



The State University of New York
Student Assembly

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SUNY Student Assembly Advocates for State to Invest in SUNY

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SUNY Student Assembly leaders joined hundreds of activists at the State Capitol to demand that lawmakers place public higher education first among budget priorities this session.

"Students and families have carried the burden of public higher education for far too long," said Marc Cohen, President of the Student Assembly and SUNY Trustee. "This year more than ever before, we need to ensure the student voice is present and that access and affordability are at the forefront of the state's agenda. The future of our communities, our state, and our nation depend on the success of this generation, and adequate investment in public education is paramount. Seeing as we must align ourselves with these policies, we must have a role in crafting them."

On Thursday, student leaders from across the state gathered to brief lawmakers on student interests and reiterate the need for higher education funding. Among the top issues discussed were state reinvestment and funding for student services.

For Emily Altschuler, Chair of the Campus Safety committee and a student at SUNY Cortland, the upcoming budget is critical to secure appropriations for mental health facilities. Financial setbacks have limited staff hirings and services from expanding. This comes at a time when there is a growing demand for mental health counseling across the state.

"On Thursday, all students made their voices heard in regards to the importance of funding being allocated for higher education," said Altschuler. "We have seen an unwavering need of support in the area of improving our mental health resources across the state. The ability to easily access services is crucial to the success of all students and professionals."

The push to increase funding for mental health facilities has been at the forefront of a combined legislative effort between the Student Assembly and SUNY's Office of Academic Health and Hospital Affairs. This move accompanies other historic changes in the legislative agenda, notably a plan calling for child care expansion. In past years, child care offerings have grown without appropriate state funding. SUNY provides child care services for 5,000 children at 53 centers system-wide.

"This year's advocacy efforts have been a grand slam for students" said Rey Muniz, Director of Legislative Affairs. "Not only did we see record-breaking turnout here in Albany, but the students that joined us from across the state found legislators and their staffs receptive to our positions. We are incredibly excited to continue our advocacy work

through budget negotiations, and something tells me we are going to see a string of incredible legislative wins.”

Another concern in the legislative agenda: food insecurity. Talks over food insecurity have mostly occurred before the SUNY board. Still, the Student Assembly believes lawmakers should be looped in on this issue.

"The student's voice is so powerful," said Nicole Pereira, Chair of the State-Operated Campuses committee. "Advocating for public higher education rights at the Capitol brings all of our work full-circle. Making sure our voices are heard and discussing issues such as food insecurity, increased tuition and mental health assistance, makes this day worth it and brings student concerns to the top of the legislative agenda."

In addition, the Student Assembly is continuing to progress initiatives surrounding environmental sustainability, diversity, equity, and inclusion, community college base aid, and disability awareness and accommodations.

About the SUNY Student Assembly

The Student Assembly of the State University of New York (SUNY SA) is the recognized student government organization representing the nearly 600,000 students of the State University of New York. Comprised of student leaders elected by their peers from across SUNY's 64 campuses, SUNY SA is committed to empowering students throughout the state, and ensuring the representation of its members on the state and national level, as well as throughout the SUNY system.

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