



UNITED UNIVERSITY PROFESSIONS

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



2024

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INTRODUCTION



UUP is entering year four of our NY HEALS agenda. Over the past two years, we've achieved tremendous success advocating for necessary federal and state resources to carry our campuses and institutions through the worst of the coronavirus pandemic. Now, we must refocus our efforts. This year, UUP will continue to pursue policy solutions for our workplace and communities in Healthcare, Education, Accessibility, Leadership, and Sustainability.

COMPREHENSIVE COLLEGES



HEALTH SCIENCE & ACADEMIC MEDICAL CENTERS



TECHNICAL CAMPUSES



UNIVERSITY CENTERS



Develop A SUNY Downstate Sustainability Plan

UUP is calling for the state to develop and implement a sustainability plan for the SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University (SUNY Downstate). This plan is needed to address the untenable financial situation of the only state-run hospital in New York City. For over a decade, Downstate has suffered underfunding and unequal treatment from the state.

Beginning in 2011, the hospital experienced a steady reduction in state critical mission (subsidy) funding that culminated in the complete elimination of such funding in 2018. This subsidy was in recognition of the hospital's public safety net mission to provide healthcare to all, regardless of ability to pay. It also recognized the fact that SUNY hospitals pay for their employee fringe benefit costs and capital debt service costs—unlike any other state agency entity. Moreover, its financial distress was recently compounded by being designated a COVID-only hospital during the pandemic. This forced the hospital to suspend other revenue raising services, leading to a multimillion-dollar deficit.

State action is needed now to ensure that SUNY Downstate is financially viable for the future. As one of the largest employers in Brooklyn, the reach and impact of this hospital are vital as it predominantly serves people of color, low-income, uninsured, underinsured, undocumented and at-risk individuals.

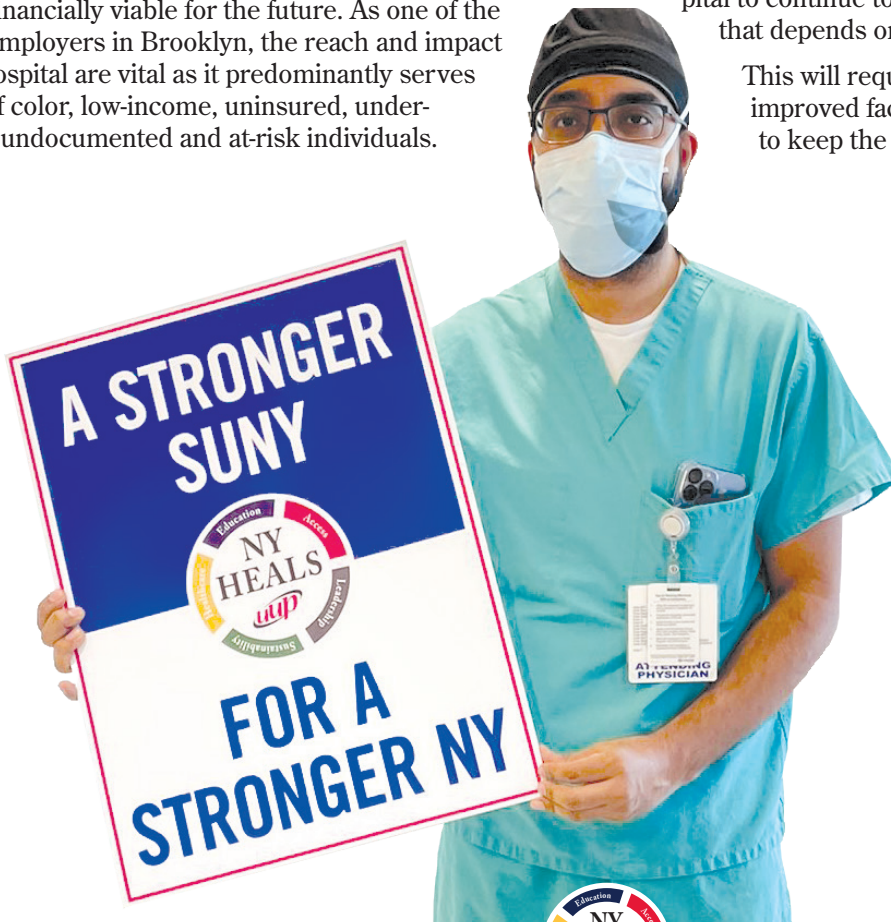
These patients have limited access to affordable healthcare and are more prone to suffer from serious disease. They also face higher morbidity rates than other patients across New York City and New York state.

SUNY Downstate also provides training in 56 specialties and educates nearly 1,900 students annually. The teaching hospital graduates more than 900 students each year and produces the highest number of doctors from underrepresented communities in the state. It is imperative that Downstate remains financially viable and directly connected to its medical school so it can continue providing life-saving care to its patients, provide high-quality education to our state's future doctors and medical professionals and conduct groundbreaking medical research.

UUP urges the governor and the Legislature to work with UUP and all the other public employee unions that represent workers at SUNY Downstate to develop a financial sustainability plan that will maintain it as a state-operated public hospital, staffed with public employees within the State University of New York.

We need a plan that will place SUNY Downstate on a solid financial path, one that will enable this important hospital to continue to serve the Brooklyn community that depends on it for critical healthcare services.

This will require capital funding for a new and improved facility as well as bridge funding to keep the hospital in operation while it is





undergoing construction improvements. Developing and implementing such a plan is extremely important for patients, students, UUP and organized labor.

We firmly believe that by working in partnership with the governor and the Legislature, we can develop a solution that will address the serious financial challenges facing SUNY Downstate and enable this great institution to continue to serve the residents of Brooklyn and our state.

UUP urges the development and implementation of a Downstate financial sustainability plan. UUP requests \$4 billion in capital funding for a new facility and \$75 million to \$125 million in bridge funding to keep the hospital open during construction.

Make SUNY Hospital Capital Debt Service Payments Permanent, Cover Employee Fringe Benefits Costs

SUNY hospitals are the only state agency entities required to cover their own debt service and employee fringe benefit costs. This discriminatory practice is wrong and should be discarded. The state should take

on these costs permanently.

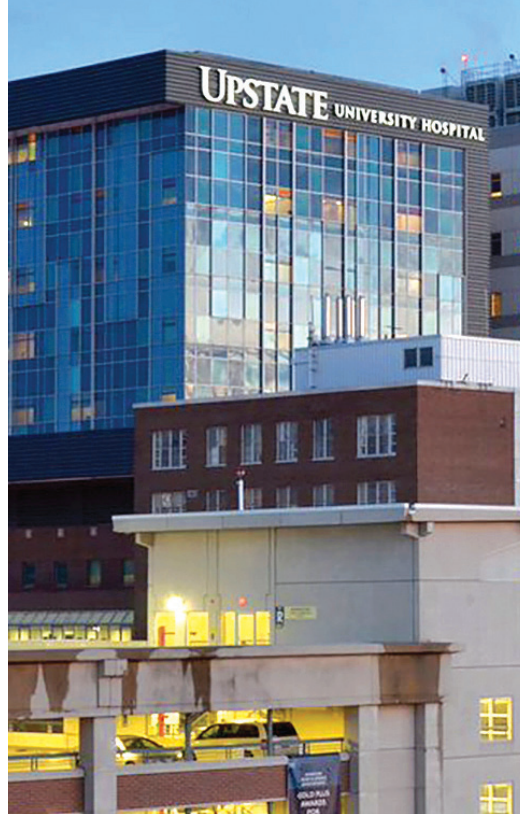
Over the last two years, the state has provided temporary debt service relief for the three SUNY public teaching hospitals in Brooklyn, Stony Brook and Syracuse in the state budget. This year, debt service costs should be made permanent to allow these institutions to fully use their state capital funding. Other state agencies annually rely on debt service relief for their capital projects. For SUNY hospitals, however, relief is uncertain.

For years, our teaching hospitals have been forced to either forgo making needed capital improvements or divert their limited resources to cover these costs. Our hospitals will be able to make needed capital improvements and reinvest in patient services and staff with the state permanently covering these costs.

Additionally, the SUNY hospitals are annually burdened with employee fringe benefits costs. The state provides funding for all other agencies to cover such costs. This unequitable treatment of our hospitals by the state unfairly burdens them and limits their ability to hire needed healthcare professionals to improve patient care and improve operations.

UUP urges the state to permanently cover the SUNY hospitals' capital debt service and employee fringe benefits costs.





Restore Critical Mission Funding to the SUNY Hospitals

State support for SUNY hospitals was systematically reduced over the last decade, until the Cuomo administration eliminated it in 2018. In fact, since SFY 2008-09, these hospitals have lost nearly \$2 billion in state funding, when adjusted for inflation.

This amount does not even account for the years that SUNY was required by the Cuomo administration to pay for the state’s matching share of federal Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) funding. To make matters worse, the Cuomo administration often kept portions of this funding—that SUNY paid for—and used it for other purposes.

State critical mission funding is needed and it is warranted. These hospitals are crucial institutions in their communities as safety net hospitals. Stony Brook University Hospital is the only Level 1 trauma center in Suffolk County. Upstate Medical University is home to the poison control center for 54 counties and houses the burn care center, which provides services for more than 37 counties. SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University is the fourth-largest employer in Brooklyn and provides hundreds of free health screenings for the community every year.

Reinstating critical mission funding is vital to the long-term success of these life-saving institutions, which provide medical services to over 1.3 million people

annually. These hospitals are providing cutting-edge and specialized care that private hospitals do not, cannot or will not provide.

UUP urges the state to restore Critical Mission Funding and allocate \$175 million.

Pre-Medical Opportunity Program

Building on the success of SUNY’s successful Educational Opportunity Program, UUP proposed a Pre-Medical Opportunity Program, which launched in 2021. This is a crucial program that requires funding to address New York’s healthcare staffing shortage. New York desperately needs more healthcare providers, from doctors and nurses to speech language pathologists.

With more funding, the program can provide a robust pipeline of healthcare professionals for New York state. The Pre-Medical Opportunity Program provides extensive support to disadvantaged students interested in medical fields. It will improve the diversity of our state’s healthcare professionals so they can meet the diverse needs of patients throughout our state.

UUP requests \$5 million to continue to support the Pre-Medical Opportunity Program.



Increase Funding and Protect the Educational Opportunity Program

For more than 50 years, SUNY's Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) has supported academically unprepared students with limited financial means and helped them succeed. The program is remarkably successful; It has helped nearly 80,000 students earn a college degree and has helped promote upward social mobility and financial prosperity. EOP has even begun to expand its offerings with the creation of the Pre-Medical Opportunity Program, providing academic support for students earning their advanced degrees from SUNY medical centers.

SUNY's plans to add the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) and Accelerate, Complete, and Engage (ACE) is concerning when it comes to the EOP. While ASAP and ACE are successful at CUNY, the programs are too similar to EOP and are duplicative. Rather than instituting these new programs at SUNY, we should be investing more in and growing EOP.

UUP urges the state to allocate an additional \$20 million to EOP.

Increase Funding for Educational Opportunity Centers (EOCs)

EOCs play an important role in supporting this state's workforce and providing opportunities to low-income students who are looking to complete their high school equivalency, access higher education, or gain the skills needed to find new or better employment. The services provided by the EOCs are free to students and their offerings reflect the needs of their communities. Those offerings include academic counseling, college preparation programs, English as a Second Language programs, high school equivalency programs and many specialized services based on workforce needs in the community.

EOCs play an important role in addressing workforce challenges and shortages across the state. They need adequate funding to continue to provide these crucial services to students in need.

UUP requests an additional \$5M to support SUNY EOCs.

Reform the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP)

The Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) has helped make a college degree affordable for millions of New Yorkers since its inception 50 years ago. Given the rising costs of college—particularly mandatory student fees, particularly mandatory student fees—UUP requests modifications be made to the program to help students obtain a college degree. Student fees total over \$3,000 a year at some campuses, and fees are not eligible for TAP. UUP advocates rolling mandatory fees into tuition, thereby making fees eligible for TAP and making fee increases subject to legislative approval.

Additionally, UUP supports increasing the minimum TAP award to \$1,000. The income threshold for TAP should also be increased, as it has remained at \$80,000 for dependent students for over 20 years. These modifications would support enrollment at SUNY by reducing the cost barriers that prevent so many New Yorkers from attending college.

UUP requests that fees be included in TAP, and that the minimum TAP award and income threshold be increased.

Reform the Excelsior Scholarship Program

The rising costs of college have become a national topic. President Biden has introduced several plans to forgive student debt for millions of Americans. New York created the Excelsior Scholarship in 2017 to offset the rising costs of education for thousands of middle-class New Yorkers.

UUP is urging the state to make changes to the Excelsior Scholarship, which would:

- Adjust the credit hour requirement from 30 credit hours per academic year to 12 credit hours per semester. This would bring Excelsior in line with the Tuition Assistance Program's (TAP) definition of full-time students.
- Increase the family income threshold to \$180,000 annually, allowing more students to qualify.
- Expand Excelsior to cover student fees and books.

These adjustments would help thousands of students and families have better access to and use of the Excelsior program.



Leadership

Increase Operating Aid for SUNY

UUP is requesting an increase in state operating aid of \$139 million for 18 financially distressed state-operated campuses. We request that this funding be directly allocated to these campuses for the specific purpose of closing their current deficits.

Last year, we advocated for \$160 million in operating aid to close the deficits at 19 SUNY campuses, most of which are located upstate. We are grateful to the governor and the Legislature for providing an increase in operating aid of \$163 million in the 2023-24 state budget, which could have been used toward closing budget deficits at 19 financially distressed SUNY campuses.

Unfortunately, the SUNY Board of Trustees chose to allocate this money inequitably, directing the lion's share to already well-off university centers and attaching strings to portions of the funding. As a result, 18 campuses still have budget deficits.

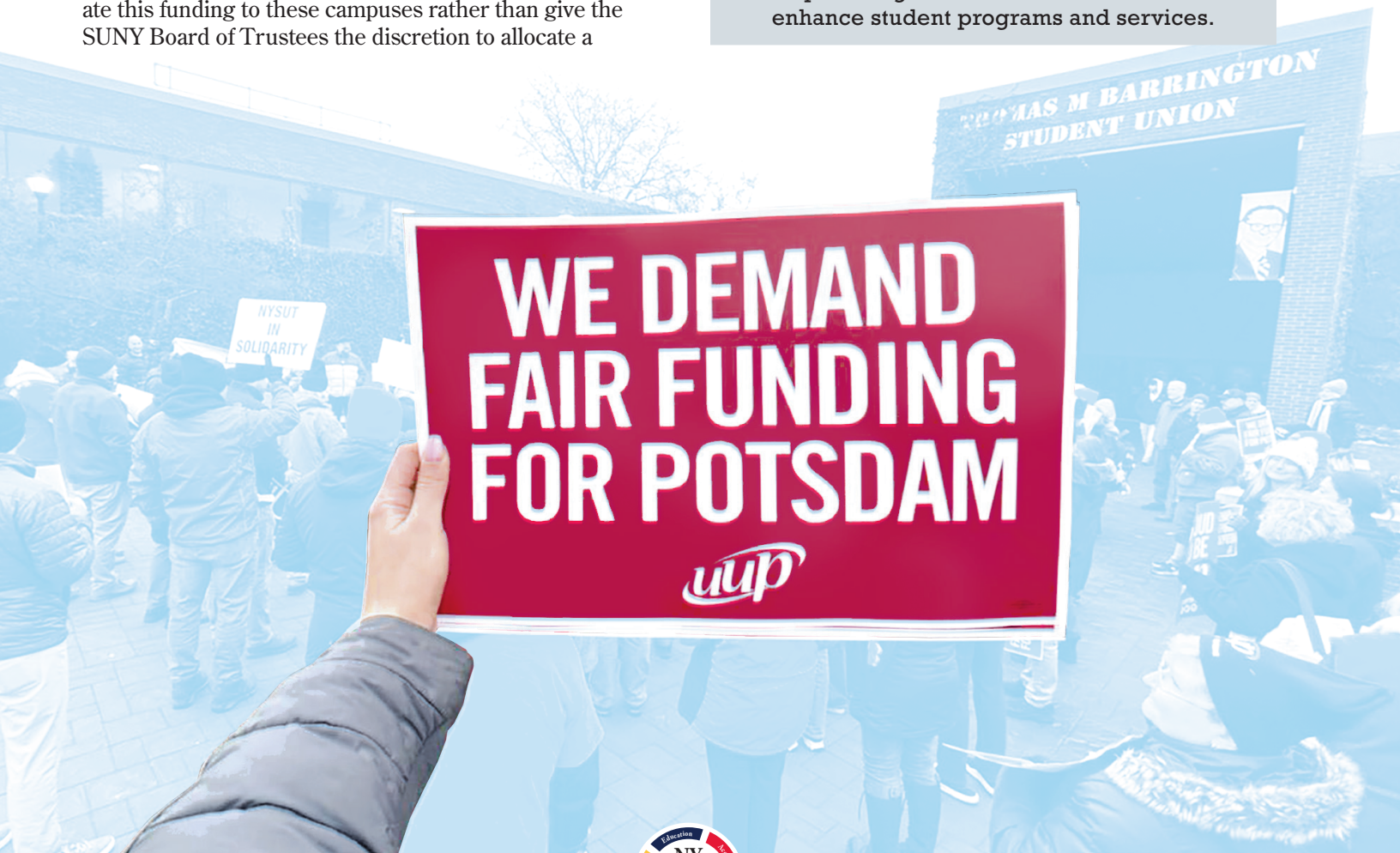
We strongly urge the Legislature to directly appropriate this funding to these campuses rather than give the SUNY Board of Trustees the discretion to allocate a

lump-sum appropriation. We are deeply concerned by the recent program cuts at SUNY Potsdam and SUNY Fredonia and seek these additional funds to prevent more unnecessary cuts across the SUNY system.

In addition, we request \$110 million to be allocated across the SUNY system to enhance student academic programs and services. It has been difficult for many campuses to make enhancements in this area because of more than a decade of inadequate levels of state funding to SUNY. In fact, since SFY 2008-09, SUNY has suffered a decline of \$7.8 billion (adjusted for inflation) in direct state operating aid.

UUP appreciates the increased operating aid provided by the governor and the Legislature in the last two years. However, much more funding is needed to begin to reverse the damage caused by the prolonged financial neglect of the state.

UUP urges the Legislature to allocate \$139 million directly to campuses to close campus budget deficits and \$110 million to enhance student programs and services.



Sustainability

A Greener SUNY for a Greener NY

The worsening impacts of climate change are felt across New York state, and we must take action now before it is too late. SUNY campuses should take a leading role in working toward the state's goals outlined in the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA).

SUNY campuses comprise about 40% of the state's property and are excellent sites for sustainability projects, such as solar arrays, microgrids, heat pumps and efficiency improvements. Implementing these initiatives across SUNY will help the state reach its climate goals and develop a sustainable future.

Hire Sustainability Professionals at State-Operated SUNY Campuses

UUP supports legislation proposed by Sen. John Liu and Assemblymember Anna Kelles (S.7084/A.6536) to require SUNY to hire sustainability professionals. These professionals would be experts in waste management and energy management. They would educate the SUNY community and promote sustainability.

If we are to combat the growing climate crisis and reach

our sustainability goals, it is crucial that the state has a workforce that is trained and equipped to use the newest sustainability technologies.

UUP urges the state to allocate \$15 million annually for the hiring and retention of sustainability professionals across SUNY.

Climate Change Superfund Act

We support legislation proposed by Sen. Liz Krueger and Assemblymember Jeffrey Dinowitz (S.2129-A/A.3351-A) to create the Climate Change Adaptation Cost Recovery Program. This program would require substantial greenhouse gas emitters to help cover the cost of infrastructure improvements required to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Currently, these costs are paid for by taxpayers. This legislation will change that system and make companies that polluted our environment pay their fair share to rectify their wrongdoing and negligence. UUP also advocates for using some of the funds to support sustainability projects on SUNY campuses.

UUP advocates for the passage of this legislation and the reinvestment of funds into sustainability projects on SUNY campuses.



Millionaire’s Tax, More Progressive Income Tax Needed

It is imperative that the state increases its revenue to fund the many public goods and services it provides, including higher education. New York state is the most unequal state in the nation, and its tax structure has become more regressive over time. The state is missing out on billions of dollars in revenue and is struggling to fund its essential services that benefit the whole population.

We ask the Legislature to consider a more progressive income tax and a true millionaire’s tax. These taxes would only apply to the extremely wealthy who have abundant excess income, not the working or middle classes. Increased taxes on those at the top of the income bracket would not cause excessive burden on these individuals, and it would allow New York state to create a more just society with fully funded public goods and services.

Increased revenue would support our institutions of public higher education and keep tuition costs down, thereby supporting enrollment. Keeping SUNY affordable is key to attracting students and giving New Yorkers a pathway toward upward mobility. Finally, the state should use its robust reserve funds to prevent cuts to public higher education.

UUP asks the Legislature to implement a more progressive income tax structure by enacting a multi-level millionaire’s tax.

Hire and Retain Full-Time Faculty and Professional Staff

UUP requests \$53 million to expand and retain full-time faculty and professional staff at SUNY campuses. We applaud Gov. Kathy Hochul and the Legislature for their commitment to funding full-time faculty.

However, we respectfully request that the use of this funding be expanded to enable campuses to hire and retain professional staff in addition to full-time faculty. Moreover, we request that this funding be equitably distributed across the whole SUNY system.

For too long, the system has relied on overworked, underpaid part-time faculty who do not have the proper resources to give our students the support they need and deserve. This funding is crucial to retain and attract world-class faculty and professional staff. In addition to being equitably distributed across our 29 state-operated campuses, this funding should be used to support and hire faculty and professional staff from underrepresented communities.

UUP requests \$53 million, equitably distributed across all state-operated campuses, to support the hiring of full-time faculty and professional staff.



Non-Budgetary Priorities

Mental Health Educational Opportunity Program (MHEOP)

UUP urges the enactment of S.7044 (Webb) and A.7591 (Kelles), which establishes the Mental Health Educational Opportunity Program (MHEOP). The Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) has been a widely successful SUNY program for decades, and the recently implemented Pre-Medical Opportunity Program has also proven successful.

UUP advocates for the creation of a MHEOP to expand the mental health workforce and the diversity of mental health professionals.

There is a concerning disparity between the demographic make-up of behavioral health professionals and the general population. We need many more counselors who reflect the student body and understand students' experiences, particularly on our diverse SUNY campuses.

UUP advocates for a MHEOP program to support students who are pursuing degrees that will lead to careers in mental health, including psychology, sociology, social work, mental health counseling and addictions counseling.

Tier 6 Reform

UUP joins NYSUT and other public employee unions in the fight to fix Tier 6. We demand equity for our Tier 6 members in ORP, ERS and TRS. Fixing the state pension system is crucial to recognizing public employees for their valuable work and ensure them economic security in their retirement after devoting their career to the public good. In addition, we must reform Tier 6 to recruit and retain new employees in public higher education.

Amendments to the State Finance Law

UUP urges changes to the NYS Finance Law to provide automatic approval by the state comptroller for SUNY employment contracts and due process for state employees who have been alleged to have been overpaid.

Amend the State Surplus Property Program

UUP advocates for S.6431/A.6494, introduced by Sen. Jeremy Cooney and Assemblymember Patricia Fahy. This bill would revise the outdated surplus property program so that items in good condition can be donated to a list of pre-approved non-profits. This would allow for unwanted and unsold state items to be reused rather than sent to landfills as waste.

Transparency of SUNY Research and Campus Foundations

UUP urges the state to improve transparency of the SUNY Research Foundation and the campus foundations across SUNY, which together hold assets of hundreds of millions of dollars. We support S.6863 (Stavisky), which would require a publicly available annual report detailing audited financial reports, contracts, employees and salaries of all campus foundations. These foundations are meant to support the mission of our public institutions, and the public has a right to know where the money is going.

SUNY Board of Trustees Reform

UUP advocates for the passage of A.6430 (Wallace), which would reduce the number of Trustees the governor appoints. It would also allow the Temporary President of the Senate and the Speaker of the Assembly to each appoint four Trustees.

UUP also promotes amendments that would give voting rights to the two faculty members on the board, specify an implementation plan and mandate that Trustees cannot be existing employees of their appointing authority.

Emergency Contraception in SUNY Campus Vending Machines

UUP supports A.4091 (Gonzalez-Rojas), a bill that requires every SUNY and CUNY campus to have at least one vending machine containing affordable emergency contraception.





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