previously from the Governor, I think we may have a workaround. So we'll work on that to increase additional staffing in that department.

Because of the work that they do and because of the audit that they received, I

think when you work with not enough staff, as SED has been doing for years, the output is only as good as those employees that do the heavy lifting. And I thank the entire SED for the work that they do and all the unfunded mandates and bills that we pass in our houses.

In regards to the -- I was able to meet with students with disabilities last week. And understanding that the executive proposal would cut $2 million, what are your most recent estimates of the number of students that the funding currently serves? And has that need grown, and if so, by how much?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yeah, so let me say this. Our -- we're going to give you the exact number, and it really works out to be about $40 per student, even if we were able to get the money that we had last year, which was four -- we had 4 million last year, and that was as a result of certain of our legislators who really committed to this.

And we have to think about not

retrofit, but fit, that our higher ed institutions have to be open and have the kinds of resources and have the kind of support in order for all -- all means all -- all of our students to succeed.

So we have been asking for -- actually, we would like it to be more than the 6 million because we know that there's a tremendous need for the number of students that participate. But we also understand that in many cases we also have to do a great deal of work in professional development and support and staff that really work with our students to make sure that they have a sense of identifying their needs, but also benefiting from these resources. So --

DEPUTY CMMR. MEYERS-RUFF: So the current number of students with disabilities that have self-identified is 10,000. That number is growing every year, 10,000 students -- I'm sorry, it's 100,000. I apologize. It's 100,000 students.

(Overtalk; mic out.}

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MURPHY: -- grown

about 15 to 20 percent in recent years from like the high 70,000s. We're now up to like 92,000 plus.

And as you know, like the suballocations actually go to SUNY, CUNY and the independents so they're able to work with whether they want to do training or bring in technology supports. But I will say like if you look at like between 40 and 60 dollars per postsecondary student with disabilities, obviously it doesn't go, you know, as far as we would want it to go, yeah.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Especially with equipment. You know, Assemblywoman, when you think about the technology that's out there today and the kind of equipment that really can support students benefiting and being successful and going to the centers and making sure that they truly feel that this equipment and the staffing and the sense of belonging and welcoming and being part of the higher ed institution needs to really become part of the fabric, not an add-on.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: I know it's

not in your report, but can you tell me what is the budget for VR, ACCES-VR?

DEPUTY CMMR. MEYERS-RUFF: It's around 126 million for VR.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: And how many students do you serve annually?

DEPUTY CMMR. MEYERS-RUFF: The percentage grows every year. We're a little over 50 percent of the customers are students, and we're defining students between the ages of 14 to 21.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: And the reason for the 14 is the transition.

DEPUTY CMMR. MEYERS-RUFF: Yes. Yes. In our state -- in the state plan that's submitted to the Rehabilitation Services Administration, every state has to define their starting age. And so because the Commission for the Blind starts at 14, we agreed that we would start at 14 as well.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: And what is the time frame between an institution, you know, accessing or applying and actually receiving money from VR?

DEPUTY CMMR. MEYERS-RUFF: So when you say an institution, are you talking about customers or are you talking about the enhancing supports and services initiative?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: The customers.

DEPUTY CMMR. MEYERS-RUFF: Okay. So it -- we -- according to federal regulations, there are some very specific timelines: 60 days to make a person eligible for services. And then after a person is eligible, 90 days to create their employment plan.

We are -- we've done a lot of work, we're averaging around 30 to 45 days per application to make you eligible, and then we're around 60 days for developing your IPE. A lot of that has to do with providing the documents in a timely manner, getting assessments and psychologicals from psychologists. So there are a lot of factors, but on average we are definitely within the federal requirements.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: I'm thinking about all of the -- you talk about there's a lot of students graduating from high school

with an IEP and not knowing the course, parents not knowing the options they have because it's not a GED task, it's not a high school diploma, and sometimes they find VR, you know --

DEPUTY CMMR. MEYERS-RUFF: And sometimes they don't.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: -- a rather roundabout way. So, you know, hopefully they do. And then the additional documentation again that's required for families, which is why I asked the questions, because sometimes even if they don't find our offices, a lot -- not every high school counselor is always well versed in the programs that the state -- as we were just talking about, that the state offers.

And so how do you, with the -- is there outreach --

DEPUTY CMMR. MEYERS-RUFF: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Is there a budget for that to make sure?

DEPUTY CMMR. MEYERS-RUFF: Yes. But this gets back to the commissioner's comments

in her testimony. This is the reason why we unified the Office of Special Ed with ACCES-VR. The vision is a seamless transition from secondary high school into adult career services.

The truth of the matter is that transition really starts at Early Intervention, through the transition to pre-K, special ed, into K-12 and into adult services. All along the way at these various transition points families need information about what is the future for their child and how do they connect to services. Then we have a package of services in what we call pre-employment transition services that are really meant to allow students to explore career options -- what are you interested in, what might you like, work opportunities, work experiences.

So by having these two offices within State Ed working more closely together and providing joint guidance to the field, we can get more information to families. We do, at the voc-rehab level, have counselors assigned

to schools and they go into schools and they meet with families and staff. But we recognize that everyone doesn't get the information.

And so the work that we're now doing as a combined office is to address that very issue.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: And language access within VR, how is that?

DEPUTY CMMR. MEYERS-RUFF: So we are using actually some assistive technology to help with translation services. We've had some success with that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Okay, thank you.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: And Assemblywoman, to emphasize, at the foundational level. Meaning that for a long time we had the Office of Special Ed on one side, even in the department.

So when you had these babies starting zero to 3, 3 to 5, in -- some of them not even in inclusive types of settings -- this is an incredible opportunity to start at that

point, to start working with families to really do the journey with, alongside of families that need to understand that the early stages, in the middle school, when they enter high school with transition and all the way through, as a P-20 process. So that's what we have advanced.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Okay, I'll come back with my other questions when I have enough time. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Next up is our chair, Toby Stavisky.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you.

Thank you, Commissioner, and to your deputies, particularly Dr. Hamilton for being so accessible when I have some questions.

The Governor, as you know, proposed transferring some of your professions to the Department of Health. In your opinion, are they better qualified to assess both the applications for licensure, the program approvals, et cetera?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, let me start with -- Senator, we've been doing --

obviously, you know, the fact that we've been doing this for 134 years is a start.

But we have really been -- you know, when you think about expertise and when you think about not trying to fragment, you know, the professions and not trying to necessarily engage in a situation that we have been working so hard at improving not only the safety and the quality of response to the field, we really, truly believe that this suggestion, recommendation, decision is not one that's in the best interests of the public.

So with that, Dr. Hamilton?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HAMILTON: Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you, Senator.

We have highly qualified, well-trained and very experienced staff who evaluate education from international programs and from domestic programs to determine if people meet the requirements. We have board offices that help guide the practice of the professions in terms of working with our counsel and others to make sure that there

are practice alerts and guidelines. We have professional discipline that takes care of the public safety.

So we have an entire team. And to start trying to figure out how we break part of that team apart to send some people to the Department of Health to deal with medicine -- which is an important profession, but it's one that we've been doing well and doing for a long time.

So we don't see the need for this type of change.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you.

How long does it take to process, let's say, an application for licensure once all of the credentials are submitted? Approximately.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HAMILTON: Once all the credentials are submitted, we get those individuals licensed within two weeks. And last year we licensed about 97,000 people, compared to 50,000 just in 2019.

So our volume's gone up, but thanks to the investments from the Legislature letting

us spend money to add staff, we've been able to improve our services as well as working on the modernization, which will help the entire system move even better.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you. And thank you for what you're doing.

The commissioner mentioned some of the Opportunity Programs in response to the Assemblywoman's questions. The Governor has proposed a cut to all of the Opportunity -- or many of -- some of the Opportunity Programs administered by SED, others by HESC.

What would be the effect -- I asked this question of Dr. Linares before. What would be the effect on the student population of such cuts to CSTEP and HEOP and Liberty, all of the Opportunity Programs?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So let me start by saying, Senator, that in a time when we are looking to increase the footprint in higher education, at a time when we're looking not only just to increase the footprint but also increase the footprint of many types of individuals who have not had

the opportunity to be part of the landscape of higher education.

I think that this kind of a decision really in many ways impedes having the kind of increase of not only the diversity of students but also supporting higher education. As we're talking about -- earlier today we talked about the increase of having individuals be part of higher education. And then when you diminish any population, you're going to obviously see that in terms of these programs, because these programs support, financially support individuals who would have a challenging time paying -- paying and having the support system and resources.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MURPHY: Yeah, and just to add a little bit to that, for HEOP, Liberty Partnerships, CSTEP and STEP, all of them, you know, to -- if we're cutting them not only could we serve less students, but we would have less resources for staff. These are usually network-of-support programs. They make us a leader in opportunity programs across the country where they're, you know,

decades old.

But a particularly urgent area relates to our CSTEP and STEP programs, because they are in a new funding cycle year and the cuts -- even maintaining the level right now could result in a smaller footprint of programs for our CSTEP and STEP programs. Even just maintaining the current level, let alone if you don't get the increases, because of the sensitivity with the new cycle. And you'll hear more about that, obviously, from the panels coming up, with APACS.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: And Senator, it would helpful to give you a total number. We're talking about 45,000 students. So that's a huge footprint.

SENATOR STAVISKY: It's a large number.

Getting back to the Article VIIs in the Governor's budget that affect the various professions, I think it's being done in response to underserved areas where there's a need for additional healthcare providers.

There are shortages in some areas.

How would you address the shortfalls, the changes in experience, et cetera, that -- how do we resolve the issue of areas not having certain healthcare providers? Rural areas, for example. Urban areas.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HAMILTON: Well, thank you, Senator. There are a number of ways that can be approached and is being approached. In some areas they've expanded the scope of practice for a profession. Like pharmacy -- pharmacists 20 years ago couldn't administer an immunization, now they can.

In other areas, the Legislature has provided collaborative relationships. There's been a proposal for several years to allow dental hygienists who collaborate with a dentist to be able to provide advanced services that really help the patient, and that that would be one way to get into especially those rural areas. We have counties where we have just a handful of dentists, and getting the dental hygienists there would be a big improvement.

That also requires that we invest in education to train the individuals to get into these professions where there's a high demand for services.

The other option that is suggested in the Article VIIs, with Commissioner Rosa and Commissioner McDonald from the Department of Health we have been working to identify pathways and there's legislation introduced that would allow medical assistants to administer immunizations that are prepared by a physician in the physician's office or -- again, to take some of the burden off the professional nurse because there are so few nurses in offices.

So there are many creative ways, and we are really trying to work to find those creative ways while still continuing to protect the public.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you. And we've discussed the changes in scope of practice for the medical assistants.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HAMILTON: Yes.

SENATOR STAVISKY: And I think we're

making progress on that issue.

Commissioner Rosa, you spoke about high school students and the work, the college work that they do. How can we improve the -- let me give you an example. I used to represent Townsend Harris High School, which is on the campus of Queens College, and paying for this became very difficult. There are other areas where high school students are taking college credits in the high school -- advanced placement, for example.

How can we provide a more seamless pathway to college for the high school seniors or juniors?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So I think this whole idea of the high school and college, the 12 credits, is obviously a good commitment. But I do think, you know, the whole notion of dual-credit programs, expanding those, really gives an opportunity for students to even experience, to have that -- to your point, that taste of knowing that they can take college credits that

obviously are going to advance their interests, are going to give them an opportunity to not only experience but experiment --

(Time clock sounds.)

SENATOR STAVISKY: Hold that thought. It's like the bell at 3 o'clock in the school.

(Laughter.)

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Having been a principal, I --

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: You understand the bell.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Exactly.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Spoken as a former high school teacher.

(Laughter.)

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assemblymember Clark.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

And thank you, Dr. Rosa, and to your entire team, both for being here but also your commitment to our next generation. The

most important thing I think as a state that we do is honoring our commitment to them and ensuring they are educated and ready for leading us next. And as the mom of three teenagers, very, very, very dedicated to this.

I have a couple of questions, one on Bundy Aid. I understand going after sort of colleges with large endowments has been -- you know, it's an easy thing to look at. But when you look at University of Rochester in Rochester, the reason it has a large endowment is because of the medical center, which is very, very -- they are very restricted as to what they can and can't do with it. And so not giving them access to Bundy Aid gives me pause in the sense that we may be taking children -- or taking students who have the opportunity to go to these schools from getting access to a premier university.

Do you see that as a challenge in terms of ensuring that kids have access to some of our premier schools, understanding

that endowments are sort of locked up in terms of what they can and can't use money for?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: I do -- I'm going to ask my senior deputy, but I do see any investment -- you know, when we think about all of our institutions at -- every single opportunity that we can commit to in terms of investing is an investment that we know ultimately will pay off. So I think cutting back any kind of investment is going to definitely have an impact.

And, you know, the Bundy Aid obviously will have an impact. So I think that a lot of times when we think about, you know, kind of taking from A to, you know, make sure that it's B, we have to think about education being the kind of investment that should be across the board and not necessarily thinking about taking it from one place to supporting --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: Well, I have another quick question, but we can talk about that more.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: And I want to talk about the professions for a thing, and taking another -- a different side of it. Which is obviously we have in our rural areas some real issues with the ability to get people there to do healthcare efficiency, to ensure we're doing that.

But one of my biggest fears is that we are educating some amazing people in our state and they're leaving for other states to operate at a higher level. And so as we look at scopes, and hoping that we can partner with SED in a more meaningful way to really understand that that's only going to add to our brain-drain issue. And if we're educating people in our top schools in these professions, we really need to be a better convener and have better conversations about how we look at scopes to make sure they stay here, while also protecting the safety of our residents.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: I totally agree. I agree. That commitment has to be

a two-way commitment in order to --

(Time clock sounds.)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLARK: And I look forward to working with you on it.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Webb.

SENATOR WEBB: Thank you, Commissioner Rosa and your entire team, for being here.

I know I've had several conversations with you in the past about most certainly expanding resources for our students. I wanted to ask a more specific question pertaining to access to mental health services for our students in college.

And so I know as a state we've made a lot of investments in expanding mental health services. So right now we have students that when they leave their home state for college they have to discontinue therapy with their hometown therapist. And so this also is true for New Yorkers who are going to schools in another state.

And so my question is, how do we address this? Because this is leading to a

disruption in existing treatment which exposes them to risk of setting back on their progress -- falling back on their progress, rather. And I know there are several other states, up to 41 states, I believe, that I believe have signed on to the Psych Pact, which is the interstate therapist compact. And so I was curious if you could elaborate as to where we stand in New York with regards to that and if we are looking signing on, just out of curiosity.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HAMILTON: Thank you, Senator.

Right now New York does not participate in any of the licensing compacts, even though there have been some proposed -- the budget includes a nursing compact, earlier legislation has addressed the Psych Pact for doctoral-level psychologists, and there's compacts for other professions.

All of those require that the state cede all its authority about licensing, establishing standards, and defining practice to a private body that's made up of one

representative from each of the participating states. So if we were the 42nd state to join, we'd have one vote that may or may not be the same as the other 41 in something like Psy Pact. That could really affect your authority as legislators to oversee the practice of the professions, make sure people are getting access to qualified practitioners and safe services.

SENATOR WEBB: I know there's a lot of benefits. I know in New York, especially in the Department of Education, we set very high standards, so that's not where I'm coming from. But I just don't quite understand how our potential participation would lead to us losing our authority when there are other states that I would imagine still have the ability to have regulation, oversight, you know, just given the nature of this particular issue.

I'm just curious -- and we can talk further offline about it too.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HAMILTON: We can meet with you, because it is very

complicated.

But compacts not only allow people to come into New York, they allow people to leave New York, which gets back to the question about brain drain, whether people are going directly or practicing electronically.

SENATOR WEBB: Okay, I'll definitely follow-up with you. Thank you.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HAMILTON: Thank you, Senator.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Next we have Assemblywoman Jo Anne Simon.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: How exciting.

So thank you all for your testimony and for always being so accessible.

And just combining the Office of Special Education and ACCES-VR, brilliant move. I don't know why we didn't do it 20 years ago, although ACCES-VR was not called ACCES-VR 20 years ago, but you get my point. So thank you, I think that's great.

I do want to raise an issue which is

kind of two hats that I wear that I know you share concerns about, and that is, you know, I'm chairing Mental Health now, and of course mental health and loneliness and lack of self-esteem are big issues in our students. Obviously COVID has had an impact on that. But it also goes to this issue about our children reading and how when our children can read, they have better self-esteem and feel better about themselves.

I'm a little concerned that the Governor's budget didn't include funding for enough staffing for State Ed to do an assessment of the education prep programs that were called for under our state action plan that we all worked on and the Governor's office supported, et cetera. I'm concerned that we may end up having a little arrested development there.

Can you talk about how important it is to be able to start doing that very important work?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So I'm going to start by saying that, you know, the notion

of mental health obviously is one that we have been struggling with for a while, even before the pandemic. The pandemic exacerbated it, and we know that.

And to look at, you know, having fiscal support to assess, to have the data is so critical, because not only does that help us to then put together an action plan to support that, it's something that we know, given our modernization and the kinds of things we're trying to do to wrap our arms around that.

We do work -- just so you know, Commissioner Sullivan, that's another great partner. And in our -- some of our monthly meetings that we have with commissioner -- you know, we have them monthly with Chancellor King, we do have conversations about how we can support, at the higher ed level, both in OP, looking at OP and looking at higher ed, what are the kinds of things that we can do, not only assessing but also developing responses to -- you know, to the needs of our students as they even make those

transitions from, you know, high school into college or in some cases through career education as well.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator Griffo, five-minute ranker.

SENATOR GRIFFO: Good afternoon.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Good afternoon.

SENATOR GRIFFO: So to follow up on the Governor's Executive Budget, just curious to get your perspective, when we talk about rejecting the proposals relative to the Office of Professions. And you do believe that you have the adequate infrastructure in place to deal with these issues, correct?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yes, without a doubt.

SENATOR GRIFFO: So as a result of that, what do you think the impetus and the motivation was behind such a proposal? And if you can, maybe address maybe some of the criticisms of the past relative to length of time or staff inadequacies, things of that nature.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yeah, I do think we are your house -- I said that earlier -- and so I think what sometimes happens is, you know, we work very closely with a lot of our commissioners. And there's an understanding of that interagency work in terms of the work.

That doesn't necessarily -- you know, my humble opinion, it doesn't necessarily sometimes make its way to -- you know, I'm not part of the conversations at the Governor's cabinet, so we're pretty dependent on messaging the kind of work we're doing through our collaboration with -- whether it's Labor or, you know, in this particular -- DOH, and so forth and so on.

So I do think that sometimes there is this desire to think that things can be done better if in fact, you know, you move it from A to B. In our particular case, we had internal conversations with some of the members like Commissioner McDonald -- who, by the way, did this work in his previous life in Rhode Island. And, you know, again, I

can't speak for him, but we know that it is a -- there is a commitment that it should stay with us and not move.

SENATOR GRIFFO: Was there any conversation or discussion with you relative to this proposal before it was made, or were you blindsided?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Oh, no, these are -- I think for the last couple of years since I've testified, these come -- you know, I think that the Legislature has asked that some of these not be part of the proposal, because these are policy. Or, you know, I think they become sometimes negotiating points. And so sometimes I feel like we're part of the negotiating points and not necessarily that they're done with the intent to necessarily move these.

I know I've spoken to some of you about, you know, the issue of having a movement, whether it's the Museum or OP, I think we ran through nutrition once upon a time. These are movements that sometimes people want to make, but other times they're

good negotiating points.

SENATOR GRIFFO: But you do believe that any issues of any deficiencies or criticisms that you may have experienced in the past, that you've been able to address and rectify as a result of your structure --

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: I think that we stand as a department, as an agency, with our numbers of the kind of work that we do despite the fact that we don't necessarily -- you know, it's like the Museum having a $7 million deficit. Despite that, we still continue to innovate and we continue to do quality work on behalf of this state and our communities.

SENATOR GRIFFO: Would you just touch on quickly -- at the end, you talked about an additional need for an additional 20 million, maybe, for improvements at the SED Building. What's the nature of the work that would require that?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure.

Christina?

NYSED CFO COUGHLIN: Thank you,

Senator -- (mic issue.)

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Great question.

NYSED CFO COUGHLIN: That is a good question. Thank you very much, Senator.

It's a historic building and they -- all buildings need upkeep. And this one has suffered from years of underinvestment. And what's happening right now, at the top and exterior of the building, is that water is intruding, it's coming in through the skylights. We need to replace them. They're not historical.

We have water coming in through pipes on the roof. And on that historic facade we have water coming down through the inside of the columns; it freezes; parts are cracking and breaking off. The skin on the exterior of the building has water in it.

So it's a lot of work, and unfortunately it's very expensive work. But it's what you need to do to maintain a historical building like that.

SENATOR GRIFFO: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman Kelles.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Thank you so much for your patience with all of us and still being here.

So a bunch of questions, we'll probably not get to all of them, so hopefully I'll follow up with you.

The first, the Liberty Partnership Program is set to receive 3.8 million to enhance college access and mental health support. And I wanted to get a sense from you how you feel that these new funds will be allocated specifically to ensure that students from underserved communities have equal access to these funds.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: You know what, I really had a tough time hearing the question.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: No, no, no, that's okay. This is better.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: This is specifically related to the Liberty

Partnership Program. And it's set to receive the additional $3.8 million funding, and I wanted to know if you could give me a sense of how you are going to ensure the allocation -- there's sufficient allocation to underserved communities with those funds.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Sure.

Bill?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MURPHY: I apologize, which partnership program?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Liberty. Liberty.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MURPHY: Oh, the Liberty Partnerships, I'm sorry.

Yes. So yeah, again, this is one where we're asking for a 15 percent increase. And the footprint of this has grown to -- I think it's around 17,000 students right now. And, you know, this is really one of those vital programs that not only works on a lot of academic interventions but interventions to make sure that students are now getting ready to get into like some of the more advanced careers they're thinking about, like

college and career pathways.

So we know that unless the funding keeps up for that amount of students, they're not able to do a lot of like summer orientation sessions with students, working with them --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Do you have a plan of doing the outreach into the most rural underserved areas to make sure that they have access to these additional funds?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MURPHY: Oh, yes. Yeah. And I know that like when we -- when we're working with the programs and we're at the conferences, you know, that they're going to be discussing different ways and different avenues to make sure that they have the right outreach to reach those, yeah.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: I would love to hear about those, follow up, and then I can show those in my communities as well.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yeah, we have been spending, right, an enormous amount of time in North Country and recently just looking at the kinds of services. Because

there is mentoring for this, and the skill development, as you know, mentoring process, knowledge base, all of that is critical.

And so what we --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: You have to get to them early.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Absolutely. So I will definitely make sure that we share --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: Thank you so much.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: -- and where the programs --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN KELLES: -- the breakdown is. That would be great.

And then the other question you might not -- we might have to follow up. But regarding the Office of Cultural Education, and you've requested the increase in the fee from the -- the transaction fee, $10 to $15. That's 12 million, I think.

How are you going to balance the potential impact of these increases on low-income individuals? That's what my

question is. And we can follow up offline. But that's always my concern, is that we don't -- that we balance, you know, advantages and --

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman Chandler-Waterman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Commissioner and your team, for your work especially around enhanced supports for students with disabilities, as we discussed, ensuring funds are restored and fully funded to properly increase and expand the faculty and training. Mental health is a big deal. Mental health literacy and identifying students with disabilities and mental health conditions is really big for me and my constituency.

I just want to change the conversation a little bit. As we know, we depend heavily on our vital services from our local nonprofits, organizations, to bolster the work, right, in our community -- wraparound services, after-school programs, et cetera.

Oftentimes there's challenges with the procurement process that's not really on them, it's really on the agency.

So what is the procurement process and timelines allocated? Is there any challenges that we're having? Because I have some reports of nonprofits that from 2014, they haven't received the funds for after-school.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So we're going to go through -- the procurement process usually in most situations, we're talking about from the development of an RFP to execution, we're talking about -- and of course we work with DOB -- this is about 10 months to get this done. So it -- it is --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN: -- member allocated funds to CBOs, to our community-based organizations.

NYSED CFO COUGHLIN: It's a little different for member funds. But -- because there's not an RFP process. But there is a process.

So if you have a particular group in

your constituency that is having a challenge, I would urge them to just call us and we'll try to work it out. There is a process that's defined by state law where we have to get them registered as a vendor, and that can be burdensome for smaller nonprofits. And we recognize that. We try to provide assistance. But it's not really our system; we're just the front agency for that.

But we do try to help. So I would hope that your nonprofits would reach out, and we'll do our best.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN: And I'm sure there's other members that have this challenge, so I'm interested in what supportive services for the community-based organizations that we depend so heavily on to provide such vital services.

So maybe it's a conversation we could have about what support is needed and how can we get to that level so they wouldn't have these challenges with procurement.

NYSED CFO COUGHLIN: You know, I think my staff would love to have that conversation

with you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN: Okay, thank you so much. I appreciate it.

NYSED CFO COUGHLIN: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman Griffin.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: Thank you very much, Chair.

And good to see you all here today.

I have a couple of questions. With the -- you've asked for an increase for students with disabilities, which I wholeheartedly agree with. I just was curious, what level of funding is it now? We asked for a 2 million increase. What funding level are you at now?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Okay, we asked for 6 in total.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: Okay.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Last year we had 4.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: Okay. So you had 4, you're looking for 6 in total.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Correct.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: So an increase of 2, obviously.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Correct.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: And with that, I wonder are your disability services for students commensurate throughout SUNY/CUNY, or are you focused at some schools providing more services? Like, you know, putting more resources at certain schools, there could be an argument to make for that. I just wondered what do you do at the schools?

DEPUTY CMMR. MEYERS-RUFF: Yes, so I'll start and then I'll hand it over to Bill.

So first I want to say that even at the 6 million which we're hoping to get, it's not enough. The original ask was 15 million. And we asked for it for years, and it hasn't quite happened. And we've had a lot of legislative support to get to where we're at now. So I just want to lay that foundation.

There's a formula that's part of the original legislation, with SUNY and CUNY admin getting a significant amount of

funds -- it's based on the number of enrolled students with disabilities. So I had referenced the 100,000 number, and my colleague referenced 90,000. It's because there is a delay in when the data gets reported.

So students self-report, the colleges and universities report that data to State Ed. And so the most recent official number is what Bill shared. However, what we're hearing from the colleges and universities is that every year those numbers are going up and we're at 100,000 now.

Bill can talk a little bit more about the formula that's utilized. Because it's SUNY/CUNY, private and independent colleges that can apply and have been applying and receiving the funds.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: Okay, thank you.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MURPHY: Yeah, and I don't have a lot to add. I think you kind of covered it comprehensively. But basically that's what the formula is. They calculate

the number of students at SUNY, CUNY and then the independents and allocate that according to the number, and then they kind of use it creatively to the ways that that fits into what they're doing to serve the postsecondary students with disabilities.

Like in other words, CUNY may already have certain initiatives and they say, well, we don't need to really beef up our -- you know, universal design training for our faculty, we need to do more with our, you know, technology, you know, with transcribing, et cetera.

So that's ultimately what happens, is it's kind of just connected to the number of postsecondary students with disabilities, and that's how they allocate the funding. And then they kind of use it creatively for the ways to supplement what they've already been using for those services.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GRIFFIN: So -- thank you. So if you're a family prospectively looking at colleges, you want a college that will address the special ed issues, there's

not a way to choose that, a school based on that. Because it's based on -- I'm way over. I'll follow up. Yeah, okay, thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Eachus.

ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Thank you, Chair Pretlow.

First of all, Commissioner Rosa, I want to commend you on your testimony today. Instead of telling all of us everything's beautiful with the Governor's proposed budget, you need money in a lot of places -- a lot of places. And I do appreciate you being truthful and honest about that.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Just a quick statement for the preservation of the Education Building. I commend you because you've already started this, but I would recommend it more, have more legislative meetings and visits to that building. That's what brings us to reality when we actually can take a look at it.

What I would like to talk to you about, though, is college and high school

opportunities. As a teacher for 40 years, I taught both dual enrollment with a college and the high school, but I also taught AP at the high school. The difference is that when you teach college courses, those college courses don't necessarily transfer. Okay? Sometimes not even to the college that you're giving them in, because they just don't have faith in us as high school teachers and so on like that.

So I would make a recommendation that we push on advanced placement courses, which generally are accepted I think more widely. You know, provided they can set the scores. Like if you're going to an Ivy League school you need a 5 on an AP exam and so on like that. And they can set, the colleges can set their own requirements.

But I think the AP courses would actually be better accepted across the nation as we offer them here in New York State. And you're shaking your head yes, so I assume the answer --

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: I'm going to

say yes, the APs have a definite role. But what I want to share with you is that with the dual enrollment, the curriculum comes from the college. The teachers are trained to teach the core requirements and the coursework.

So we're getting closer and closer to the fact that it is the actual course, because there's a lot of investments that have been made. We have been able to observe not only the curriculum, the teacher being trained to do that, and some of those teachers are -- guess what, they're adjuncts in those.

ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: I know. I know. But the schools do get beat up with the textbook situation. Okay? In every college course you go to, every year they want a new textbook, it's the same thing they're demanding of the high schools. Which is sometimes very difficult to meet.

The final thing I just want to comment on is that we know that in the past the Governor has made a statement about mental

health clinics in each school building. I immediately got calls about not having enough room in the school buildings, and of course I knew right off the bat with my experience in mental health that there wasn't the staff there.

So I hope we take kind of a realistic approach to this. I would love to have a mental health clinic in every building, but I don't think it's very realistic.

And also the Governor's office said: Oh, the money for that was already in their budgets, even though the school districts didn't know it.

Thank you.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

Senator Stavisky for a three-minute follow-up.

SENATOR STAVISKY: (Pause.) Sorry. One quick question, and that concerns the New York State Museum. Because a lot of money has gone into it, and it's very hard to see the result of that investment. And the

Governor obviously proposed transferring it out of SED.

Can you explain to us why it has deteriorated over the years to such an extent, despite quite a bit of an investment? Maybe I'm wrong about the investment. But nevertheless, I think that issue ought to be addressed.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: So, Senator, I'm going to start, because a lot of times there's also -- the building itself, the building as it sits, it's an OGS building.

We -- we hold -- it's like a container, computer and software. We have the -- we have the, you know, what I would call the treasures of the institution. So that's one issue.

The other issue is that we have been running -- you know, even though your comment about the funding, we have not been receiving -- you know, we have asked for the -- you know, for the $10, $12 which will go very quickly into -- and we have done this before, talked about the $10, $12 that's

attached to sales of homes. Or asking for the 12 million appropriation. None of that has happened, which is why we're at a $7 million deficit.

So funding has not been funding that has been given in terms of support for the museum.

NYSED CFO COUGHLIN: Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you, Senator.

I think the distinction the commissioner's making between the interior of the building and the exterior is really important. The Legislature has put some money toward the exterior and for storage spaces and for gallery renovation.

One of our challenges is with that fee that was set in 2003 and has never been adjusted for inflation, so it's worth 40 percent less than it was then. We have struggled to operate that museum, and our capacity in the museum -- we've reduced staff, we've reduced staff, we haven't been able to keep things up. You know, over time, you just can't do what you want to.

So the commissioner has new management there. They're working really hard with the limited resources they have. But we need that fee to get back where it was where you were comfortable with in 2003 in terms of purchasing power. With that, we'll have the -- I don't know how to say it -- oomph to keep moving forward on those capital investments that you've made, so that we can really present to the public of New York a great facility. That's what we are completely on board to do.

SENATOR STAVISKY: In the remaining -- can we come up with some plan for restructuring? That's all I'm asking.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman Seawright.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Thank you all for your testimony.

Commissioner Rosa, I have a piece of legislation, it's an LGBT curriculum and anti-discrimination bill. It passed in the State of New Jersey, and they're teaching it

around the state.

Is this something that you would support?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: A hundred percent.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: I think given what we're seeing, it's such a tumultuous time coming out of Washington, that I would greatly appreciate it. Thank you.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Well, let me add that we did, along with the AG, we signed the guidance, as you saw, to make sure that all of our students are supported.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Great. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman Hyndman for her three-minute follow-up.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Thank you.

So you had mentioned the Smart Scholars program. How many schools in the State of New York currently -- because it's a grant, you have to apply for that, right? It's a grant program. And I know the

Executive Budget wants to do more around credits while in high school.

So how many students are you currently serving with Smart Scholars?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: I think we have 64 Smart Scholar projects, and about 8400 students.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Eighty to a hundred?

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: I'm sorry, 8,400. Sorry. Eight thousand four hundred students. And a total --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: A big difference.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Yes. And a total of, in our scholars, 64 Smart Scholars projects, yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: And so with those students, are you keeping track of how many of them actually receive the college credits, how many of them are actually transferable?

You know, I do like the executive proposal for that because of the costs

that -- we know that college is not getting any cheaper, just more and more expensive.

Do you keep those numbers?

SR. DEP. COMMISSIONER MATTESON: Yeah, data is a real issue with the early college.

And that is why when we have conversations with the chamber about putting together a proposal like this, we want to make data an integral part so that in realtime we can produce data such as that: Where are they at any given time? How are they on the journey while they're in the Early College High School or Smart Scholars program as far as attainment of credits? And what happens five years down the road?

Some of these are very young programs, and we add more every year, but data collection is very important. And in that proposal any new ones moving forward, that is going to be a requirement for receiving the funding.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: I know student data collection is something that you all hold highly. I've had some bills that didn't

move because, you know, it took my student collection.

How will you secure that information?

SR. DEP. COMMISSIONER MATTESON: Yeah, for educational programs that are coming right back to us, it's not a problem sharing the information with the people who are administering the program.

If it was going to be data that was requested by an outside party or a non-public entity, then there's a process for gathering that data.

But for a school district to report data, most of this is already in their student data systems. They report a ton of it to us. And the additional stuff that we would need then to report going forward as far as like what are the programs they're actually engaging in and what's their curriculum they've chosen, their pathway, that would be done through a template that we'll put into our regular data reporting mechanism.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Okay, thank

you.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: And Assemblywoman, we also wrote a grant and we have been working with the Governor's office on a statewide longitudinal data system in order to create that P-20 process.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman {sic} John C. Liu.

SENATOR LIU: Thank you, Chair Pretlow.

Hello, Commissioner.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Hi, how are you?

SENATOR LIU: Always good to see you. I apologize, I had to attend meetings across the street, but I'm glad to be back. And I wasn't going to ask any questions, but I was intrigued by your response to Assemblymember Seawright that you are in full support of her curriculum bill on the --

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: The fact that a curriculum bill exists at the local

level -- school districts, we always go back to this, school districts will use those at the local level. Absolutely. Remember, curriculum is at the local level.

SENATOR LIU: Okay.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: And I know, Senator, we go into this. We have standards that we absolutely, you know, support, and school districts make decisions at the local level about curricula and programs.

SENATOR LIU: Mr. Chairman, I didn't even ask the question and the commissioner answered my question.

(Laughter.)

SENATOR LIU: Something's not right about that, Mr. Chairman.

(Laughter.)

SENATOR LIU: And I still have two minutes left. I cede my time, thank you.

NYSED COMMISSIONER ROSA: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

And thank you, Commissioner, this ends this panel. Thank you all for your participation.

And I'm going to call up Panel C: Professional Staff Congress of CUNY Local 2334; United University Professions; New York Community College Trustees; Faculty Federation of Erie Community College; and the Graduate Students Employees Union of the Communications Workers Union 1104.

(Pause.)

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay, just for the people in the audiovisual -- they still use that term, audiovisual? -- in the AV room upstairs, could you just, starting from my left, your right, just who you are so when they put your name up on the board they know who we are?

DR. DAVIS: Good afternoon. I'm James Davis. I'm the president of the Professional Staff Congress, the City University of New York faculty and staff union.

MR. SAKO: I'm Andrew Sako, president of the Faculty Federation of Erie Community College.

MR. CUSHMAN: -- chair, NYCCT.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Turn your microphone on when you speak, please.

MR. CUSHMAN: There we go. Thank you. George Cushman, chair, NYCCT.

DR. KOWAL: Frederick Kowal, president, United University Professions, faculty/staff at the State University of New York.

MR. HERSHENSON: Brad Hershenson, business agent, Graduate Student Employees Union, CWA Local 1104.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay, welcome one and all. You can start in any order you choose. You each have three minutes for testimony, so.

DR. DAVIS: I'll begin. Good afternoon, Senate Chairpersons Krueger and Stavisky, Assembly Chairpersons Pretlow and Hyndman, and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Thank you for this hearing and indeed for your support, continued support for public higher education. We are grateful that the Legislature has supported CUNY.

Especially during Governor Hochul's administration, you have built on the Governor's investments to accelerate funding for the university after decades of disinvestment.

In addition, recent TAP expansions, including to part-time students, and the minimum TAP award, have helped to open new doors to students. Those advances lead us closer to realizing our goal of a New Deal for CUNY, and indeed for a New Deal for public higher education.

We want to thank Senator Gounardes and Assemblymember Reyes for their leadership on the legislation for the New Deal for CUNY. It deserves to be fully funded and passed.

We can't really talk about the CUNY budget without talking about the effort in DC to dismantle federal agencies and services, including many of the programs on which our members and our students rely. The Trump administration is using higher education as a wedge. Medical research is in jeopardy, and universities are being targeted for cuts, as

you know. Please do work with us and with your representatives -- with our representatives in Congress to protect our great public universities.

We are happy to report that last month our members voted overwhelmingly to ratify a new collective bargaining agreement. We are grateful the Governor has included expenses associated with that contract in her budget. As you heard from the CUNY administration, they're asking for an additional $34 million in operating aid to cover the full costs of that agreement, and we certainly support that proposal.

We're also excited about the Governor's Opportunity Promise Scholarship to provide free tuition for associate's degree programs in high-demand fields for New Yorkers ages 25 to 55. We see it as a great foundation on which we can build toward the New Deal for Higher Education in New York State. We urge you to support that program and also to join us in advocating to eliminate the age restrictions that would

exclude students coming directly out of high school; to permit students to complete those 60 credits towards their degree at any CUNY or SUNY college, not just at the community colleges; and also to include those who have already completed a degree and are returning for a second degree.

As enrollment increases, Albany must increase investment in the faculty and the staff that CUNY needs to improve retention and student success. And I'm glad to talk more, because I know my time is up, about our retention and graduation rates. I want to cede the time to my colleagues here at the table, and thank you again for your support.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you, Mr. Davis. Okay.

MR. SAKO: Good afternoon, Chairpersons and honorable members of the Legislature, distinguished staff. I'm Andrew Sako, and I'm the president of the Faculty Federation of Erie Community College. And I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the '25-'26 Executive

Budget.

My testimony will focus on issues facing Erie Community College as well as the 29 other community colleges.

As you know, community colleges educate and prepare all types of students for our workforce as well as providing essential foundations for those seeking to move to four-year institutions. We also collaborate with regional employers in developing and providing flexible training to meet the local needs.

While we appreciate the modest increase in the operating aid in the Executive Budget, we are disappointed that our community colleges are slated to receive the same level of base-aid funding that was in last year's enacted budget. We need more support, more financial support to teach at the highest level we can possibly do for our students.

Under state education law, as you all know, you're supposed to give us 40 percent. I've said this a million times and, you know,

I know you're probably tired of hearing it. But if you look at the last 10 years, in '08-'09 and '18-'19, the contribution has decreased from about 31 percent to 25 percent for community colleges. And it forced our students to pay higher tuitions.

We are requesting -- through NYSUT, we are requesting 429 million in base aid, and we're also calling on the state to provide another 95 million, which would bring us to the 33 percent of what is statutorily required. It is short of the 40 percent obligation, but it would be a good step.

We'd welcome the opportunity as well to participate in the process of designing a new funding model for community colleges. We must start working to insulate our campuses from the short-term enrollment fluctuations and prepare them for long-term growth and stability.

We're also happy to see the SUNY ASAP program. We are disappointed that only 13 of the 30 community colleges are included in that.

We're also asking for -- our campuses are in need of infrastructure improvements, and we're seeking an additional 130 million for state-appropriated capital, exclusive of the county match. This long-overdue investment will enable our community colleges to stabilize and will help our students, which is our most important thing.

And I want to thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

MR. CUSHMAN: Thank you, Chairs Pretlow, Krueger, Stavisky and Hyndman, and members of the Senate and Assembly here. I appreciate you having me.

My name is George Cushman. I'm a trustee at Finger Lakes Community College and chair of the New York Community College Trustees, representing institutions that transform the lives of more than 145,000 New Yorkers a year.

While we've made significant progress together in supporting SUNY community colleges, we stand at a critical juncture where increased investment will determine

whether we can meet the evolving educational and workforce needs.

Regarding Governor Hochul's Opportunity Promise, we fully endorse this transformative initiative to provide tuition-free access for an estimated 35,000 additional New Yorkers annually. This initiative will directly contribute to the workforce development and regional economic activity across all 30 SUNY community college service areas.

As one college president said to me before I came before you, "The Governor hit the ball out of the park with this, but I am really concerned that we don't have sufficient resources to realize her vision."

To fully realize this vision, we require an additional 100 million in operational funding. Let me break that down. First, 30 million for faculty and staff. Nursing faculty salaries lag hospital wages by 32 percent. Similar gaps exist with advanced manufacturing instructors. We must compete with industry to retain talent.

Second, $30 million for high-cost programs. Each student in these high-cost programs creates a $7500 to $10,000 a year deficit. Healthcare requires a 1:8 faculty-to-student ratio. Contrast that with liberal arts, which is about 1:30. Advanced manufacturing needs similar specialized ratios. Without support, we must either limit enrollment or risk financial stability.

Third, 30 million for program expansion. Again, for every one of these students we bring on, that gap still exists. We won't be able to make it up on volume. There's also a significant upfront investment needed, as the chancellor mentioned earlier today.

Fourth, 10 million for student support. Forty percent of our students have increased demand for mental health services. Thirty-five percent of our students face food insecurity.

We strongly support maintaining the funding floor of the 8 million in additional operating aid and ask that you add this

$100 million in your one-house bills.

Thank you.

DR. KOWAL: Good afternoon, Chairpersons Krueger, Pretlow, Stavisky and Hyndman, esteemed members of the fiscal and higher education committees. My name is Dr. Frederick Kowal, and I'm president of United University Professions.

I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify today and for being steadfast supporters of public higher education and the work that UUP members do across SUNY.

As my colleague Dr. Davis mentioned earlier, higher education is under assault from the federal government. It is imperative that together we support what we do jointly to make the lives of New Yorkers and indeed Americans across this country better through public higher education -- it's now more than ever.

Though the Governor's '25-'26 Executive Budget is a great first step, SUNY still has numerous unmet needs that I will

highlight today.

First, regarding operating aid. I ask for total operating aid to increase by 212.1 million, 102 million of which would be used to be directly allocated to the 17 campuses with structural deficits.

I appreciate the additional funding you provided the last two years, which would have been more than enough to close these deficits. Unfortunately, the SUNY chancellor and the Board of Trustees allocated it inequitably. That's why it is critical to directly allocate restricted operating aid in the budget this year. You can find a table of the deficits on page 3 of my written testimony.

My next priority is state support for SUNY's public teaching hospitals. I urge you to treat SUNY hospitals like every other state agency and entity, covering the costs of their employee fringe budgets and debt service permanently.

I support SUNY's request for a down payment on employee fringe benefits of

$70 million this year, which would grow to 100 percent over time.

I also want to express my deep appreciation to you and to your colleagues for being key allies in preventing the closure of SUNY Downstate this past year. I ask you to take the next step in supporting this important cause, which is meeting Downstate's capital needs, which will come to $1 billion. As a member of the Downstate Community Advisory Board, many concerns have arisen concerning the process that I would be happy to discuss with you during the question-and-answer period.

Based solely on the first public hearing, Downstate clearly needs an additional $250 million in capital funding on top of the Executive Budget's 750 million, to ensure services remain at SUNY Downstate's current location and enhance core specialty inpatient services, including prenatal care and the hospital's prized kidney transplant centers.

There are other areas that I need to

address as well; the clock has run out. And I will be happy to discuss them with you as time goes on.

MR. HERSHENSON: Good afternoon, Assemblymembers, Senators, committee chairs. Thank you very much for taking the time to host a hearing on higher education.

My name is Brad Hershenson. I'm business agent for the Graduate Student Employees Union CWA Local 1104. I'm here today on behalf of nearly 5,000 hardworking union members that are professional educators across SUNY. We teach almost 40 percent of the classes at SUNY, and our members conduct amazing research in a variety of fields -- such as humanities, science and technology -- that not only helps pave the way for New York to have a better future for all, but enhances our competitiveness on a national and global scale.

We must address the important issues surrounding our system, addressing the needs of our students, our workers and their families, and our campuses by enhancing

support for our programs, including mental health services.

Now is the time to (1) fully fund collective bargaining agreements for our workers and campuses and (2) make expansions and enhancements to our programs and offerings so even more students and their families can join the SUNY family and thrive together.

We have to make expansions to programs to allow for other costs to be covered -- for example, textbooks, laptops and equipment, other items that are not just tuition and fees. These are the real costs for students. These are the real costs of pursuing an education.

Lastly, our graduate student workers need support. We very much appreciate your hard work and the funding made available to alleviate the plight we face with respect to our fees as workers, and hope you will continue to address college affordability this session. We need your help.

We need a commitment to include

language in the budget that would provide the support we need to eliminate fees for graduate student workers once and for all.

As we know, many of our SUNY campuses are engines of economic opportunity, so these kinds of enhancements -- for example, the TAP program, aid to support our campuses such as the University at Albany -- will help skyrocket enrollment and act as an investment in our students and investment in our state.

The onus is on all of us collectively to support our universities, which includes goals to leverage our teaching success, our research success, and drive economic and workforce development with more funded graduate students and their families across our system.

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

Ms. Chandler-Waterman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN: Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank you all for your work in higher education. As you may know, I

represent in Brooklyn, so President Kowal, you know everybody needs SUNY Downstate Health and Sciences University and Hospital to remain open and fully invested in -- about 1 billion, as you discuss. And as you stated, in making sure that the community input process is intentional and prioritized.

So how is the process for the Downstate Community Advisory Board going? And the same thing you said about an extension, can you talk -- and you could talk the whole time. Go ahead.

DR. KOWAL: Thank you very much, Assemblymember.

It is a distinct privilege to serve on the Downstate Community Advisory Board representing all of the three unions that work there and serve the community while at the same time being cognizant of the community's deep needs for the best healthcare possible, and the role that Downstate has played in that community over the years in terms of providing healthcare and providing the top services that can be

provided while at the same time in the depths of COVID, being a COVID-only hospital, and because of that suffering hundreds of millions of dollars in losses, in lost revenue that the state never compensated them for. So already there was this financial hit.

Last year the plan to close Downstate was terrible. I thank the Legislature for stopping that, for working with the community to do so. The board that has been created first took eight months to be named, which is unconscionable. And then our first meeting took place late in December. There has only been one public hearing. I have called both within the deliberations of the board, but also we heard from the community in the one public hearing we've had so far, that there's been a demand for more public hearings, more public access to information so that there is full transparency. That's the only way that you're going to get a thriving hospital, but also a plan that the entire community can get around and support.

It is imperative that those who are within the community, that are within SUNY, in the Governor's office and all of us here today, understand that whether we are thinking about the education of the next generation of healthcare professionals, about the healthcare in Central Brooklyn or the research that takes place there, lifesaving research -- all of that is going to demand the highest possible investment by the state.

Whatever it takes, it needs to be done, because to not do so means that the institution, whether you're talking about the hospital or the educational institution, they're going to fail. And when that happens, people are going to die. And the healthcare crisis we face in this country that's being exacerbated by actions undertaken by the Trump administration, those situations have to be confronted directly and aggressively. That can take place with a proper plan developed with the community.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you. Senator Toby Stavisky.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you, gentlemen.

Dr. Kowal, following up on your statement on Downstate, earlier today Chancellor King said he expected the results by April 1st. Is that realistic or optimistic or something of both?

DR. KOWAL: I'm a born optimist, but April 1st is going to be extremely challenging. We are studying an institution that has a wealth of services, dimensions, and forces at work within it and the community. This is a very complex operation.

And the way I look at it, Senator, is that we basically have from when we really started serious work in January, we've got three months. It took eight months to put this board together, and we got less than half that amount of time. What we heard loud and clear from the community was that they wanted the time extended not indefinitely -- no one wants that. We want this plan

developed and progress made, and therefore there are very loud, committed voices both on the panel and in the public that would like to see an extension. The Governor can do so to get us to June 1st, give us a little more time so that we can be confident of doing the right thing.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you.

Professor Davis, you heard the -- I don't know if you heard Chancellor Matos Rodríguez today. Can you comment -- if you heard it, would you comment on some of his -- is there anything you would like to comment on that he spoke about today?

DR. DAVIS: Anything at all?

SENATOR STAVISKY: Well, what he spoke about, obviously.

DR. DAVIS: Sure, of course.

Look, I think one of the encouraging developments that we've seen in the past couple of years in our dynamic with the CUNY administration is that the CUNY administration is now eager to name their needs from a budgetary point of view in ways

that they were reticent to do in prior executive administrations.

So that is a challenging thing because the needs are enormous. On the other hand, it's encouraging because I think we're pulling in the same direction, the labor union and the university, when it comes to resources. I think the chancellor recognizes that we need an increased number of full-time faculty, we need more mental health counselors, and we need more academic advisors.

So I'm pleased also that they're in pursuit of that remaining $34 million to close the gap in the collective bargaining agreement, and I'm hopeful we can get a pay bill sooner than later to make that happen.

SENATOR STAVISKY: And congratulations on the contract. And they had it on their sheet also, so I think there's unanimity.

Thank you.

DR. DAVIS: Thank you for your support.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman

Seawright.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Thank you.

Professor Davis, congratulations, as the Senator said, on your contract.

You've mentioned a lot of good things today like removing the age restriction, but what would you consider your very top budget priority?

DR. DAVIS: Well, the university had an overall what they characterized as a structural deficit, over $200 million as recently as a couple of years ago. And they described I think the efforts that they've made to reduce that now to $60 million.

We went through, therefore, a period of a hiring freeze, a vacancy review board that every hiring decision had to go through. It's been a tough few years even despite the investment of the $53 million for full-time faculty on both the SUNY and the CUNY side.

So for us, again, in terms of being able to fully staff all the classes with as many full-time faculty as our students need, and to give them the support that they need

to progress through to graduation, we really place a high priority on the full-time faculty and mental health counselors and academic advisors. I think the Governor's new program is a welcome development. We would love to see free 60 credits at all the campuses, as you know.

But even those programs in themselves are going to require -- I mean, something like a nursing program or an engineering program, those are resource-intensive programs.

So again, I think it's a great bar to set, and our goal would be to make sure that those students who come in, those new students, are successful in those programs.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Liu.

SENATOR LIU: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for testifying.

A quick question for Mr. Davis. How you doing, James? So I heard your testimony, and I guess you're pretty much aligned with what the CUNY leadership is asking for.

DR. DAVIS: We are. I don't have their Gold Sheet in front of me --

SENATOR LIU: The Gold Sheet, right?

DR. DAVIS: Yeah. We're seeking -- we're seeking $198 million above the Executive, inclusive of the 34 million in complete collective bargaining costs. In operating.

SENATOR LIU: So you're aligned on the collective bargaining costs, the 34 million. Okay, great.

And I guess a similar question. Dr. Kowal, you're asking for more than what the SUNY leadership has asked for.

DR. KOWAL: Yeah --

SENATOR LIU: And specifically for us to designate legislatively the aid for the distressed campuses?

DR. KOWAL: Correct, yes.

And I would add to that, which I didn't get to in my oral testimony, we are aligned with SUNY on the request for Upstate Medical University for the full 450 million for their capital project.

Where we disagree strenuously is with the Executive Budget's cuts to the Educational Opportunity Programs. Terrible move. Once again we thank the Legislature for the strong support of these programs.

If the chancellor and the Governor are concerned about attracting more students, it's EOP that does it, bringing in students who otherwise will not be in SUNY schools. And so therefore that program should grow aggressively. We're calling for an increase of 20 million, let alone the reestablishment of what you all put into the budget last year.

SENATOR LIU: Does the SUNY leadership -- are they going to be good with that?

DR. KOWAL: It's confusing and distressing that they don't seem to be more enthusiastic. I'll leave it at that. And we have had conversations about that.

But I think it's imperative that, yes, ACE and ASAP are great at retention, but EOP attracts and retains and graduates students

at higher rates than the general population at SUNY.

SENATOR LIU: Okay. And are there any precedents for us to legislatively earmark funds for SUNY and tell them exactly where to send it?

DR. KOWAL: Yes. Presently in the budget there are items -- campuses are lined out within the budget and those lines within the budget have not changed in 15 years. everything has been basically block-funded to campuses where you can adjust those lines. And that's how you would do it.

SENATOR LIU: Thank you.

And I especially want to thank Mr. Hershenson. This is not the first time he's spoken here before this committee, although I think this is the first time in this responsibility.

I just want to caution you that a certain influential Assemblymember is about to ask you questions, and anything goes.

(Laughter.)

SENATOR LIU: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Eachus.

ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Thank you, Chair Pretlow.

Dr. Davis, I want to totally agree with you about we need to get rid of those age restrictions on the Governor's Opportunity Promise Program. This is going to be another program -- and we have too many of them -- where the finances will be there but they won't be taken advantage of. I truly believe that it's younger than 25 that will be taking advantage of those programs and all.

Mr. Cushman, you talked about the need for a $100 million investment. That's the operating costs, as well as salaries and so on like that, to support the Governor's Opportunity Promise. Because if we don't give that, we could be looking at a deficit almost in that amount for the community colleges and so on like that, because so many of the programs that she has identified cost -- as was mentioned in several of these -- $7500 to $10,000 more.

Is that correct, we could be in that debt --

MR. CUSHMAN: That's correct. And the colleges won't have a deficit because we have to adjust -- we have to balance every single budget at every single college. That means we're going to have to cut in other areas or reduce the number of students that attend, the number of seats.

And what's happened is that the 7500 -- the reason for that is that at one time there was enough students coming into the liberal arts mix with a higher ratio to be able to offset the costs of those other students. Now, with -- the students are changing and there's more going to those workforce programs. And now we are seeing significant reductions, and it's really putting the squeeze on the colleges.

ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Yeah, I'd like to see a lot of the money that we put outside to workforce training actually going to the community colleges themselves.

The community colleges, in my opinion,

have the physical facilities already as well as much of the staff. They can do the reporting already. Why we're creating new physical facilities to do this I don't know.

My final question is to Fred Kowal. I understand that we can direct the money to various different locations. So my question is, did you hear Chancellor King this morning respond to my question about where are these fiscally-in-jeopardy places? And would you agree with what his response was? He gave like five different locations that he said are just fine now, basically.

DR. KOWAL: Yeah, and I think -- well, the numbers that we cite in my written testimony, those are SUNY numbers as of fall of last year. So there may be adjustments because it's a snapshot; his numbers and mine were different snapshots at different times.

I don't accept the idea that there are only five distressed campuses. We have heard from our representative who is here advocating from Delhi, and he has said, yeah, he heard the chancellor say there's no

deficit. He was at a labor-management meeting yesterday and was told they have a big deficit.

So questions remain as to what the real situation is.

ASSEMBLYMAN EACHUS: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator Webb.

SENATOR WEBB: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you, all of you, for your testimonies.

I just want to hone in on a couple of things. One, I want to direct this to Fred. with regards to the operational funding proposal from the Governor, just in listening to your response to one of my colleague's questions about the deficits that some of our campuses are running, can you just elaborate on that a little bit more? Because I know you said that there's discrepancies.

And most certainly I am a big advocate of increasing funding. In fact the Legislature for the last several years has been increasing operational money. And I

think it would be important to kind of provide some additional context there.

And then my second question is for the community colleges piece. I raised this with the chancellor. You know, we most certainly support making community college even more accessible for all. But, you know, I continue to grow concerned that our community colleges do not have -- not even just simply adequate -- sustainable funding to continue to grow in the ways that they need to, especially as they play such a pivotal role in workforce development, amongst many other things.

So if you could speak to those issues. Thank you. And I'm a proud UUP member, by the way.

DR. KOWAL: Thank you for that, Senator.

I would just add to what I had said earlier to the Assemblyman's question. One of the concerns that I have is such a heavy emphasis is placed -- and we welcome the increase in enrollment at SUNY campuses

across the board, but I place for your study the example of Cortland, where enrollment has risen consistently, their classrooms are packed, and yet their financial challenges remain.

The financial challenges -- the deficit is what it is -- was created in the Cuomo years with the flat budgets and the poor financing, which you all have attempted to, along with the Governor, to address. The funding needs to increase directly to these campuses. They're growing, but let's get them out of their deficits now so that they can grow and not worry about contracting programs when there's more students coming in.

(Inaudible; off the record.)

MR. SAKO: Yes, I think community colleges in particular, one of our issues are going to be the high-need programs. We're going to need more faculty, more staff.

In nursing they're going to need more placements for the students in the medical areas. In the trade areas you can only have

so many people in a classroom. And now that we're somewhat downsized in some of the liberal arts areas, it is going to create a financial difficulty, as our colleagues here have said, so.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Ra.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Good afternoon.

On the community college funding, you gave a number with regard to the -- getting to the statutory level. Can you repeat that?

MR. SAKO: Yes. One second. Yes, we're requesting 429 million and an additional 95 million to get to the 33 percent. That's what I said in the testimony.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay, thank you. As many of us know, in the absence of that a much higher percentage is falling on the students than is supposed to be, and we're supposed to have the dividing of responsibilities, and the state really should be at that percentage so that we're not getting into, you know, the low 40s percentage falling on the students in the

form of tuition.

But one of the things that, you know, is really striking when you look at the numbers is how we fund our community colleges versus four-year institutions. And even when you take the state's side of it, the county's side of it, it's really like less than half what we're looking at when we have a four-year student.

So I guess my general question is, is the FTE, the head count model outdated? Should we be looking at a better way of getting at making sure there is more parity with regard to funding students in community colleges?

MR. SAKO: (To Mr. Cushman) I'll mention it from my side of the aisle, and I'm sure you've got a comment.

I would say that it's an antiquated system. I think we need to figure a way to insulate the campuses, you know, from the enrollment trends but also with some of these initiatives of the free tuition, it's going to strain our budgets further.

So, you know, we've got to come up with some way of, you know, funding to a level where we know and we can plan. That would be my part.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: And if anybody -- oh, go ahead.

MR. CUSHMAN: I just concur that the model is broken. You look at our students, and most of them are -- a typical student would be a 27-year-old single mom who's working. They've got to go part-time. And we've got more of them, they require more support services. We can't give them a quarter of a support service. So yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: And my colleague was saying this earlier, that, you know, it's not necessarily always somebody coming for a full program, they may be coming for a certificates, you know. And we -- a lot of that gets lost in the way we're funding this.

So thank you. Thank you all for being here.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senate?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Griffo.

SENATOR GRIFFO: Thank you.

Dr. Kowal, for you, appreciate the passion that you had on behalf of the efforts and the investment in Downstate Medical. Important. But you also represent the Upstate community too, correct?

DR. KOWAL: That is correct.

SENATOR GRIFFO: And in my view, the investment there at the university, Upstate University, has been pretty frail. And there are significant needs there right now. And there's an effort to make an appropriation this year, but I think it's insufficient.

So what can or should you be doing or will be doing to advocate for some parity there to avoid the potential challenges and problems that are foreseeable?

DR. KOWAL: Yeah, and I think, Senator, when you talk about potential foreseeable problems, they are serious should the funding not occur.

That our union and the leadership at Upstate have worked together very carefully

and very closely in developing the proposal, the $450 million proposal that SUNY, to its credit, proposed and the Executive Budget put in the 200 million.

We continue to advocate with all of the unions with whom we work -- NYSUT, AFL-CIO. We're all on board with the idea, no, we want the full 450 million for that. It has to be done. I live in Schoharie County. Trauma I center, all the important services that I may need at the biggest and best hospital in upstate, it's Upstate. It's in Syracuse. And it's not here in Albany -- with apologies to the folks from Albany -- it is Upstate.

The burn center, the trauma center serving, you know, 20, 30 counties -- it is imperative that the investment be made. And so we're going to fight very hard for that. And we appreciate the support of upstate legislators. In fact, I think this is a time for upstate and downstate legislators to work together to address this longstanding healthcare issue in terms of healthcare

delivery both in Central Brooklyn but also in upstate with that facility that's so vitally important.

You have situation, Senator, and I'm sure you're aware, where you've got people who go into the emergency department and they don't ever get a room, they get a spot in a corridor and it's numbered. That's their, quote unquote, room. That's how badly the upgrades are necessary, and yet the services are still topnotch.

And so this investment is very, very vitally important and we're going to fight for it very hard, and look forward to having your support.

SENATOR GRIFFO: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Assembly.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Otis.

ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: Thank you, gentlemen. And a question, I'll maybe start with Mr. Hershenson but go down the line.

Any comment -- I chair the Assembly Committee on Science and Technology, and so

certainly interested in your impressions on, in your institutions that you work with, the rollout of expanded use of AI for students or otherwise. Any observations? And if we don't have -- in three minutes, if we don't get it all in, other comments offline, would appreciate them.

MR. HERSHENSON: Sure. I will say that our members across SUNY are involved in the research, we're involved in analyzing the tools and different areas in which we're bringing forward some of these tools and resources to students, and also for university research. So we're at the forefront of artificial intelligence as the graduate students conducting research at SUNY.

ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: That's great.

DR. KOWAL: And obviously we're working closely with the graduate students in the research that our members do, but also we're working with SUNY administration to ensure that the work of our members is protected and ultimately it is the human

element that has ultimate control over what happens in the classroom and in the workspace.

MR. CUSHMAN: From a community college perspective, we're working together with CUNY community colleges to actually start to develop the curricula to educate the students in the proper use of AI. There's a lot of lessons to be learned from things that happened with Twitter and X and Facebook that we need to take advantage of.

And the community college systems are uniquely positioned. We can reach every single -- every single person in the State of New York by commuting. And all the small businesses in particular really need this kind of support. They can't do this on their own.

MR. SAKO: I think currently we're more in an investigatory phase and we're having conversations, also in negotiations about it as well.

DR. DAVIS: Some of the most exciting work in AI that's happening at CUNY right now

is around how AI can be used with integrity and appropriately in the disciplines. And that's really where our faculty are doing interesting work within their expertise.

We're concerned, from the point of view of the labor union, as Dr. Kowal said, that robots don't replace it. We believe that our members do good work with students, and so of course in any environment of intense efficiency seeking, there is going to be an appeal to try to figure out ways to have machines do the work that people do. We see it across many industries. Higher education is one where I think we need to tread really carefully around that. Which is not to say there's no place for AI, but one needs to be really mindful of the impact of real human beings.

ASSEMBLYMAN OTIS: Thank you all for your comments. And if you want to send us something in writing with more detail, appreciate it.

Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Tom

O'Mara.

SENATOR O'MARA: Thank you.

Good afternoon, gentlemen. Thank you for your testimony.

I think I'll start with Chair Cushman, a community college question on the free tuition Opportunity Promise Program. There's been concerns raised about how that total number was reached and whether the funding attached to it in the Executive Budget is going to be sufficient to cover that.

What perspective do you have, and what was the involvement? And others can jump in after Mr. Cushman on what was -- what input were you given into this process and to these high-demand areas and the overall funding mechanism here?

MR. CUSHMAN: Well, the college has been focused on these areas for years, and we've been operating at a deficit in each of them but managing to get by.

We had no input in it. It was a surprise. I got a call the morning of the announcement from the Governor that this is

going to be announced.

So I believe there's like a $28 million allocation. A million is going towards promotion. I think 3 million is going to get split between the 30 community colleges to do something. You can do the math on that.

SENATOR O'MARA: Have you had a chance to look at the projections on what it's going to do to enrollment and whether the funding attached to it in this budget proposal is going to be sufficient, in your opinion?

MR. CUSHMAN: I'm concerned that we can expand even for five more students right now, never mind -- yeah. So yeah, it's a concern.

SENATOR O'MARA: Okay. Anyone else want to --

MR. SAKO: Yeah, I'd like to just say that I like the concept, I think it's a good concept. I think they need to adjust the age situation.

But I think we need to look closer into additional funding for those programs

because, as has been said a couple of times here, the monies aren't there to actually expand it because we've got lesser students and, you know, it's much harder to continue those programs when you have limited resources.

SENATOR O'MARA: Do you have any thoughts on any -- maybe other high-demand areas, in your opinions, that weren't included in this proposal that potentially should be? I mean, is it kind of different in different regions what's in demand at that point in time?

MR. CUSHMAN: It's clearly different in each -- if you've been to one community college, you've been to one community college.

(Laughter.)

MR. CUSHMAN: They're so unique. Each area has its own unique needs.

We run an LPN program that's a high-demand program that won't be covered by this at all. I think North Country also does so. Some colleges don't even have a nursing

program; others have more robust. Some have more -- if they've got manufacturing in their area, they do manufacturing.

SENATOR O'MARA: Thank you all.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Epstein.

ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Thank you, Chair. And thank you all for being here and all the work you do.

Brad, I'll start with you. So I appreciate you trying to get the fees waived. It's something that's really important for us. I know we've taken small steps. I want to ask you about TAP for grad school and where your membership is on trying to expand TAP for grad programs.

MR. HERSHENSON: Sure. And I'll preface this by saying, you know, we need direct --

ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: You need to speak in the mic and be quick.

MR. HERSHENSON: Sure. We need support for our graduate workers. We need to

expand TAP, we need to make TAP available to grad workers. And we need to make sure it's ever-expansive -- not just tuition, but also the actual real costs associated with pursuing a degree. So textbooks, housing, food, transportation -- these are the things in which our members need support in order to pursue their degrees.

ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Okay. James, just on 34 million, so is it -- we heard the chancellor talk earlier about wanting the money. Clearly this is something that's imperative for you and your members. You just did a contract.

What do we need -- what do we need to be the message to send to the Governor on this? Like how critical is this at this point?

DR. DAVIS: Yeah, it's really critical. Assemblymember, thank you for the question. Look, when we look around the state at the other public-sector labor contracts that have been settled in the past few years, they've been taken care of fully.

We really appreciate the fact that there's $192 million in to cover retro pay and a ratification bonus.

But 34 million -- that's about a 1-1/3 percent raise for all of my members altogether. So if it's a pay bill that needs to happen, we would appreciate --

ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Does it change the 61 percent full-time versus adjunct threshold with the actual money? The chancellor mentioned 61 percent are full-time staff, 39 adjuncts. Does this additional 34 million impact that at all?

DR. DAVIS: First of all, I would need to see the data that drove those particular numbers, because they don't make sense to me on the face of it. But -- so I want to follow up about that.

No, I think the key piece here is, right, we would need additional operating funding to try to move some of our part-time faculty into full-time positions.

ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Beyond the 34 million, right?

DR. DAVIS: Yeah.

ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Okay. And just either for you or for Fred just on students with disabilities. We see this being a larger crisis that students with disabilities aren't getting the support that you need.

What are your unions seeing on the ground for students, and what should we be doing to advance those issues?

DR. KOWAL: Yeah, once again I would say that though there's a lot of verbiage that's used, you know, expressing support from the leadership of SUNY and campuses, you know, individual administrations in support of students with disabilities and so forth, the funding isn't there. It needs to be there.

We know that we've got allies in the Legislature that push for it, and we stand with you. There needs to be additional funding for disability services across the board.

ASSEMBLYMAN EPSTEIN: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Other Senators? Me. Hi. I don't have questions, I guess I have a statement that you are welcome to respond to.

We're sitting here, we all know we're committed to higher ed. We also know elections have consequences, and right now Washington is proposing to cut hundreds of billions of dollars out of the most fundamental programs in this state and the other 49 states.

So I just want to be a realist. We're not going to have more money for higher education, we're going to have less money. We're going to have less money for healthcare. They're talking about cutting $800 billion out of Medicaid alone. We're going to have less money for housing. They've cut half the staff at HUD already. We're going to have less money for environmental things.

So we all here can want exactly what you want. I've got to tell you, this isn't the year you're going to have good news. And I would urge you all to both think about what

are ways that we hold ourselves together under more difficult circumstances than you are already describing, and what do we do -- even though we don't do politics in this room right now -- to make sure that the next set of elections have different consequences, because otherwise we'll be having much worse conversations over the next few years.

And you can respond to me or just think, Oh, we don't want to talk to Liz Krueger, this is bad news. But I just want to be as honest as I can about what I'm seeing in the future. And I'm reading press right now about the Congress deciding to cut hundreds of billions of dollars out of our national budget. And the things that they are targeting absolutely hit New York State harder than most other states in this country, for a variety of reasons.

DR. KOWAL: Well, Senator, I welcome your directness and bluntness. I think that it's important for all of us to realize that what's coming from Washington is Armageddon.

My response, two-part response -- and

I'll be brief so my colleagues can speak as well. First, I would hope that this state, which has a tradition of progressivism of both Republicans and Democrats, that we will offer this country a different way forward by taxing those who have the most, as they're going to be getting tax cuts, and using those resources as best we can to improve public services, healthcare, education and so forth.

And secondly, to do what we can to ensure that those who represent us in Washington know what really needs to be done in defense of the best that our society does and in defense of our democracy.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

MR. CUSHMAN: I would agree with that and just also add that I think we have choices on a lot of things that we're funding, and to the extent that we fund some more and some less, I think education is the one that will return on your investment.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Does anyone else want to respond to that? Because I'll give you my three minutes.

MR. HERSHENSON: Sure. I'd just like to say if we don't fund public higher education, the campuses are going to be forced to make decisions that impact graduate student workers. They're going to be impacting the hardworking union members of our campus. We grade the papers, we teach the classes, we give the exams.

If we do not fund public higher education, the campuses are going to take the money from somewhere. And that's going to go from the food pantries to other places. It's going to make it so that our hardworking union members don't have the critical services that my colleagues have shared on each and every campus. It is so critical to our members pursuing their degrees and supporting their families.

So it is now more than ever the most critical time to fund public higher education.

MR. SAKO: I'd just like to say education is the key to economic success. And it is refreshing to hear you say

something that's not a lie. And I've been saying that about Washington, so I may not have said that appropriately.

But I understand, and it's refreshing to hear that. However, it's not refreshing to hear your idea that, you know, there's no funding. And I understand. But what's going on in Washington is just despicable and I'm sorry that we have to be in this situation. But I think that New York State is better than this. And I think we can find ways to educate our population and be the leader in this country that it needs.

DR. DAVIS: I mean, we do something really special in the city and the state university systems. The return on investment is tremendous. And in the CUNY system alone, we have almost 300,000 students. A third of our students were born in another country, 75 to 80 percent of our students are students of color. Our faculty doesn't look all like this table; diverse faculty as well.

We do something that is profoundly important, not just economically but for the

society and the culture in higher education. And so recognizing, Senator Krueger, the realities coming out of DC right now, this is also a question about the narrative that we put out there, and it's a question of power.

And so I do think that we all, all of us in this room, have an obligation to pressure and work with our representatives in DC to put a different public narrative out there that talks about why it's so critical that we do the work we do. Obviously healthcare, right? Obviously housing. So many needs are going to be on the chopping block.

But higher education -- I mean, J.D. Vance said that professors are the enemy for a reason. He's trying to stoke a culture war, but he knows that a highly educated citizenry is an enemy of the agenda that that administration is pursuing. I think we all know that here. And I think we should be proud of standing up for public higher education for that reason.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you for

giving me your three minutes.

The Senate is done.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: The Senate is done? Then I will go to Assemblyman Stirpe.

ASSEMBLYMAN STIRPE: Hi, there.

And this is for George. Let's turn this sort of upside down. If I told you that community colleges are not going to get an extra $30 million of operating funds, they're going to implement this new free community college program with 28,000-whatever students, can you imagine what things will have to be cut in order to make that happen?

MR. CUSHMAN: Thanks, Judge Stirpe.

ASSEMBLYMAN STIRPE: (Laughing.)

MR. CUSHMAN: Good to see you again.

We're going to have to limit the number of students coming into the programs. It's wonderful that we've got TAP for the low-income students, but it's almost cynical to think that they wouldn't be able to get into a seat at the college for a program like that.

And the community colleges

unfortunately have had a couple of decades of lack of investment, so we're used to trimming. But we're kind of into bone at this point, the muscle's gone. So it's going to be very, very painful and it's going to be a combination of services and faculty and staff -- which is just the most painful thing that we ever have to do -- along with raising tuition. Again, we're the fourth-highest in the country for tuition for community colleges. And that hits maybe not the low-income students that are getting TAP, but certainly it hits the middle-class students. (Inaudible.)

ASSEMBLYMAN STIRPE: Yeah. I mean, what one community college president told me, he said: The question is, do you want more students or do you want more trained employees coming out the other end? We can do more students, we just can't provide all the resources necessary to give them the skills that are needed for all these jobs that are out there.

And that's really the biggest problem,

and I hope everybody recognizes that.

MR. CUSHMAN: Yes, I -- one of our trustees on our -- at Genesee had a manufacturing company and she really couldn't get -- she's on the board for Genesee and still had trouble getting the qualified people. And she's just one of many small businesses that -- unfortunately, she had to sell it to somebody out of state.

ASSEMBLYMAN STIRPE: Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman McMahon.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McMAHON: Thank you, Chair. Hi, everyone.

I just -- I really appreciate Senator Krueger's message of tough love and reality, realism. There's so much uncertainty that's been injected into this whole process this year. And it's made unique challenges for all of us. But I also appreciate all of your remarks in response to that. I agree with you that higher education is the best investment in our workforce, in our communities and in our future. So thank you

for that.

And I think we also have to -- I agree, I think you said we have to share this narrative with the people who can make a difference at this point about it.

So moving on from that, I represent a district in Western New York. I have SUNY Buffalo in my district, and it's, you know, a flagship university. It's doing great. I'm a little more concerned about places like Fredonia and Buff State and these distressed schools.

So how do we -- I guess my question is kind of for Fred, maybe Andy. We need to increase enrollment at these places, but I've heard -- and we've worked to address the TAP gap, so we're working to make tuition affordable. But then there's room and board and those other expenses. And so we want people to go to these communities upstate because these schools are really the economic drivers of these communities in many places. But I don't know if we've really made it reachable for a lot of downstate people who

might -- or like New York City students who might just find it easier to stay in New York City.

So any thoughts? I'm sorry, I took two minutes out of the three.

DR. KOWAL: No, Assemblymember, thank you. It's a central question, especially in places like Fredonia, Buffalo State. And I think what we have seen in terms of the fall-off in enrollment at those places is a direct result of underinvestment for over 10 years. So much money is needed in terms of operations that recruit students and then retain them and keep them at the institution so they can succeed.

One of the indicators that I would draw your attention to is on page 9 of my written testimony where it shows the incredible cost of room and board that far outpaces tuition. We are missing -- we have data, and it's national as well as New York State. We have data that shows that SUNY is not attracting students who are somewhat interested in going to higher education but

they can't because they see it as totally out of reach economically and financially.

The students are there, but we need to make it affordable. And that's why the Opportunity Program of tuition needs to be expanded beyond community colleges.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN McMAHON: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: And thank you, gentlemen. This ends this section of the hearing.

DR. DAVIS: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: I'll now call up Panel D: The Empire State University Student Government Association; CCNY Alumni Association; University Student Senate of CUNY; and the State University of New York Student Assembly.

(Pause off the record.)

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Is someone missing?

MS. LERNER: Yeah, we're missing one person.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: So starting from my right, just say who you are so they know who you are in the booth, and then we'll

figure out who's not here.

MR. HARVEY: Gio Harvey, president of the SUNY Student Assembly.

MS. LERNER: Gabrielle Lerner, president of the Student Government Association at Empire State University.

MR. REDEN: Daniel Reden, the CUNY University Student Trustee and chairman of the University Student Senate.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Okay, so the Empire State University Student Government Association is not here.

MS. LERNER: That's me.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Oh, that is you, I'm so sorry.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: CUNY Alumni Association is not here.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: The CUNY Alumni Association is not here. Okay, fine.

Shall we start to the right and go down?

MR. HARVEY: Well, good afternoon, Chairs Krueger, Pretlow, Hyndman and Stavisky and esteemed members of the Legislature.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

My name is Giovanni Harvey, and I have the privilege of serving as the president of the SUNY Student Assembly, representing over 1.3 million students across all 64 SUNY campuses, and I also serve as the student trustee while pursuing my master's degree at the University at Albany.

First I want to express my sincere gratitude to Governor Hochul and the Legislature for your ongoing investments into SUNY students. Your commitment has been transformative, strengthening our campuses and enhancing the student experience statewide.

Governor Hochul's proposed increase in operating aid for fiscal year '25-'26 is critical to maintaining the quality of education and essential student services here at SUNY. We strongly urge the Legislature to support this increase. Our campuses require significant capital investments to address aging infrastructure, and with this

investment we can create modern, accessible and sustainable learning environments that will enhance student success, foster innovation, and ensure our campuses remain competitive.

Affordability remains a top priority for students and families. To improve the Excelsior Scholarship, we propose reducing the credit-hour requirement from 30 to 24 annually, eliminating the continuous enrollment requirement, expanding the awards to cover student fees, and also increasing the income eligibility threshold to $180,000. These changes will ensure more students can benefit from this program without barriers that disproportionately impact part-time and working students.

To promote equity and opportunity, we advocate for an increase of $20 million to the Educational Opportunity Program. As a proud EOP alum myself, I know firsthand the life-changing impact of this program. The support I received through EOP made both of my SUNY degrees and my next degree possible,

and I stand here today because of that investment made in students like myself.

So expanding EOP to all 64 campuses will ensure that more New Yorkers can access this invaluable opportunity.

Additionally, as the SUNY Student Assembly we request a $5 million investment to strengthen diversity, equity and inclusion efforts across our campuses, ensuring every student, regardless of background, has the support they need to thrive.

We also call for increased investment in student well-being. Nearly a quarter of college students face food insecurities, and SUNY campus food pantries provide a safety net. We propose an increased investment to enhance and expand these efforts across our system.

Additionally, as the demand for mental health services continues to rise, we request a $10 million investment to increase staffing and improve access to these critical resources for our students.

So to close, these investments are

essential to maintaining SUNY's excellence and ensuring that higher education in New York remains affordable, accessible and high-quality.

Thank you for your time and your unwavering commitment to SUNY students. I look forward to any questions you may have.

MS. LERNER: Good afternoon, Chairperson Krueger, Chairperson Pretlow, distinguished members of the Senate Finance Committee and Assembly Ways and Means Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Gabrielle Lerner, and I serve as the Student Government Association president at Empire State University. I'm not just a student leader, I'm also a graduate student, a parent to a five-year-old, and an advocate for a large and often overlooked group: non-traditional and online students.

These students are the backbone of our higher education system. They are working parents, military-affiliated learners,

full-time employees, and individuals returning to school after years, sometimes decades away. They juggle jobs, families, and coursework, often studying late at night after putting their kids to bed or finishing a long shift. Yet the system was not built with them in mind.

One-third of all SUNY students fit the definition of a non-traditional student. Yet many policies and resources still assume a traditional, full-time, on-campus experience. Today I would like to address some of the main issues that are plaguing online students, including childcare, digital accessibility, and housing.

The Government Accountability Office estimates that one in five college students are parents, and the biggest barrier to returning to school for students who have dropped out is family commitments. The good news is that during the 2022-2023 academic year, SUNY offered approximately 4,500 childcare slots across the 46 SUNY campuses that have a childcare center on-site, which

served 795 student parents. The bad news is that now we need to do some math. So if one in five college students are parents and there are approximately 468,000 students enrolled at SUNY, minus the 795 parents who benefited from on-campus childcare, that would mean that there are about 92,805 parents left behind.

Affordable childcare is a necessity, not a luxury. Without access to childcare or subsidies for off-campus providers, many student parents are forced to make an impossible choice -- their education or their children's care.

On the same trend of affordability, COVID shined the brightest light on the importance of access to a reliable and stable internet connection. Imagine having to go to Starbucks with your children for hours every day to complete your coursework because you don't have access to stable internet connectivity at home. Well, that's the reality for many students who can't afford to pay $100 per month on wifi. If it comes down

to a choice between paying for wifi or groceries to feed their kids for a week, we will always pick the latter.

But with your help, we can change that. State-funded technology packages and subsidies for internet services could level the playing field and ensure online students have the tools they need to succeed.

Now, if students can't afford wifi, can you imagine how challenging it is to afford housing? Housing insecurity is a crisis for many non-traditional students, especially those learning online. Unlike traditional students, they cannot access campus dorms and must navigate skyrocketing rental costs while balancing school and work. Expanding state-funded housing assistance and expanding TAP to cover off-campus housing would be a game-changer.

The truth is that non-traditional students are not asking for special treatment. We are asking for fairness. We have an obligation and an opportunity to shift the paradigm to an inclusive system

that recognizes the evolving landscape of higher education and invests in diverse opportunities to ensure that every student, regardless of age, employment status, or family responsibilities, has an opportunity to succeed.

Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

MR. REDEN: Good afternoon, Chairs Hyndman, Pretlow, Krueger, Stavisky, and esteemed members of the New York State Senate and Assembly Higher Education Committee.

My name is Daniel Reden. I was born and raised in Brooklyn to Nigerian immigrants. I'm a former foster kid. But today I'm before you as the chairperson of the University Student Senate and a student trustee of CUNY.

I represent over 390,000 CUNY students across our 25 campuses who work tirelessly to earn their degrees despite numerous challenges.

I just want to thank you all for your

continued support and commitment to CUNY students because, as you know and as has been repeated, fully funding CUNY is an investment in New York City's future.

Transportation is a major barrier to student success. Many students struggle to afford commuting, leading to missed classes and lower graduation rates. The CUNY University Student Senate student commuter MetroCard pilot program included in the fiscal year '26 CUNY budget request is crucial. The 2025 People's Budget also recommends extending free or reduced-cost MetroCards to the amount of $75.5 million for all CUNY students, highlighting the critical need for transportation equity.

A state-funded partnership between CUNY and the MTA would reduce fare evasion, which disproportionately impacts low-income students -- who make up 54 percent of our CUNY student body -- improve graduation rates by ensuring students can attend class, and strengthen the workforce by supporting student retention, success and graduation.

CUNY students also face deteriorating campuses conditions, including leaking ceilings, mold, inaccessible facilities, elevators not working, escalators not working. These environments hinder academic success, to say the least.

And with proper capital funding outlined in the Executive Budget, CUNY can provide safe and inspiring learning environments and keep CUNY in a state of good repair.

Many students also struggle with housing, as my constituents also mention housing insecurity. And so with adequate capital funding, CUNY can repair and renovate existing housing, fund new housing construction, and develop targeted programs to support homeless and at-risk students. CUNY student housing is affordable housing.

Another issue, and I'll reiterate, is hunger. It's a widespread issue among CUNY students and students in general which impacts academic performance. Funding CUNY also means vendors to reopen campuses'

cafeterias, expanding food pantries, and providing affordable and nutritious meal options.

Lastly, outdated technology limits student success. CUNY should be moving in lockstep with technology and not lagging behind. Community colleges in particular need immediate help to upgrade their wifi, computers, and learning tools to remain competitive in this rapid technological age that we're living in.

So -- thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assembly Education Chairperson Hyndman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Hi. Thank you, Chair Pretlow.

Daniel, it's good to see you again.

So you talked about the gaps between a student and what services they need -- not so much in the academic part. But because as you know, the Assembly's always supportive of not increasing tuition at all. We're very strong on that. But what about -- I know a lot of the CUNY colleges now have food

pantries. There is the Fair Fares program that the city offers, as you talked about transportation.

How -- a lot of what you're asking for is like outside the classroom. What kind of supports does CUNY give you for what other programs the city offers for individuals? Housing, like the FHEPS program, all of those things that the city agencies offer. Is there any kind of coordination of services? And what office in CUNY does that?

MR. REDEN: Well, thank you for your question, Alicia. And it is great to see you again as well.

There is a lot of resources that are available to CUNY students. But what I'm noticing, and what I've noticed in my four months in this position is that there isn't a centralization or a singular place where CUNY students can find that.

It shouldn't be where you have to look high and low for a resource that you need. And so in that, working closely with the senior vice chancellor for technology and the

chancellor to upgrade and revamp the CUNYFirst portal, in order to make the resources that CUNY already does provide more accessible and easier to find for our CUNY students.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: So what campus do you attend, and where do you go -- like what CUNY institution is getting it right?

MR. REDEN: Yeah. I mean, I go to the CUNY School of Professional Studies. It is the only -- well, chief online institution at CUNY. And they definitely do it right because -- out of necessity, right? They have something called OpenLabs.com, which is a centralized place for the resources, the SUNY government organizations, so on and so forth, on our local campus.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Okay. Gabrielle, you attend Empire State. And don't they offer a lot more online classes or credits for education already attained?

MS. LERNER: If you're referring to prior learning, I guess assessments, they are available and a lot of students do utilize

them. And 98 percent of our students are online. So it is a valuable resource that our students can utilize to use some of their experience to gain credit.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Okay. All right, thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

Senate?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senators? Senator Toby Stavisky.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you, Senator Krueger.

And thank you to the students. Thank you for coming up. With all due respect, you are our clients. And the reason we're asking the questions today is because of the students.

And Gio, great to see you again. I have your Student Agenda. And it's remarkable because it really reflects our thinking as well. I'm not going to repeat it, but these are great recommendations. And I hope the students just keep their interest in government, student government now, but

there are many people in the Legislature who started just where you're starting now.

I don't know how many of you have been listening to the commissioners and the chancellors, et cetera, but would anyone like to comment on any of the points that were raised today?

MR. REDEN: I'll take it away. Félix is, from my perspective -- and I have a very good perspective -- he's doing everything that he can with the tools that he has in order to bring CUNY to a place that he knows it should be and it will be, which he outlined in his plan.

So everything he said today is something that I stand by. I didn't feel anything that made me feel a wrong way with what he said earlier today. So I'll pass it on.

MR. HARVEY: Always great to see you as well, Senator Stavisky.

I would just echo the same sentiments that Daniel shared. Chancellor King has definitely engaged the students on many of

the issues that he's talked about in his testimony, sought our advice, and we are very much collaborative partners in this process.

And so we're very grateful for the support that you all provided us in the audience. You have also given us to share some of these concerns and also express some ideas that we have to in fact make SUNY the institution that we all know it's on its way to.

And just to echo what the chancellor said, SUNY is on the move. And I would like to add my own phrase: Our students are leaders. SUNY students lead every day in the classroom through the investments that you all have provided and as well as the advocacy that we have done in partnership with our chancellor. We have seen some real results, and our students are leading in and outside of the classroom.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman Seawright.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SEAWRIGHT: Thank you to

each of you for your activism, your leadership as student leaders.

In terms of internet access for online students, I'll direct that question to Gio.

And for Gabrielle, do you think there's a great demand for more mental health counselors on campus?

And for Daniel, I wanted to just touch base with you on the food pantries on the CUNY campuses.

And if you could each just share about each of those subjects.

MR. HARVEY: Thank you, Assemblywoman.

So I would agree, absolutely, we need more investments into internet access for our students, both online and students in rural communities. Some of our campuses are in some of the ruralest parts of the state. So always increased investment in that area for our students would go a long way.

And in terms of your question about mental health, absolutely, we need more investments into mental health to increase staffing at some of our campuses so students

have access and they're not experiencing any lag in services. And also expanding our mental health programs to telehealth and telemedicine is also very important and critical for our students. And thank you for your support and work on that.

MS. LERNER: Thank you.

So really quickly, I would also like to address the internet issue. And there are programs -- I guess were/are. So the federal government used to have the Affordable Connectivity Program, but that expired June 1st. That was a pretty solid program that was helping a lot of our students.

On January 23rd the Governor's affordable broadband act came out, and it was taken into effect. However, it's only for like low-income populations, and a lot of students kind of, you know, live paycheck to paycheck even if they live above the median on paper.

So for mental health counselors, we actually have a telehealth kind of approach at our school and we don't have any in-house

counselors. And I'll say that the telehealth approach is perhaps not the most personal or personable solution for students to be able to make those connections. They spent a lot of time just kind of reiterating what they had already shared with the previous person if they utilized that service.

So I'm a strong proponent for on-campus counselors. Thank you.

MR. REDEN: Thank you, Assemblywoman Seawright, for your question.

Yeah, food pantries are very, very important. I've gone to a food pantry myself and it's been a source of -- it's been a safety net for me and a lot of other students as well who don't have the money -- I mean, look at the price of eggs, right? -- don't have the money to afford food, who have to choose between work and school.

And so these food pantries that we have in our campuses sometimes don't have a lot of food in them, but -- thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

Senator Joe Griffo.

SENATOR GRIFFO: Thank you all for being here, for your presentation.

Gio, good to see you again.

If I were to ask you today -- because there's a number of issues that have been raised, right -- if you could identify what you consider what is the top challenge, concern and need, from your perspective.

MR. HARVEY: Great to see you as well, Senator.

I would say the top challenge or, you know, asset we have -- if that was your question. I had a little hard time hearing the first part -- is really increasing operating and capital aid for our campuses. Some of our campuses are experiencing infrastructures that haven't been improved in decades.

And so in order for our students to remain competitive and receive -- continue to receive the cutting-edge education that we're receiving, we need an investment in the facilities in which to do that.

And I also would just mention, really quickly, just really investing in some of these basic-need services as we outlined in the Students' Agenda to support our students. We're super-thankful for the Legislature not increasing tuition and keeping that steady, but students are still facing significant challenges around basic needs.

So any support -- or more support to increase our food pantry access on our campuses, as well as mental health and transportation services for students, would be greatly appreciated.

MS. LERNER: Thank you for your question.

So I'll say on my campus it's probably food insecurity. And we have a really interesting way of addressing that. We have a virtual food pantry, which is I guess the first of its kind. However, it's only available to students once per semester and they have a limit of $76 per person. And then they send their shipments through Amazon or Walmart.

And it's a really I guess interesting concept because going grocery shopping like once in four months is not really sustainable.

So with the student government we invested a little bit to try and increase that to four times a semester. But even going food shopping like once a month, in theory, is not enough. And I believe that some increases with each additional person in the household.

MR. REDEN: And for USS for CUNY, the chief ask is probably one of the most easiest ask to bring into reality. It's free MetroCards for CUNY students through the USS pilot program that we've included in the CUNY state budget, after months and months of research and involved work and diplomacy.

It's mental health as well. It's providing slack, giving some mental real estate, showing that the state, CUNY has investment -- not only investment, but also faith in them and gives them the opportunity to have one less thing to worry about.

Right?

MetroCards are a pesky thing. If you do the math, it's over $9,000 that you're spending every year just to get to and from.

Thank you.

SENATOR GRIFFO: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

Assemblywoman Simon.

(Pause; off the record.)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: No, I was here, I just wasn't able to press the button.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: She's trying to thaw out. It's freezing in here.

(Laughter.)

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Sorry.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: So thank you all for your testimony.

And let me just say that I'm so glad that you focused your testimony on childcare and how critical that is and what a real -- how necessary it is for our students to be successful.

And also I just want to say thank you, Daniel. You know, the very few foster --

kids who are in foster care ever get to college, let alone succeed. So that's extremely important, and it's wonderful to see you. We've done a lot of work trying to help with transition and providing more support for students. So thank you for being a great example of that.

So, you know, I have a couple of sort of very basic questions. You know, if there's the sort of -- I think you may have answered it a little bit with transportation, but the one sort of barrier that either in your own experience or in, you know, that of your -- the folks that you represent, is the biggest barrier to your being successful in higher education?

MR. REDEN: Yeah, I'll be quick. It is transportation. I live in Brownsville, Brooklyn. I take the subway stop every day. There was recently a high-profile situation where someone hopped the turnstile and lost his legs because of -- that could have been me.

A lot of students go to school and

they commute from all over the city. And that, like I said, is providing slack to students who have -- they're up to their neck with everything else that is going on.

I'll pass it on.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Okay. Yes?

MR. HARVEY: Thank you, Assemblywoman.

So I would say the biggest barrier is addressing some of those basic needs that I mentioned for our students, whether that's access to food on campuses for some of our community colleges; access to transportation, they're in some rural areas. And so really addressing the basic needs that our students are facing is one of the barriers.

And also just the affordability. So I mentioned about the Excelsior Scholarship and looking to change that credit requirement. There are students who need that aid, right, but because of the credit requirement and the other stipulations they're not able to access that. So addressing, you know, the affordability aspect is important.

And also, you know, mental health is

very critical. We're thankful for your work and your advocacy as the chairwoman of that committee. But just addressing, you know, some of those challenges related to staffing on-campus providers, so on and so forth.

Thank you.

MS. LERNER: Thank you.

And I would also like to talk about housing. So --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Twenty seconds.

MS. LERNER: -- right now for on-campus students, you know, they can pay for dorms with Pell. However, that's -- well, funding for Pell doesn't seem to be going in a great direction right now. So expanding TAP to cover off-campus housing for students would be really helpful for our group.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Senator Webb.

SENATOR WEBB: Thank you, Senator Krueger.

And thank you all for being here. I want to thank you for your, you know,

continued partnership, especially on expanding more resources for students.

I was wondering, just going to your legislative agenda, if you could go into a little more detail with regards to the climate that you're seeing on your respective campuses now, and most certainly where supports for expanding mental health services, also reproductive health services could be helpful, along with the Excelsior program changes that you mentioned that need to happen.

So whoever wants to jump in on that.

MR. HARVEY: Good to see you, Senator Webb, and thank you for your work and your championing SUNY.

I would say, you know, the climate right now around those issues -- again, students are looking for that increased investment into these areas. You know, food pantries and -- you know, food insecurity is definitely top of mind for students.

Also you mentioned some of the work around, you know, mental health. We're

grateful for that support. We're looking for more increased support. My campus, University at Albany, through the CAPS program provides a really robust in-person counseling apparatus as well as an online. So if we can replicate that, right, across the system, I think that will be helpful.

Also we really thank you for you championing the Emergency Contraceptives Act. Also the University at Albany just purchased a vending machine that provides those contraceptives to students, through the great work of Jalen Rose, the president of the student association there.

So like I said, SUNY students are leaders, they're leading in and outside of the classroom. And with your support, we're going to be able to keep doing that. So thank you.

SENATOR WEBB: Thank you.

Anyone else want to add?

MS. LERNER: Yes, thank you.

So as I mentioned earlier, having some in-house counselors and psychologists would

be game-changing for us.

And as for the other items, because we're like an online school and a lot of our students are a little bit older, we don't really see those issues specifically. But I guess on a similar note, providing menstrual products for students across SUNY would also be a monumental thing to invest in. So just a --

MR. REDEN: Let's go out.

(Laughter; overtalk.)

MS. LERNER: So "no" for that.

MR. REDEN: We've never been so connected, yet so alone. This age, like I think someone mentioned earlier, exacerbated by the pandemic, we've been in silos, absolutely. And when I travel across CUNY and talk to students, they -- they don't even stay at home. When they do their homework, they stay on campus just to be around other people. They need someone to talk to.

The ratio of counselors to students at CUNY is -- there's nine counselors for 11,000 students at York College. You do the

math.

SENATOR WEBB: Thank you all.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: The Assembly is finished.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: And the Senate is finished. So I guess we thank you all for your attendance today and your work on behalf of all the students in the college system.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you very much for your testimony.

And I'll call Panel E: Literacy Academy Collective; New York State Police Benevolent Association; Association of Private Colleges; Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities; Catholic Charities Tri-County Services; and Kaplan.

So just for the people in the booth, everyone just state your name and organization so they'll know what names to put up on the screen when you do speak.

Okay, we're starting from -- it doesn't matter, left or right. Someone take the initiative.

MS. BRABHAM: Lola Brabham, Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: (Mic off; inaudible.)

MS. STELLING-GURNETT: Good afternoon. I'm Donna Stelling-Gurnett, president of the Association of Private Colleges.

MS. GENN: Hi, good afternoon. I'm Ruth Genn, executive director of Literacy Academy Collective.

MR. LACOSSE: Good afternoon. I'm Chris Lacosse. I represent the University Police Officers PBA in New York State.

MR. ADAMS: Good afternoon, Senator Krueger, nice to see you again. I'm David Adams from Kaplan Education.

MS. ESPINOSA: Hi, my name is Elisabeth Espinosa. I'm the director of outreach programs for Catholic Charities Tri-County Services, and I'm here on behalf of the Anti-Hunger Advocacy Day Coalition.

(Off the record.)

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Let's start from the left -- that's our left, your right --

with Kaplan.

MR. ADAMS: Sure, thank you. And thank you, Chairs Krueger, Pretlow, Stavisky and Hyndman, and members of the Legislature.

My name is David Adams. I'm senior vice president of Kaplan Education, and I'm here today to talk about how New York can open career opportunities in critical areas like nursing, engineering, medicine and teaching through a historic investment in a transformative workforce development program, and how we can help solve workforce shortages across the state in these areas by ensuring all students, regardless of background, have access to critical resources necessary to pass licensure and certification exams.

So as you know, understandably, high-stakes testing for professional licensures in these careers is a required hurdle that students must pass. Yet due to the cost of these exams, and the cost of the preparation courses necessary to succeed -- a cost not often considered in higher education -- the hurdle is especially

daunting for underrepresented and economically disadvantaged students.

Now, Kaplan is a New York company that was started almost 90 years ago in a Brooklyn basement, and we know from years of data that students cannot pass or do well on such exams without access to high-quality test preparation programs. And students that can't afford the cost of these preparation programs for licensures are getting shortchanged, they're getting left behind, and the state is missing out on a critical pipeline of talent.

So because of this, economically advantaged students outperform lower-income students on tests -- licensure tests, certification tests -- accessing significantly more scholarships for graduate school, passing licenses at much higher rates and entering the workforce with a meaningful head start over their peers.

Instead of evening the playing field based solely on merit, these high-stakes exams are too often oversized obstacles on

the path to career success for underprivileged, underrepresented and economically disadvantaged students.

And the lack of a stronger and longer talent pipeline is impacting millions of New Yorkers. We see that in shortages in areas like nursing, medicine, teaching, engineering, who all need the critical services of talented doctors, teachers and nurses, among other professions. This is felt across the state.

So over the last few years Kaplan's university partners, including schools in the CUNY system and in SUNY, have come to us sounding the alarm and asking for help in closing this opportunity gap. And some states have already seized the initiative and begun offering universal access to license and test prep programs across their public system, to address their broad workforce priorities.

So as part of this state's ongoing efforts to address demographic and economic challenges, a universal workforce development

program focused on preparation for critical license and admissions exams will be an important and beneficial addition to the state's workforce efforts.

(Time clock sounds.)

MR. ADAMS: A workforce readiness program -- is that my time is up? Okay. I'll close just by saying thank you and move on to my peers. Thank you. I'm happy to answer questions.

MS. ESPINOSA: Hi. I guess it's my turn to talk.

So I'm here for the Anti-Hunger Advocacy Day. And I know this may seem unprecedented to come to this budget hearing, but I have to be forthcoming about all our college students that see our pantries. So I oversee six food pantries, three soup kitchens across Rensselaer and Albany County. I also see college students coming in, ones from Hudson Valley, SUNY Albany, RPI.

And this was my story 20 years ago. Twenty years ago I was a single mother of a five-year-old disabled child. I was

homeless. My friend snuck me into Empire so that I could attend school. I ate out of trash cans because there were no food pantries at that time.

And I just want to be clear that with the food pantries now that we have, it's only three days' worth of food. It's not a lot of food. And what the schools are asking for, they need. Because they need that and what I'm about to ask you for.

On the budget hearing I'm asking that you guys fully fund both programs for $75 million for Nourish New York and the HPNAP.

And that's my time. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

MS. BRABHAM: Good afternoon. I'm Lola Brabham, president of the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities, and I appreciate the opportunity to testify today.

Independent-sector institutions educate over 40 percent of New York's college students. We share the same mission as public institutions: To produce capable

graduates who drive the state's workforce, economy and communities forward. As we navigate the challenges facing higher education today, we remain committed to the principles of access, opportunity, choice, and excellence.

Higher education is facing attacks at the federal level that threaten student aid, research funding, and our efforts to maintain diversity on campus. With that in mind, we ask the Legislature to reject harmful, shortsighted state budget proposals that diminish supports for student aid and make it harder for families to afford college.

We are thankful for last year's historic expansion of TAP and for the continued expansion of part-time TAP in this year's proposed budget. To ensure continued access, we ask the Legislature to reject cuts to critical pipeline programs and instead increase funding by 20 percent. Programs like HEOP, STEP, CSTEP and Liberty Partnership are successful and effective. These proposed cuts roll back legislative

additions and threaten the future of thousands of New Yorkers.

We're grateful to the Legislature for rejecting similar proposals in last year's budget. We hope that you will again protect Opportunity Programs to sustain this critical investment.

We are disappointed by the continued elimination of Bundy Aid for campuses with endowments greater than 750 million. Bundy Aid is outcome-based, which means colleges receive funding based on the number of degrees they confer. And the funding is invested back into programs that help more students graduate. This cut will continue to increase costs for hardworking students who rely on the financial support provided by Bundy Aid. We strongly urge you to restore Bundy Aid to impacted campuses.

CICU also urges the Legislature to expand the Opportunity Promise Scholarship, known as free community college to associate degree students in our sector. This initiative, aimed at students 25 to 55, can

reduce worker shortages in critical fields such as education, nursing and STEM. Our member institutions award nearly one-third of associate degrees in high-demand fields. Twenty percent of associate degree students age 25 and older attend an independent-sector campus. This program should work like TAP and be open to all New York students regardless of whether they attend a public or a private nonprofit institution.

Despite substantial contributions to New York State's higher education ecosystem, our campuses are needlessly excluded from key state initiatives and funding opportunities, and this hinders our shared mission of producing capable graduates who drive New York's workforce and economy forward.

The economic partnership between the independent sector and New York State is exemplified through HECap, through the Centers for Advanced Technology and the Centers of Excellence.

(Time clock sounds.)

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

MS. STELLING-GURNETT: All right, good afternoon. Thank you for giving the Association of Private Colleges the opportunity to present this testimony.

My name is Donna Stelling-Gurnett. I am the president of APC. The association supports 12 privately owned, primarily family-founded and family-led institutions educating over 22,000 students across New York State. These institutions have deep roots in their local communities, strong ties to the industries they work with, and drive economic growth to help meet the workforce needs of New York State.

I'd like to begin by thanking the Legislature for their commitment to making much-needed changes to the Tuition Assistance Program. The changes made last year will benefit approximately 93,000 students in both public and private institutions, including 48,000 students that are newly eligible for TAP. While these improvements are greatly appreciated, further steps are needed to ensure that TAP continues to support

New Yorkers.

APC supports the proposals that will continue to expand and streamline part-time TAP, extend the number of years a student can receive a TAP award, and reinstating Graduate TAP.

APC also applauds the Governor's proposal to offer scholarships to adult students pursuing associate degrees at community colleges in high-demand fields such as teaching, nursing, technology and engineering. However, we ask the Legislature to expand the program to include all students regardless of where they choose to attend college and get their associate's degree.

I'd also like to mention the enhanced supports for students with disabilities. This funding provides much-needed support to over 100,000 identified students with disabilities attending institutions across New York. APC member colleges have used this funding to increase and expand faculty and staff training, increase mental health literacy, and improve the processes for

identifying students with disabilities and mental health issues.

The Governor's proposal contains $2 million for this program. That's a $2 million cut from last year's budget. APC requests the Legislature restore the funding for this program and fully fund the $6 million requested by SED.

Finally, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the APC Student Leadership Council members that are here in Albany today visiting with their legislators and sharing their stories. So keep an eye out for the white and blue scarves and say hello if you see them.

And with that, I will end my testimony, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.

MS. GENN: Hi. Good afternoon, Chair Stavisky, Chair Hyndman and Chair Krueger, and thank you so much for allowing this testimony today.

Again, my name is Ruth Genn, and I'm the executive director of Literacy Academy

Collective.

So what if I told you that in one decade a state moved fourth-grade reading scores from 49th to the 9th percentile? And what if you found out that in the same state, Black fourth-graders now ranked No. 3 among their peers nationally for reading and math, and that Hispanic fourth-graders rank No. 1 for reading scores and No. 2 for math scores?

That state is of course Mississippi, and they are now number one in the country for the most significant gains in student achievement.

But what if I told you that we know exactly how they did this and that New York State is on the verge of that same path? I am here today to urge you to learn about and to support the New York State Path Forward, a statewide policy effort with a specific action plan to integrate the science of reading into higher education preparation programs and certification requirements.

My organization, Literacy Academy Collective, is a school support organization

that opened the very first in-district public school specifically designed for students with dyslexia and other struggling readers in the South Bronx. The recent release of NAEP scores shows that only 31 percent of New York State students are at or above proficiency in reading. Yet we know that 95 percent of students can learn to read with the proper instruction.

So over the past 25 years we have learned a lot about how the brain learns to read and what kind of instruction is necessary to address how the brain learns to read, and often we call this the science of reading. Unfortunately, here in New York State most teachers are not trained in the science of reading. So it's true that while many teachers have not been trained to recognize dyslexia, not all students who fail to read even have dyslexia. Many have simply not been taught to read using evidence-based practices grounded in the science of reading.

And the reality is that many of our EPP graduates have not been trained to teach

reading the way that the brain learns to read, to reach all children. In fact, New York State ranks fifth from the bottom in terms of how well we integrate the science of reading into our educator preparation programs. And The Path Forward is aiming to change that.

So about 18 months ago, Commissioner Betty Rosa and Chancellor Lester Young showed incredible leadership by signing on with LAC to participate in The Path Forward. And with their support we built a steering committee with leaders from State Ed, the Governor's office, the Legislature, CUNY, SUNY, CICU and NYCPS, and working groups with over 55 members from across the state. And that steering committee developed a robust action plan statewide to help New York City with the process of integrating the science of reading into our educator preparation programs so that every teacher who graduates will be ready to teach reading on Day One.

It needs to be funded. It's imperative that we keep the momentum. And we

are here to ask you to include a $500,000 appropriation in the one-house budgets to support the implementation of the plan.

Thank you.

MR. LACOSSE: Good afternoon. My name is Chris Lacosse. I represent the 400 police officers in the New York State SUNY system.

I'm here today to ask for your support in centralizing our agency. In New York State we are the only decentralized law enforcement agency. It is common for most state agencies to be that -- state law enforcement to be centralized.

We have a commissioner and deputy commissioner in Albany. However, they cannot direct or order any chief on any of the 29 campuses to perform any task. Centralization would give the University Police many things. Among those, the legitimacy through standardized policies and procedures. Currently 29 campuses have 29 different policy and procedure manuals. And that spans the gamut how they respond to sexual assaults, persons in distress, and

things of that nature.

It gives us built-in service sharing for things like the pro-Palestine rallies we had last summer. While the chancellor or the commissioner can merely ask for assistance from agencies and the campuses amongst themselves, they are under no obligation to assist.

It gives us a clear and standardized career ladder, one we've lacked for the entirety of our existence. That would help us retain officers. Right now we are basically a revolving door. My agency alone at SUNY Albany has gone through some 50 officers in about seven years, and we are a 30-person department. Currently we only have four classified titles to aspire to after police officer.

It gives us buying power. We have 29 campuses with 29, quote unquote, budget lines. And that makes things very difficult for the smaller schools. Obviously they don't have the money the centers have. It gives us the buying power for equipment,

cars, all of that assorted stuff.

While this is not an overnight change, we know this is long-term savings and they are immeasurable. As I am in the twilight of my 25-year career, I am hopeful we can achieve this step for the future safety of our university communities and for the SUNY Police.

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

Assemblywoman Hyndman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: I'm going to try and ask everyone a question in three minutes.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: You can have my three minutes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: I can have yours? Okay, great.

I'll try to go this way. For Kap -- for Kaplan, sorry. This weekend it was really hard getting a hotel room as all the hotel rooms, the bar students are here. So although, you know, it's an impediment, the testing -- I know I just paid $250 for my

daughter to take the exam. But I know for a lot of families sometimes it's hard to make sure that they have the money available.

Do you have preliminary numbers about like how much you think it would cost for students to take the nursing exam, the bar exam? I know there's a -- I have a budget ask, but if you could give, for my colleagues, more of how much -- how many exams we'd be able to cover if it's covered in this year's budget. That's one.

To Lola, if you can also talk, when it comes to your sector playing defense to what comes down from the federal government, what plans does your sector have in place to make sure they're able to continue to offer the level of education? Because I think we were premature in cutting off the cap that we set on the endowments and making sure now schools are going to have to really look at how they're able to give the financial aid packages that they have been giving to students who do go to schools in your sector.

And Donna, one of the things you

talked about was you're grateful for the expanded TAP. But I know that a lot of our high schools would benefit if they were able to get those early college programs. For instance, my district is very close to the New York Automotive and Diesel Institute, and that kind of program would really benefit students if they were able to get the college program and get those credits towards an associate program in automotive technology would be fantastic.

Forty-five seconds left, I'm sorry.

MS. BRABHAM: I think I'll start first before I forget what the question was.

(Laughter.)

MS. BRABHAM: It was a long question.

So I think -- in summary, I think your question is what are we going to do to kind of fight back against the -- what we're hearing from the new federal administration, you know. And it's a -- I guess it's an easy and difficult question at the same time.

First of all, we don't know what's going to happen at the federal level. We've

received the "Dear Colleague" letter, you know, that says, you know, cease and desist from doing any activity that could be considered DEI or risk losing federal funding. There's no parameters about what that means. When you talk to lawyers, they say the letter does not have the force of law.

So what we're doing is coming before our state Legislature and we're asking you to stand in the gap. We're asking you to restore the cuts to the Opportunity Programs that -- you know, that the Governor did in the proposed budget, we're asking you to add 20 percent to the current funding level so that we can continue to serve, you know, deserving students that deserve the opportunity to achieve the dream of a college degree.

Am I out of time?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: No. He gave me his three; I'll take it. Okay.

MR. ADAMS: I can try to answer very quickly so everyone else has time.

You asked what's covered. What we're talking about is 40-plus programs. You name the licensure or certification exam that's required for critical jobs like nursing, engineering, medicine, as well as certifications and things like program manager -- those are all covered. Forty-plus programs for 140,000 students at the CUNY system, no matter how many times they want to take those.

And on average it's -- you said $250 to take the bar exam, but it's another two, three, four thousand dollars to take the prep, which is absolutely necessary to pass the bar exam or do well on the MCAT or other exams. So the average cost for those is over a thousand dollars per person, a cost that's not often considered.

So even if only 10 percent of CUNY students take advantage of this, you're talking about $14 million in savings for those students. And we've seen with our other university partners usage rates far in excess of that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Okay. Thank you, Donna. And just before you go, to the PBA for SUNY, I didn't know that it wasn't a centralized system when it came, and I remember when the protests were happening at New Paltz, I believe they called the Troopers in to assist. Which we know the campus police has a relationship with more students, and bringing that in set a different element.

So I didn't know that. Is the chancellor supportive -- I want to make sure I get Donna in too, but is the chancellor supportive of unifying the, what is it, 29 different --

MR. LACOSSE: Twenty-nine campuses, yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Yeah.

MR. LACOSSE: The chancellor is supportive, but there are hurdles. The presidents of each college, they are going to most likely have an issue with it. They control what happens on their campuses.

If that was the case, if we were centralized, that would come out of SUNY

Central. The presidents would lose that control. So I believe there's an issue there.

But I think overall he was supportive.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: All right. Sorry, Donna.

MS. STELLING-GURNETT: Okay. So APC member institutions would love to be able to participate in the state-funded early college access programs. Unfortunately, some of the earlier programs, the P-TECH programs, came through from federal funding, which excluded us.

But since then the program has expanded and it's now fully state-funded, so we would love the opportunity to participate.

Many of our institutions, including the Automotive and Diesel Institute, are working with their local high schools. They're cultivating those relationships. They're offering the dual degrees and the dual credit programs at all of their own expense.

I was with Monroe University

yesterday, who said that they have over 1200 students enrolled at different local high schools, and the programs are there, we just aren't able to --

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senator.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you, we're going to cut you off there.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Thank you.

MS. STELLING-GURNETT: I get it. No worries.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I'm not exactly sure what happened, but we're not continuing it.

(Laughter.)

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Three minutes for Senator Toby Stavisky.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Yeah, I'm going to ask real quick questions because I'd appreciate real quick answers.

In no order at all: Chris, I totally, totally agree with you about the campus police, the uneven nature, et cetera, and

that's why I'm sponsoring the bill.

MR. LACOSSE: Thank you very much. We appreciate that.

SENATOR STAVISKY: You're doing a great job under difficult circumstances. We've been talking about this with previous folks from the State PBA.

MR. LACOSSE: Thank you.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Lola, got a quick question. You mentioned Bundy Aid, which is for scholarships for students. There's a number of institutions where their endowment was more than 750 million. Did they -- it's almost I'm embarrassed to ask the question. Did they provide -- did they replace the missing money with money from their own university to give scholarships to students?

MS. BRABHAM: Senator, I'm sure that some of our colleges and universities were able to do that. There may be others that were not able to do that. In fact, I've heard from some of my staff that on some campuses where the number of scholarships that, you know, were awarded may have been

reduced slightly.

I'd be happy to provide you with more detail on that about specific campuses.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Yeah, I'd appreciate it. Because I think it's important. These are allegedly the most financially sound institutions with money in the bank, so to speak. Maybe they can't touch their endowments, et cetera.

MS. BRABHAM: Well, and that's the point that I was going to make. They're financially sound because they're making prudent financial decisions, but also, you know, as you know, endowments just aren't, you know, large stacks of money that you can use any way that you see fit, so ...

SENATOR STAVISKY: Right. Thank you.

And Donna, I think many of us agree that a student is a student no matter where they -- you know, there should be parity. How would you go about providing the funding necessary to achieve the parity that you talk about?

MS. STELLING-GURNETT: That's a very

good question. I would suggest we put some parameters and metrics around the schools that are accessing the funding. That might be one way to do it.

But obviously, you know, I think maybe the real answer to that is, you know, above my understanding, I guess. But really, you know, I think we just need more funding from the State Legislature to help support, but --

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblyman Ra.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

For APC, can you detail how the changes with regard to part-time expansion last year -- how many students, if you know, benefited at your member institutions?

MS. STELLING-GURNETT: Yeah. Well, first of all, thank you very much for that expansion last year. We appreciate the fact that part-time TAP was expanded to include students attending proprietary institutions.

It is a little early for us to have those exact numbers just yet because they just started being able to access it this

year, this academic year. But I can reach out to our members and see if we can get that exact number for you.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. And what about the proposals in this year? Would those benefit additional students?

MS. STELLING-GURNETT: Absolutely. Anything I think that you can do to increase flexibility for our students is very important. Expanding the number of years that students can receive a TAP award from four to six or, if it's a five-year program, to seven years. Expanding the part-time TAP process right now and streamlining it, lowering that credit limit to three credits, would be very helpful and make a huge impact.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay, thank you.

And CICU, the endowment limitation with regard to Bundy Aid. I know like last year, for instance -- I have Hofstra University in my district -- they were below, now they're above. And, you know, it means they're going to eventually lose a lot of money that was previously given out for

scholarships.

So, I mean, I know I'm preaching to the converted here, but, right, this arbitrary number and doing this in this manner doesn't really make any sense. I don't know what that number is based upon. I don't know if you know of other schools that, you know, maybe were just below it, now are above it.

MS. BRABHAM: No, I think that Hofstra is the only school that was just below it and is now included in that group. It was 17 last year, I think. You know, with the addition of Hofstra, it's 18 now.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Okay. And, I mean that number obviously can fluctuate, so it just doesn't seem to make a lot of sense to me.

MS. BRABHAM: Well, no, it doesn't make a lot of sense for that reason and it also doesn't make a lot of sense considering that, you know, the independent sector is such an economic driver in this state. We, you know, add $97 billion to the state

economy every year. We're major employers in every corner of the state. You know, when you count campus and spillover jobs, that's about 400,000 people that we're employing across the state.

And so it doesn't make any sense to take away money from campuses that is intended for students. It puts -- you know, it can put campuses at risk. I know that people like to say, Oh, you know, endowments -- and paint every school with a very big brush, you know. But that's not actually, you know, the case.

So it definitely does, you know, put our campuses at risk. And more importantly, it puts student aid at risk.

ASSEMBLYMAN RA: Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: The Senate is over.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: The Senate is over, okay.

Assemblyman Smullen. No? Okay.

Assemblywoman Simon.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: So thank you all

for your testimony.

I have a very quick question for you, Ms. Genn, about -- you didn't quite finish there. So I just want to establish what it is the request is, that this is funding that you're seeking for a particular key next step to assess programs. Is that true?

MS. GENN: Correct.

So part of the statewide action plan was looking at sort of the regulatory structures that we have in place to support educator prep programs and to understand whether the science of reading is being implemented. And so these dollars would support positions at State Ed who would be able to support the implementation of what's in the action plan that was, you know, designed by leadership across the state.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Okay, thank you.

And thank you for participating in that as well.

MS. GENN: Yes, absolutely.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: And so I have a question for you, Mr. Adams, about -- you

know, I've worked with a lot of students taking tests. That's like how I built my law practice for years. And many of them had gone to Kaplan programs and individual tutoring.

And tell me how -- because some of my clients of course were served by that, addressing those needs of students with disabilities who are taking these tests often need accommodations, need support for that -- but how is it that the folks that you work with, that work for you, work with those students?

MR. ADAMS: So we -- all of our online programs we strive to get them WCAG 2.0AA compliant, which is the compliance standard for disability and accommodations.

If students need specific accommodations -- like for example we have a sight-challenged student right now that we're working with that came to us on the LAST -- those students are given extra assistance and accommodations as needed. We have a whole department that does that. In fact, on our

legal team we have somebody who's specifically an expert in accommodations, to make sure that we're both following the state law and the federal law on that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: And supporting their request for accommodations for the tests as well?

MR. ADAMS: Absolutely. Supporting their requests for accommodations, yes, absolutely.

And we do work with public universities across the country, and many of them have very stringent standards for disability access and accommodations, and we meet all of those.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SIMON: Okay. Thank you very much.

MR. ADAMS: Yup.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Assemblywoman Chandler-Waterman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN: Thank you all for your work and dedication in higher education.

So as I listen to these testimonies, I

cannot only -- I can't help but reflect on my four children, who are unique in their own way. I have my eldest, who graduated from CUNY, my son who's currently in SUNY, and my other daughter, who attends a private college. And we always want to ensure all voices are heard no matter where they attend or receive their education.

So as a proud graduate of a private college myself, Berkeley College and Metropolitan College of New York, I became independent with the birth of my first child and actually my marriage, right? So it was very challenging juggling and navigating, trying to figure out financial assistance and all tuition assistance when it came to non-traditional students.

So the question I have is, how does the current TAP structure impact independent students like myself? Yes, that would be you.

MS. STELLING-GURNETT: Thank you.

So right now independent students get a much lower TAP award, and they also have a

much lower maximum income threshold that they have to be under to be eligible. So it impacts them greatly.

And there's a huge disparity between independent students and dependent students. And right now there's two different TAP schedules, depending on what category you fall into. APC has for years asked to eliminate that disparity and just have one TAP schedule and treat everyone equally. So that's -- you probably saw that in my written testimony, but that's what we would be advocating for.

I will say last year the income threshold was raised for independent students, so we appreciate that. But the disparity is still pretty stark. So we would ask for that to be eliminated.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CHANDLER-WATERMAN: Thank you so much.

Anybody else have anything they would like to add, or anything else that you would like to speak about? No? Okay. Thank you so much.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Well, I want to thank you, panel. This concludes this section of the hearing. And I appreciate your testimony.

I will now call up Panel F: New York Public Interest Research Group; Fostering Youth Success Alliance; On Point for College; REACH NY; Friends of the New York State Liberty Partnerships; and the Association for Program Administrators of CSTEP & STEP.

(Pause.)

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: It looks like one person is missing, and it's not Blair Horner.

For the people in the booth, could you just state your name and your organization so they know the correct names to put up on-screen. We'll start with you (indicating).

MR. HORNER: Blair Horner, NYPIRG, New York Public Interest Research Group.

MR. MARKEN: Kevin Marken, On Point for College.

MR. ALBA: Renaldo Alba, Association for Program Administrators of CSTEP and STEP.

MS. ALTMAN: Elizabeth Altman, the New York State Liberty Partnerships, Inc.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

Let's start from the left to the right. Ladies first.

MS. ALTMAN: Oh, okay. Thank you.

Honorable members of the committees, my name is Liz Altman and I sit here before you today as the president of the Friends of the New York State Liberty Partnerships, Inc.

LPP is a lifeline for thousands of New York State's most vulnerable youth. As a first-generation graduate who experienced the transformative power of State Opportunity Programs, I advocate for LPP, New York's only state-funded dropout prevention program with a -- 37 years -- yeah, 37 years of proven success. As part of LPP's "whole student" approach, programs are embedded into the student's and the family's communities, working from both IHEs and LEAs, and alongside CBOs and local stakeholders.

This synergistic partnership weaves LPP into the fabric of local communities,

fostering belonging and ensuring culturally relevant support.

LPP's dedicated team provides resources for students to overcome academic challenges, attendance issues, and complexities of life's challenges. We know that security is foundational to thriving, and LPP staff create safe spaces allowing the students to benefit from services like mental health, academic enrichment, experiential learning and civic engagement.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Excuse me. Mr. Timekeeper, could you start the clock?

You had extra time there, so --

MS. ALTMAN: Okay. All right. I'll keep it quick, though.

We at Liberty know "summer melt" challenges graduates. "Summer melt" challenges our graduates. The Liberty staff work to close that gap. The results speak for themselves. Last year we served over 18,000 students with a 96 percent retention rate and 86 percent graduation rate and a less than 1 percent dropout rate.

Respectfully, we request the restoration of the Governor's proposed cut and we urge the committee to support a 20 percent increase. The increase is vital to increasing our student reach, enhancing staffing levels, and expanding essential services.

This investment supports state postsecondary enrollment and workforce development goals by providing young adults ready for the mental and emotional demands of the 21st century. Imagine the kind of support, inclusivity and restorative impact this would have on communities across the state. Our promise at LPP is simple: Student excellence and a lasting legacy.

Thank you for your time.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

MR. ALBA: Thank you for the time, Chair Pretlow, Chair Krueger, of course Chair Hyndman and Chair Stavisky. I send greetings from 25,500 STEP and CSTEP students throughout the State of New York.

STEP and CSTEP are housed in public

two-year, four-year and private institutions, a network of 118 projects. Twenty-six of them are housed in two-year schools, 43 of them are housed in four-year public schools, and 49 of them are housed in private institutions. It's worth mentioning that 11 of them are housed at medical colleges or health institutions in New York State.

And so thank you for your time. And I've been here the whole day and listened to some of the questions. I hope my remarks can answer some of the other questions in earlier sessions. But what I would say is that for nearly four decades STEP and CSTEP programs have distinguished themselves as New York State's only network of pipeline programs within the opportunity program portfolio, specifically designed to prepare secondary, undergraduate and professional school students for STEM, health and licensed professions.

STEP and CSTEP's multiplier effect has helped New York State meet the need for a highly skilled workforce while generating

high-income tax earners who reinvest in their communities. Very simply, STEP and CSTEP work for New York State.

Now I must urgently bring your attention to a critical issue facing STEP and CSTEP programs throughout New York State. The 2026 fiscal year marks the beginning of a new five-year contract -- 2025 through 2030. And any cuts in this year's budget will result in the elimination of projects. It's not a simple reduction, it's going to eliminate projects for the next five years.

Any loss of projects -- and this is to Senator Stavisky's question earlier on about the impact of the Executive Budget cuts. Any loss of projects will severely destabilize these vital programs at their respective institutions across New York State and lead to an immediate decline in student enrollment across all levels -- secondary, undergraduate, and professional schools.

We're respectfully requesting the restoration of a 4.37 percent cut, which totals $1.6 million, and we ask for an

additional 20 percent from the Legislature.

We come from the Legislature. It's good to be home. We know that you support us, you've supported us in the past. But this year's situation is unique and different than in previous years. In fact, the country is at a different place than we were before January 20th. And what I'm asking is that we maintain this network of 118 projects, working with the communities that we serve to ensure that we have a pipeline into the professions that have proven in need of the type of talent we produce.

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

MR. MARKEN: Good afternoon, distinguished Chairs Krueger, Pretlow, Stavisky and Hyndman, and honorable legislators. I'm Kevin Marken from On Point for College, representing our 3,000 students and 4,600 graduates from On Point for College.

On behalf of our students and Executive Director Sam Rowser, thank you for

helping empower the dreams of our students. We help some of the ones most in need -- students that are lower-income, first generation, single parents, rural and urban, domestic violence survivors, homeless, refugees, differently abled, immigrants, foster, former foster youth. We help them.

And one of the things we're proudest of, when we level the playing field for these students, these students, despite the additional challenges, despite being lower-income, they succeed at a higher rate. The persistence rate is 10 to 25 percent higher for those at the community college level. So they work hard and lift themselves and their families out of poverty.

Over the course of a lifetime, On Point graduates provide over $11 billion spent in their communities. On Point serves students from Central New York and the Mohawk Valley, forwarding their dreams along with our New York City partners, colleges, businesses, nonprofit partners. On Point provides comprehensive college access,

success and career services for over 3,000 young adults ages 17 to 29, from application through graduation and careers.

Without the wraparound services provided by On Point, most of these students would never start college or, if they did, may stop out with debt. On Point is there for our students, whether it's certificates, skilled trades or other credentials to meet the workforce needs and position them for great careers. On Point is unique in the nation with this holistic approach. For example, we even take students on 70 college tours, provide supplies, transportation through volunteers, breaks, childcare, summer housing, tutoring, mentoring, advisement, navigation, food, financial support, internships, even dentists who provide pro bono dental work.

Together with our partners, we find a way to say yes and to help these students be able to succeed and fulfill their potential. On Point students contribute over $23 million in tuition, fees, and room and board to

community colleges and the SUNY and CUNY systems, plus $5.8 million from the 600 students who would have stopped out without On Point having their back.

In the last two years we have provided enhanced or direct services to many school districts around the state. Those districts also then provide services for access and success through college, and so we want to have the resources there for them. And state support is key to that, to help make sure that once we get them in, that they also graduate.

Providing the $1 million in state funding for On Point's programs will benefit thousands of first-generation students each year, helping them with considering going to college or the skilled trades, and being able to know that this is not beyond their reach, that they can succeed, we'll have their back. This will also empower On Point to advance the educational dreams of 500 low-income students.

Finally, in conclusion, thank you for

your vital support in helping us keep thousands of students On Point.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

MR. HORNER: Good afternoon. The testimony we submitted today is NYPIRG's sixth. In our EnCon testimony we highlighted the modernization of the Bottle Law, which could raise as much as $100 million. In our Health testimony we released a national ranking that showed that the quality of care in New York hospitals is 34th in the nation. In our General Government testimony we noted that New York's voter participation rate is now 43rd in the nation, the lowest it's been in 20 years.

NYPIRG is unique. The board of directors are all college students elected from the schools that have joined. We have affiliates at both the State University, the City University, and in the independent sector.

Today's submitted Higher Education testimony includes a call for the restoration of the Governor's proposed cuts to

Opportunity Programs, to raise the maximum TAP award to match SUNY tuition, and to restore TAP eligibility for graduate students, among other things.

The testimony also highlights the impact of decades-long cuts to Bundy Aid. That program was established in 1968. A select committee was created to look into putting it together, and they concluded: "Real level of need calls for direct assistance from New York to private colleges and universities."

In 1989, that support peaked at nearly $114 million. But today it's been savaged from budget cuts. Instead of spending $260 million to assist private colleges -- which it would have been, adjusted for inflation -- the state spends nearly 22 million. Just to give you one example. Not -- it's only an alphabetical, it's not about which legislator.

Adelphi University, which is financially under stress right now, in 1980-'81 received a little over $3 million in

Bundy Aid. If you adjusted that for inflation, it should be around 12 million today. They get a little under $600,000.

There's no surprise, then, that nearly a dozen colleges with endowments under $750 million are in dire financial situations.

New York has seen six colleges shut their doors in the last two years, throwing their students into educational uncertainty and potentially entire communities into economic insecurity.

In closing there have been many reports on economic development programs, which a lot of money gets spent on. This is the economic development program that works. It's worth -- not just Bundy Aid, but higher education generally. So we urge you to increase the maximum TAP award and other changes we recommend, to fund the Opportunity Programs, restore Bundy Aid, and to stop thinking about higher education as just higher education but as an economic development investment.

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you.

Assemblywoman Hyndman.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Thank you, Chair Pretlow.

I ran a STEP and CSTEP program years ago, and it is miraculous to see those students who are now doctors, neurosurgeons, family practitioners. And I know how successful it's been.

So my question is you're saying that not only do you want us to restore the Governor's cuts but to increase it 20 percent. So if that's not done, of the 118 CSTEP and STEP programs, who decides which ones no longer -- can't offer the services anymore, I guess is the best way to say it.

MR. ALBA: So it's a New York State Education Department application for funding that's released. And available funds are what dictates how many programs are funded -- how many programs with passing scores are funded for the next five years.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: So SED will have to decide which ones.

MR. ALBA: State Education Department, yes. That's correct.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN HYNDMAN: Okay. That's it, thank you.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Senate?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Toby Stavisky.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Thank you, Senator Krueger.

Thank you all for coming.

And I have one question for Blair Horner. Thank you for -- thank you for your service, Blair. You've done a terrific job, and I truly believe you are one of the imaginative thinkers here in Albany.

And you mentioned the cuts to Bundy Aid and the financially distressed colleges. And one of the -- I did not have time to ask Lola from CICU, Lola Brabham. How would you remedy the situation of the colleges that are in financial despair?

MR. HORNER: The list that we worked from was published in Forbes. We looked at

the 2023 listing. 2024 was behind a paywall. So I may be imaginative, but I don't have any money --

(Laughter.)

MR. HORNER: -- so I didn't get a chance to look at last year's.

I just -- I mean, when it comes to higher education, I think the one thing you probably heard today, and I was here all day, it's all about money. And you're about to spend, you know, billions of dollars on economic development and other tax-incentive programs. Senator Krueger rightly pointed out before about the problems that loom on the horizon from Washington, D.C. It certainly makes sense to focus on the programs, invest in the programs that work.

And so college works. Purely from the fact it cranks out, you know, the future leaders, but also it's an economic development engine. And so these little communities, like the College of St. Rose here in Albany, when they shut down, they don't generate any economic activity.

So I think it's worth it to invest in these kinds of programs. If you need to look at how they operate more closely to make sure they're doing what they're supposed to be doing, I agree. The $750 million cutoff could be an issue to sort of take a look at. I don't know what happened to the students in those schools. But there's a lot of schools that aren't, and they're the ones -- primarily, they're the ones on the ropes. And a lot of them are in the districts from some of the members that are here.

SENATOR STAVISKY: Yeah. Incidentally, I guess it was seven hours ago when I was walking toward this hearing room, somebody stopped me. He's a, I guess, professor at one of the SUNY community colleges, and he reminded me that we met many, many, many years ago when he was involved with NYPIRG.

And here's -- NYPIRG's work has really been felt everywhere. You know that somebody very close to me worked for NYPIRG for quite a few years. And I am in admiration of

NYPIRG. Thank you.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Senator.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: Assembly?

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: I don't believe I have any other Assemblymembers.

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I have another Senator, Rachel May.

SENATOR MAY: Thank you.

And thank you all for the work you do. I came in late, so I didn't hear everybody speak. But Kevin, always fantastic work that On Point does.

And Blair, I wanted to thank you for lifting up the economic development value of colleges. Having had two colleges close in Central New York in the last few years, we've seen how devastating that is to the communities around them and to jobs, like all of the knock-on effects.

But I did want to ask Kevin in particular about -- I mean, we know that higher education is also about upward mobility, and On Point is all about upward mobility. And as we -- it's probably too

early to tell from this Trump administration, but in general there's been a dampening effect on, you know, affirmative action and any kind of diversity initiatives in higher education.

I wonder if you are seeing -- and also threats to immigrants as well -- what you are seeing in the way of how that's affecting the students that you're working with now and the students you might be able to recruit into your program.

MR. MARKEN: Great question. There's a great deal of concern with that, and I think one of the ways to address it is to provide those comprehensive services that On Point does. Whatever the need might be, we're there. And if there's one pathway, one source of it, we look for other alternate funding -- wherever we need to go, whatever we need to do to help those students to succeed.

And the state support has been absolutely critical and is even more crucial than ever. So we are seeing that. There is

concern. We're working to address it. And I think that's one of the solutions, is to look beyond some of the traditional pathways with some of the alternative ones, many of them discussed today, but including On Point.

SENATOR MAY: And I don't know if you mentioned it, but I know SUNY Upstate Medical University now has a link to On Point and is taking students in.

MR. MARKEN: Yes, that's one thing. We're strongly partnered with that.

And moving forward, Sam Rowser, our executive director, is on it, helping to facilitate and maximize that. Because our students are the future and the potential. They have great dreams. And most of them wouldn't be going to college, wouldn't be getting these skills without it.

By the way, Sam was playing basketball with younger guys and broke a bone and his Achilles tendon. So he was heartbroken that he couldn't be here today to testify personally. We extend his warm appreciation to each and every one of you. So he

shouldn't be playing with those 20-year-olds anymore, I think.

(Laughter.)

SENATOR MAY: Well, please give him my best.

MR. MARKEN: We will.

SENATOR MAY: And thank you all for the work that you do.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: You good?

CHAIRWOMAN KRUEGER: I think so.

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Okay. Well, that concludes our public hearing on higher education. I want to thank you all for your testimony.

And tomorrow we'll be reconvening for another hearing at 9:30. So if you're interested --

(Off the record.)

CHAIRMAN PRETLOW: Thank you very much.

(Whereupon, at 5:43 p.m., the budget hearing concluded.)