

# New York State 2021 Policy Priorities



**HEALTH CARE**



**HIGHER  
EDUCATION**



**WORKFORCE**

# Higher Education

## 1. ADDRESS HUNGER, HOMELESSNESS, AND MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS ON NY'S COLLEGE CAMPUSES

### Invest in “No Student Goes Hungry” Campus Food Pantry Initiative

In 2018, Governor Andrew Cuomo launched a \$1-million initiative to create food pantries on all public college campuses in New York — but has not funded the program since. As more college students struggle with hunger during the COVID-19 pandemic, NYS must re-invest in the “No Student Goes Hungry” program to ensure campus food pantries are fully stocked, staffed, and can connect students with not just food, but support with applying for public benefits such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

### Create On-Campus Liaisons Who Support Students Experiencing Homelessness

Nearly 15 percent of New York’s public college students experienced homelessness even before COVID-19. As more New Yorkers are on the brink of losing their housing, students need campus-level support to help students navigate the financial aid process and existing campus resources, while collecting critical information about the number of students experiencing homelessness on campus. States like California, Maine, and Tennessee have all passed legislation creating liaisons to help unhoused college students. New York should follow suit and create liaisons on CUNY and SUNY campuses.

### Invest in Campus Mental Health Counseling (A.302/S.844)

COVID-19 has had a serious impact on college students’ mental health, with nearly half of CUNY students reporting an increased need for mental health services. To support students’ and their ability to persist in college, state lawmakers must increase its investment in mental health counseling on public college campuses, and guarantee at least one counselor for every 1,000 students — with a priority for hiring more Black and brown counselors. These additional counselors can help sustain virtual mental health services during the pandemic.

## 2. BUILD EQUITABLE PATHWAYS TO COLLEGE COMPLETION

### Strengthen Transfer Pathways to Improve College Completion

Students are facing unprecedented uncertainty, and the need to transfer from one college to another may be even greater than before the pandemic. The transition from one institution to another is not always easy, and the state should establish policies that help achieve seamless transfers between institutions regardless of a student’s pathway, including by ensuring credit for prior experiential learning — like

apprenticeships, internships, employment, and other experiences that can translate into college credit.

**Use Data to Support Better Outcomes for Students**

The state should establish statewide early childhood-to-workforce data connections that include college persistence and completion, wage and employment data, and data on whether students make it “to and through” college from each high school. This data can help identify and address equity gaps in the educational pipeline, assess how the pandemic is impacting the education-to-workforce transition, and support policymakers and institutions in prioritizing policies, programs and services that will be most supportive for students during this unprecedented period.

**Adopt an Equity-Driven Postsecondary Attainment Goal**

Setting an equity-driven attainment goal creates a clear and explicit target for the state, higher education sectors, and regions. An attainment goal also requires leaders at all levels to focus on the postsecondary needs of students who are too often underserved by the education system. Committing to an attainment goal of 60% for New Yorkers of all races and ethnicities by 2030 would mean that 6.5 million residents would hold a postsecondary degree or credential by 2030 — representing a 484,000 increase in postsecondary attainment over current projections.

**3. SUPPORT NEW YORK’S COVID-19 RECOVERY BY MAKING COLLEGE MORE ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE**

**Align the Tuition Assistance Program with Pell Grants and Cover Twelve Semesters**

The Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) is New York’s biggest financial aid program — but only supports students through a maximum of eight semesters of college, compared with the federal Pell Grant, which provides up to 12 semesters of financial aid support. As students navigate the uncertainty of COVID-19, New York should align its TAP eligibility with federal Pell Grants to make sure that students have the support they need to earn their degree, especially as the pandemic disrupts students’ academic progress.

**Stop Tuition Hikes During a Pandemic**

Governor Cuomo’s proposed FY22 budget calls on the SUNY and CUNY Board of Trustees to authorize a \$200 annual tuition increase at SUNY and CUNY through Academic Year 2024-25. Recognizing the toll COVID-19 has had on college students and their finances, states like California have proposed freezing tuition at public colleges during the public health crisis. New York should lead on supporting the persistence and completion of its college students — not make college even more expensive during a period of record homelessness, job loss, and financial insecurity.

### **Restore Funding for CUNY ASAP**

Governor Cuomo's proposed FY22 budget also includes a \$2.5-million cut to the CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (CUNY ASAP). CUNY ASAP is New York's true free college program, and provides students with tuition waivers, textbook support, individualizing counseling, and other supports to encourage their persistence and college completion. Research shows that CUNY ASAP doubles graduation rates. New York must invest in programs that work, and increase its investment in the CUNY ASAP program.

### **Fund New York's Opportunity Programs**

New York's Opportunity Programs are a lifeline for low-income college students and students of color, providing financial aid, support with non-tuition costs like textbooks, and academic support for eligible students. New York will need a strong, educated workforce to recover from COVID-19, and NYS opportunity programs are key to make sure Black, brown, and low-income students are supported through the recovery and beyond.

### **Encourage College Enrollment by Requiring FAFSA Completion for All NYS High School Students (A.361)**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, fewer New York students and families are completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) — including low-income students and students of color. New York should join states like Louisiana, Illinois, and Texas and require high-school seniors to either complete the FAFSA, or opt out via a signed waiver. As more New York students experience homelessness, it is particularly important to make sure guidance counselors and homeless liaisons in the K-12 system are connecting with unaccompanied homeless youth, and are making sure these students are completing the FAFSA.

### **End Transcript Withholding**

When students leave school and owe a past debt to their college — whether an unpaid tuition bill, or an overdue library fee — New York state policy allows colleges to withhold official transcripts. The consequences of losing access to their transcript are severe: transcripts are often needed to transfer to another college, complete degrees, obtain certain professional licenses, and secure a job. New York should end the poverty cycle created by this hidden form of debt collection, and ban the practice of transcript withholding.

### **Pass the New Deal for CUNY**

Our state has disinvested in the nation's largest urban public university system for decades, pushing costs onto the system's students while cutting critical services. The time is now to reverse this disinvestment, and reimagine CUNY as a driver of mobility and equity for all of New York. State lawmakers should sponsor the New Deal for CUNY, which provides students with free tuition, increased mental health and academic counseling, more full-time faculty, and provides desperately needed capital investments into CUNY's buildings.

# Health Care

## 1. EXPAND COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH CARE ACCESS TO ALL NEW YORKERS, REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS

### Create a COVID-19 Essential Plan for Immigrant New Yorkers (A.1585/S.2549)

Immigrant New Yorkers have been at the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic, risking exposure to keep New York running. Yet, as many as 400,000 undocumented New Yorkers are prevented from accessing healthcare coverage in New York. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, New York must ensure all New Yorkers, regardless of their immigration status, can access COVID-19 treatment. New York should create a temporary state-funded Essential Plan for New Yorkers up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level who have had COVID-19, and are currently excluded from coverage because of their immigration status.

### Pass the New York Health Act

The Affordable Care Act helped expand health coverage to millions of New Yorkers. Yet, we know uninsured rates are much higher in Black and brown communities, and hundreds of thousands are blocked from accessing care due to their immigration status. The New York Health Act would eliminate New York's coverage gaps and affordability burdens, and provide comprehensive health coverage for all New Yorkers.

## 2. END MEDICAL DEBT FOR ALL NEW YORKERS

### Pass the Medical Debt Protection Act (A.3470-A/S.2521-A)

COVID-19 has put millions of New Yorkers in serious financial hardship. Ballooning medical debt contributes to the instability New Yorkers are facing, harming both those with health insurance and those without. New York State can address the real financial impact of healthcare costs by passing the Patient Medical Debt Protection Act which ends unfair medical billing practices such requiring consolidated, clear hospital bills and capping interest on medical debt to 3 percent. It would also protect consumers from surprise out-of-network bills caused by provider or plan misinformation and protect patients from unfair facility fees.