



NEWS RELEASE

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28,000 Students Demand SUNY and CUNY Tuition Freeze

Student Groups Unite to Deliver Student Signatures Calling on the Governor and Legislative Leaders to Freeze Tuition Now

Albany, NY-Students have one thing on their holiday wish list this year: a tuition freeze at SUNY and CUNY. After five consecutive years of tuition hikes and diminishing state funding, student organizations delivered nearly 28,000 petition signatures calling for an end to annual tuition hikes.

Since 2008, state funding for higher education in New York has been cut by \$1.5 billion. At the same time, annual tuition hikes – part of the NYSUNY 2020 law – have caused college tuition to skyrocket, increasing by over \$1,500 in just five years. The New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG), New York Students Rising (NYSR), Purchase Student Government Association (PSGA), and University Student Senate (USS) joined on Monday to urge Governor Cuomo to freeze tuition in his Executive Budget next month.

"As New York cuts its investment in public higher education, students have been forced to pick up the tab. After Governor Cuomo vetoed a popular funding bill for SUNY and CUNY's starved budgets, he has a chance to get off the naughty list by freezing tuition rates. We stand here today, representing thousands upon thousands of students, to urge our legislative leaders to do just that," **said Alex Bornemisza, SUNY Buffalo State College student and Chairperson of NYPIRG's Board of Directors.**

Together, tuition hikes and funding cuts have shifted the burden of paying for college from the state to students and their families. Prior to the 2008 recession, tuition covered about half of SUNY's budget and less than 40% of CUNY's budget. Now, tuition covers more than 60% of SUNY's budget and more than 50% of CUNY's budget.

"This is a social issue as well as a race issue. These tuition hikes are especially affecting current and potential college students who are of lower socio economic status and students of color. My school often talks about trying to attract more students of color. We've got an idea -- stop raising tuition and provide the resources to make financial aid more substantial and accessible," **said Nicole Strifolino, SUNY New Paltz student and member of New York Students Rising.**

The tuition increases, touted as "rational" by proponents, are outpacing wage growth, limiting the ability of typical New York families to absorb the additional costs. A recent survey found that from 1979 through 2011, the wealthiest 1% of New Yorkers saw an income growth of 241%, while the bottom 99%

saw an income growth of only 8.5%. What's more, wage stagnation was more pronounced among the lowest income earners. Financial planning isn't enough when tuition hikes outpace wage growth.

"Raising tuition is only a temporary bandage to a systemic problem rooted in the divestment from public higher education. We have paid our share over the past five years through tuition increases, and now we are asking for relief. Thousands of students have signed our petitions calling for a freeze on tuition and we will make sure our voice and message are heard loud and clear this upcoming legislative session," said **Chika Onyejiukwa, Hunter College student and Vice Chair for Legislative Affairs for CUNY University Student Senate.**

Decreasing state support and increasing tuition rates have resulted in rising debt for college students. Student loan debt is currently \$1.3 trillion and it is estimated to be \$2 trillion by 2025. At New York's four University Centers, Albany, Binghamton, Buffalo and Stony Brook, 56% of graduates carry debt averaging over \$22,000.

Studies show that students burdened with student loan debt are less likely to start a business or own a home. This can create a ripple effect; where current debt hamstrings future wealth growth—the effect is even greater for low-income students and students of color.

“State funding for public higher education has decreased so much that it is now at a 63/37 split with the students paying that 63%. Why is the State not investing in higher education and the future of young people today? We need a college education to get almost any good job these days, but with the cost of college, a lot of people are turned away and do not get their degrees. Stop making the rising cost of tuition a burden that students face alone!" said **Megan Singer, Purchase College student and Chair of the Student Senate for Purchase Student Government Association.**

At the end of this coming spring semester, New York's SUNY 2020 law will expire. NYSUNY 2020 has left students with broken promises and higher tuition rates. California, Maine, Ohio, and Wisconsin have recently frozen tuition, and now it's time for New York to do the same. With so many students struggling to afford rising tuition, student groups are uniting to call on Governor Cuomo and the State Legislature to freeze tuition at 2015-2016 academic year rates.

The New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) is New York State's largest student-directed research and advocacy organization. Its principal areas of concern are higher education, environmental protection, consumer rights, government reform, voter registration, mass transit and public health. NYPIRG is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit group established to effect policy reforms while training students and other New Yorkers to be advocates.

NYSR, New York Students Rising, is a statewide network of students and campus organizations dedicated to defending public higher education in New York State.

The Purchase Student Government Association (PSGA) is a nonprofit organization responsible for the money collected from students' Mandatory Student Activity Fee. The Senate and its standing committees address the needs of the student body on a weekly basis and lobby the College on their behalf.

University Student Senate (USS) is the official governance organization charged with representing the interests of the 500,000 students of the City University of New York.

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