March 15, 2022

Dear Governor Kathy Hochul, Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, and Speaker Carl Heastie;

As faith and religious leaders from across New York State, we urge you to reverse decades of harmful disinvestment in our public higher education system by fully funding CUNY and SUNY in the state budget.

SUNY and CUNY institutions are pillars of our communities, founded with the crucial mission to make high-quality education accessible to all. This mission has only become more urgent over the past decades, as inequality has increased, and more and more jobs require higher education. Yet over that same period, austerity and disinvestment have undermined SUNY and CUNY’s ability to serve the students and communities who need them most. Tuition and fees have risen, faculty and staff have been cut, facilities have fallen into disrepair. And, in the second year of a pandemic, there are zero dollars budgeted for critical mission funding for SUNY’s public teaching hospitals, zero dollars set aside for critical elements of the New Deal for CUNY, including mental health counselors. As SUNY and CUNY institutions have been squeezed, it is not only students, patients, faculty and staff that have borne the cost. Our whole state is worse off when higher education becomes a privilege rather than a right.

For generations, CUNY and SUNY have opened doors of opportunity to New Yorkers from all backgrounds and have helped develop great leaders and innovators in education, government, community development, religion, the arts, business, and more. Tragically, rising tuition and disinvestment in CUNY and SUNY began to close these doors, just as the student population became more racially and ethnically diverse.

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Our religious traditions call us to advocate for justice, equity, and the well-being of our communities. A vibrant SUNY and CUNY system that makes debt-free higher education accessible to all; meets the academic, social and emotional needs of students; and treats workers with dignity and respect is a necessary ingredient for a just and healthy New York.

Therefore, we call on you to allocate over $500 million in additional operating funding above the governor’s executive budget for CUNY and SUNY campuses. Specifically:

- $255.8 million in additional funding to provide adequate resources to SUNY campuses and SUNY’s three teaching hospitals, which includes $100 million in additional direct support to SUNY campuses to allow them to attract and retain students by providing support and essential academic services; and $155.8 million to provide critical mission funding for public teaching hospital operations and to account for the debt service, a cost that only the SUNY hospitals bear.

- $254 million in additional funding to stabilize and increase support for CUNY colleges in alignment with New Deal for CUNY, including hiring an additional 1,385 full-time faculty ($135.9 million) and 541 mental health counselors and academic advisors ($78.9 million). In addition, these resources would enable a $300 per student enhancement to base aid, and for the State to make 2018-2019 the reference year for the hold harmless provision in the Executive Budget, stabilizing CUNY community colleges.

- Stabilize and restore funding for SUNY community colleges by pegging the hold harmless provision to levels based on enrollments in 2018-2019, the academic year prior to the pandemic. This would generate $35.7 million for SUNY community colleges.

Many of us or our families are students and alumni of SUNY and CUNY. All of us live and serve in communities that rely on high-quality, accessible public higher education. We call on you to take decisive action this year to end the disinvestment...
in SUNY and CUNY and re-prioritize public higher education as a critical part of the fabric of our great state.

Thank you,

Rev. Andrea Abbott, Baldwinsville
Rev. Carl Adair, Zion Episcopal Church, Sunnyside
Rev. Olivia Armstrong, Spiritual Light Ministries, Nichols
Rev. Earl Arnold, Presbyterian Church USA, Owego
Rev. Amanda Hambrick Ashcraft, Middle Collegiate Church, New York
The Rev. Kimberlee Auletta, Holy Apostles, Brooklyn
Rev. Dr. Gail Badger, New Mt. Zion Baptist Church, New York
Rev. Sara Baron, First United Methodist Church, Schenectady
Rev. Dr. Alan Bentz-Letts, Beloved Earth Community, Riverside Church, New York
Rev. Ashley Birt, Bronx
Rev. Dr. Roxanne Booth, Riverview Missionary Baptist, Selkirk
Rev. Emily Brewer, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, Brooklyn
Rev. Micah Bucey, Judson Memorial Church, New York
Rev. Dr. Karyn Carlo, Bellerose
Rev. Dr. Daniel Carlson, First Reformed Church or Schenectady, Niskayuna
Rev. Laurie Carson, St. Luke Lutheran Church, Ithaca
Rev. Dr. Mark Caruana, Westminster Moriah and First Presbyterian Churches, Utica
Rev. Mark Chaffin, Emmanuel Baptist Church, Albany
Roshi Shinge Sherry Chayat, Zen Center of Syracuse, Syracuse
Rev. Lynn Carman Bodden, First Reformed Church, Schenectady
Rev. Joe Cleveland, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Saratoga Springs, Saratoga Springs
Rev. Lane Cobb, Tarrytown
Deacon William Coffey, Diocese of Rochester, Fairport
Rev. Joya Colon-Berezin, The Scarsdale Congregational Church, Scarsdale
Martha Corneil, Journey UCC, Delmar

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Rev. Peter Cook, New York State Council of Churches, Albany
Martha Corneil, Journey United Church of Christ, Delmar
Rev. Terry Culbertson, Church of God, Syracuse
Rev. Marilyn Cunningham, Graves Memorial CME Church, Rochester
Rev. Sandy Damhof, Journey United Church of Christ & Protestant Campus Ministry, Albany
Minister Sellers Davis Jr., Second Canaan Baptist Church of Harlem, New York
Sister Catherine Darcy, RSM, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team, Latham
Elder Daniel DeBrucker, Cross Street Community of NYC, Ridgewood
Rev. Kyle Delhagen, Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church, Guilderland
Claire Deroche, Long Island Council of Churches, Flushing
Mary Dewar, Garden City Community Church, Rosedale
Rev. Jennifer DeWeerth, United Church of Christ, Clinton
Rev. Molly Dowell Baum, First Presbyterian Church, Albany
Rev. Beth DuBois, Presbytery of Cayuga-Syracuse
Rabbi Barat Ellman, New York
Dr. James Fairbanks, Saving Justice Newsletter, Bronx
Imam Shahid Farooqi, ICNA Council for Social Justice
Rev. Valerie Faust, Living Word Tabernacle, Albany
Minister Wanda Feaster, Metropolitan New Testament Baptist Church, Schenectady
Minister Arelis Figueroa, La Iglesia del Pueblo, New York
Rev. Sharon Fuller, Macedonia Baptist Church, Troy
Rev. Darienne Gagné, North Chatham United Methodist, North Chatham
Rev. Ron Garner, Wantagh Memorial Congregational Church, Wantagh
Rev. Dr. Richard Gilbert, Unitarian Universalist, Rochester
Rev. Bruce Gillette, First Presbyterian Union Church, Owego
Rev. Carlos Gonzalez, Strong Place Baptist Church, Brooklyn
Rev. Dr. R. A. Gregg, U.S. Community Affairs, Staten Island
Rabbi Miriam Grossman, New York
Reverend Darrell Hamilton, Middle Church, New York
Pastor David Harris, First Baptist Church of Syracuse, Syracuse
Rev. Martin Haused, Grace and St. Paul’s Church, New York
Rev. Yvonne Headley, Second Baptist Church, Poughkeepsie
Rev. Sarah Henkel, United Church of Middletown, Middletown
Prof. Christine Japely, New York Quaker, New York
Narinder Kapoor, Geeta Ashram of New York, Syosset
Rev. Jim Ketcham, Troy
Sister Honora Kinney, Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, Albany
Rev. Heather Kirk-Davidoff, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Albany
Rev. Mark Koenig, New York
Rev. James Konicki, Holy Name of Jesus National Catholic Church PNCC, Schenectady
Rev. Frank Kotowski, Summerland Church of Light, NSAC, Bay Shore
Rev. Cheri Kroon, Plainview Reformed Church, Brooklyn
Rev. Liz Kuney, Zen Center of Syracuse, Syracuse
Rev. Archdruid Jeremiah Lennox, Nemeton of the Ways, Cohoes
Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis, Middle Collegiate Church, New York
Chaplain James Litkett, Riverside D.A.R.T, New York
Deborah Little, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship at Stony Brook, East Setauket
Rev. Michael Livingston, The Riverside Church in the City of New York, New York
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Rev. Brian Lothridge, Olean
Rev. Dr. Cynthia Wickwire Lundquist, Presbytery of Western New York, Forestville
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Rev. Dr. M. Bruce McKay, United Church of Christ, Buffalo
Rev. John Magisano, Brooklyn
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Rabbi Jeffrey Marker, Brooklyn
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Rabbi Dan Ornstein, Albany
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Rev. Benjamin Perry, Middle Church, New York
Tamara Plummer, Pursuing Call, Brooklyn
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Rev. Thia Reggio, First Presbyterian Church, Astoria
Rev. Dr. Bruce Rivera, Christ Church UCC, Bronx Multi-Faith Advisory Group, Bronx
Sister Marlene Ann Roeger, Sisters of St. Joseph
Chaplain Brandon Roiger, New York
Toni Rorapough, First Congregational Church UCC, Binghamton
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Rev. Charles Ryu, Morningside United Methodist, New York
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Rabbi Peter Schaktman, Temple Emanu-el, Utica
Cantor Lisa B. Segal, Kolot Chayeinu, Brooklyn
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Rev. Monko Susan Spang, Tendai Buddhist Sangha/Tendai Buddhist Institute, Albany
Rev. Jonathan Spear, NYS Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival, Brooklyn
Rev. Andrew Sperry, Calvary United Methodist Church, Latham
Rev. William Spilly, Hamlin

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