

Supporting New York's College Students Through Crisis and Beyond

“What the crisis has shown are the inequalities and disparities of those who have the right to certain resources such as health care [and] social services...” - Lisa N., John Jay college student

The challenges COVID-19 brings to New York City's college campuses — from students wondering how they'll make rent, to accessing affordable mental health counseling — [are not new](#). But as our city becomes an epicenter of the global COVID-19 pandemic, we must ensure the needs of New York's college students are centered in policymaking. We call on New York's federal, state, and city lawmakers to address the immediate and longer-term impact of the pandemic by enacting the following student-driven agenda:

Ensure All Students, Regardless of Income, Immigration, or Housing Status, Can Access Online Classes

“Although I am grateful that the universities throughout New York are doing what they can to prevent the spread of COVID-19, I also realize that it adds on another layer of uncertainty and stress that I will have to actively deal with. How will I attend online classes when my Internet connection isn't always stable?” - Lyric Y., City College student

- **Ensure that Students Have Access to Technology and Internet**

As the CUNY system and other NYC colleges move to digital classrooms, we must ensure every college student that needs a laptop and internet access with necessary technology and connection to attend class and complete assignments.

- **Make Certain that Students Living in Shelters Can Access Technology**

College students living in NYC's shelter system must be able to use computers in shelters. New York City should work with shelters to change policy and allow laptops to be used in shelters, and ensure Internet connection is available.

Ensure COVID-19's Disruption to Higher Education Does Not Impact Students' Financial Aid

- **Ensure No Penalty for Students' Satisfactory Academic Progress Status**

Students' class and instruction time will likely dip over the next few weeks and months, as students monitor the health and financial well-being of themselves and their families. NYS leaders should follow the lead of the federal government and make clear that usage of TAP and other state aid in any semester where a student is impacted by COVID-19 should not count toward their lifetime limits.

Address Food and Housing Insecurity among College Students

“Colleges and public schools were a safe haven for most of us. A lot of us had a guaranteed place to eat, to socialize and to study.” - Tanisha W., Hunter College student

- **Streamline the Emergency Aid Process and Make it Available to All Students**

Emergency aid is critical to ensure students persist through the semester. State lawmakers should invest in existing emergency grant programs at New York City colleges. Institutions should ensure applications for emergency aid are [as simple as possible](#) (including reducing the need for in-person verification) and are [frequently communicated](#) to students. Additionally, colleges and universities should leave applications open even if all funds are used, in order to document the need among students. Finally, students who have already received emergency aid in a previous semester should still be able to apply and receive emergency grant aid during this public health crisis.

- **Ensure Campus Food Pantries Are Open and that Students Know How to Access Campus and Community-Based Resources**

[Nearly half](#) of CUNY's undergraduates experience food insecurity — and during the pandemic, we expect more students to struggle with affording food. During the crisis, many colleges and universities have limited the hours of

operation of their on-campus food pantries, and increasingly require appointments to access food. Higher education institutions must ensure that on-campus food pantries remain open and are frequently advertised to students. If staffing during COVID-19 presents a challenge, consider leaving food pantries unlocked, while providing remote oversight and guidance to students, such as to take only what they need.

- **Prepare for Increased Basic Needs Insecurity Now — and for Future Semesters**

Campuses should be prepared for more college students needing food and housing support once the fall 2020 semester begins. New York can proactively support students and our institutions by:

- Reinvest in Governor Cuomo’s 2018 [No Student Go Hungry](#) initiative to ensure campus food pantries are adequately stocked and staffed now and for Fall 2020.
- Expand CUNY’s 2019 [meal voucher pilot program](#). Research shows that meal voucher programs can not only help students’ access food on campus, but also can [boost students’ credit attainment](#) — critical after a semester disrupted by COVID-19.
- Expand SNAP eligibility to allow coursework to count towards the SNAP work requirement (as proposed by [New York Assembly Bill 1918](#)).

Support Students’ Mental Health

“Not being able to be on campus has proven difficult for me because I can no longer access the counseling resources, the career and professional center, or any other amenities. As an individual who prides themselves on progression, lacking academic and personal resources leaves me severely disadvantaged.” - Marcia C., City College student

- **Sustain Mental Health Services Allowing for Teletherapy**

- The COVID-19 pandemic will impact students’ mental health, and students are already feeling the impact of losing access to critical on-campus supports, such as mental health counseling. During the pandemic, New York colleges must leverage existing campus counselors to create virtual counseling while campuses are closed, and ensure that each campus offers this service.
- We also must ensure that students returning to campus in the fall have sufficient access to mental health counseling. State lawmakers should invest in students’ mental well-being now by closing the ratio of counselors to students to 1 counselor for every 1,000 students (as proposed by [New York Senate Bill 7317](#)).

Support the Financial Stability of College Students and Recent Graduates

“Things like graduating as a first-generation student, applying for jobs to ensure financial security after I finish my last semester, and overall creating a pathway to a stable future for myself has been put on pause, and as of right now, no one really knows what is going to happen next.” - Lyric Y., City College student

- **Allow Students to Receive Transcripts Without Having to Pay Off Past Debts**

The State should also ensure any past debts accrued while enrolled at a particular institution do not impact a students’ ability to transfer if needed during this uncertain time (as proposed by [New York Senate Bill 8697](#)).

- **Create a Pipeline to Civil Service Jobs for Graduating Seniors**

Working college students, and graduating seniors in particular, are facing an uncertain economy. State lawmakers must think creatively about creating employment opportunities for college students and graduates post-COVID-19. The State could create a pipeline for civil service jobs to ensure employment opportunities for college graduates, as explored in a February 2020 hearing of the [Senate Standing Committee on Civil Service and Pensions](#).

- **Invest in Job Training Programs that Meet the Demand for NYS’s Growing Economy**

We can also build on [historic investments](#) in the state’s workforce development infrastructure, and ensure job-training programming connects with [critical wrap-around supports](#) young workers will need in the post-COVID-19 economy.