



NEWS

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CONTACT PERSON

Alex Wojcik, 914-251-6986
AWojcik@nypirg.org

THOUSANDS OF STUDENTS & ALLIES PUSH TO MAKE COLLEGE MORE AFFORDABLE & FIGHT STUDENT DEBT

NYPIRG unveils coalition of hundreds of groups calling on the Legislature to reform the New York State Tuition Assistance Program

Purchase, NY – This week, the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) unveiled a coalition of over four hundred groups, including the Cheese Club and the Hip Hop Club at Purchase College, calling on the New York State Legislature and the Governor to reform and expand the New York State Tuition Assistance Program (TAP). The coalition, made up of student groups, labor leaders, community groups, college financial aid professionals, high school guidance counselors, and immigrant groups represent thousands of students, community members, and professionals who are fighting to strengthen access to college and reduce student loan debt.

In the last 40 years TAP has helped four million New Yorkers afford college. But a lot has changed since the program's founding in 1974, and TAP is behind the times. TAP grants haven't kept pace with rising tuition, and student loan debt is reaching a crisis level: 2.7 million New Yorkers now hold outstanding student loans, and 60% of New York college graduates last year borrowed an average of \$25,537 to pay for college. TAP should be realigned with the needs of the students and families of today. It should cover more of the cost of tuition for those who qualify, and be flexible enough to meet the needs of all types of New Yorkers, not just the straight-from-high-school-to-college full-time student that it was initially designed to serve. We also need to repair the damage done when some students saw their TAP grants cut or eliminated when Albany passed austerity budgets. To these ends, our coalition supports the following changes to TAP:

Give excluded students access to TAP

- Extend TAP to undocumented youth who arrive in the US before age 16 and graduate from a New York high school or pass a New York accredited high school equivalency program.
- Restore eligibility for TAP to students in default on federal student loans.
- Restore TAP grants to graduate students which were eliminated in 2010.
- Allow currently incarcerated students to once again qualify for TAP grants so that they can earn a college degree.

Realign TAP to the current needs of students and families

- Increase the TAP maximum award to \$6,500 for all students.



- Get rid of outdated award schedules grants be based on the year they
- Raise the income thresholds on TAF single students and married student: provide that all schedules level of \$6,500. For example, the TAP award schedule for independent single students without children– which includes foster children, orphans and wards of the state who are among the state’s neediest – is based on a 20 year-old schedule that makes them *ineligible* if they earn more than \$10,000 in net taxable income and currently limits the maximum grant they *could* receive to just \$3,025. This rule virtually prevents all poor, single working adult students from receiving any financial aid from TAP.
- End the \$100 per-year cut to students’ TAP grants in their last two years of school.
- Eliminate the requirement that students attend college full-time for a year before becoming eligible for Part-Time TAP.
- Add two semesters of TAP eligibility for students who are identified by the State as educationally disadvantaged, but are not enrolled in New York’s limited Educational Opportunity Programs (i.e. SEEK, College Discovery, and HEOP), which extends TAP for two additional semesters.
- Increase the number of semesters of TAP eligibility for all students recognizing that the majority of students take longer than four years to complete a baccalaureate degree. The federal Pell Grant program recognizes this need and provides the equivalent of two additional years.
- Increase TAP grants for students who come from families with multiple family members attending college at the same time.

and the rule requiring that students’ enter college.

award schedules for independent without dependent children, and incorporate the same maximum grant

Simplify the rules and regulations, and improve TAP administration

- Revise the TAP definition of independence to match the federal Pell Grant criteria.
- Let financial aid administrators make changes to students’ grants as is allowed under federal aid programs including Pell Grants. The current program does not allow for necessary adjustments when students are confronted with serious life changes such as a major loss of income or the death of a parent.

Continue to make TAP function better

- Create a system that periodically reviews the effectiveness of TAP to ensure that the program remains up to date.
- Require further training for TAP certifying professionals.

“On top of students having to face constant cuts to higher education funding, a shortage of fulltime faculty, and increasing tuition, we have to deal with an out of date financial aid program—one whose award is inadequate and has not been increased in more than a decade. TAP unfortunately excludes some of the neediest of students such as foster children, orphans and wards of the state.” – **Aileen Sheil, Chairperson, New York Public Interest Research Group and Queens College Student**

“For more than a century and a half, CUNY has educated the "children of the whole people of" New York, as its founding statement says. The members of our union hold that mission dear. CUNY creates economic and intellectual opportunity for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers who struggle to afford



college. But too many students who attend CUNY are prevented from receiving need-based TAP aid or underserved by TAP's outdated rules. That's why the PSC is committed to the Reform NY TAP Coalition and its platform."

attend CUNY or aspire to attend need-based TAP aid or underserved

– **Dr. Barbara Bowen, President of the Professional Staff Congress – CUNY**

"The New York DREAM Act would allow students to receive financial aid regardless of documentation, granting them access to an affordable education--- an opportunity that everyone should have--- an opportunity that the Legislature and the Governor should want all New Yorkers to have." – **Shawn Hall, Undocumented Youth and Queens Borough Community College Student**

"We support the TAP Reform Platform points that will assist in providing NYS students with the opportunities for additional assistance, while also ensuring the integrity of the TAP program and the proper utilization of NYS taxpayer funds," said "Changes in the administration of the TAP program for simplification in regards to award determination, certification, and payment will benefit all the stakeholders involved with the New York State Tuition Assistance Program."

– **Sue Mead from the New York State Financial Aid Administrators Association**

"It's been four years since the termination of Graduate TAP, and since that time, the State of New York has failed to provide an adequate financial aid safety net for thousands of graduate students," said "It's time for Albany to recognize the integral role that individuals with advanced degrees play in providing our City and State with a well-trained workforce. Restoring and enhancing Graduate TAP is a modest, but important, investment in the future of our State economy." – **Luis Gutierrez, University Student Senate Vice-Chair for Graduate Student Affairs**

"We need to bring TAP into the 21st century. The state can do that by increasing the maximum TAP award to \$6,500, aligning it with where CUNY and SUNY tuition will be going. Access to TAP gives students like me an opportunity to better myself and pursue my dreams." – **Bryan Wigfall, Bronx Community College with Debt**

"Students with disabilities are among the least college ready of any demographic in New York State; as well as have the highest unemployment and poverty rates both in NY and the nation. Extending TAP two additional semesters benefits all of New York, but most notably, individuals with disabilities." – **Paula Perez, New York State Disability Services Council**

"The Education from the Inside Out Coalition supports reforms to the Tuition Assistance Program, particularly re-instating TAP grant eligibility to those who are currently incarcerated. There is no question regarding the transformative power of education. By implementing these reforms our state will go a long way in reducing crime and strengthening families and communities." – **Vivian Nixon, Co-Founder of the Education from the Inside Out Coalition**



“With the help of in-depth college counseling at the high school level, students are able to apply to and find the right fit for college. The proposed TAP reforms would enable us in the counseling profession to provide an even wider range of options to the students we are trying so hard to help.” – **Chris Buonocore, New York State Association for College Admissions Counselors**

ENDORSED

32BJ SEIU
Advocates for Children of New York
Cabrini Immigrant Services
Campaign for Americas Future
Citizen Action of New York (CANY)
College Access Consortium of New York (CACNY)
CUNY Coalition for Student with Disabilities (CCSD)
Demos
The Education from the Inside Out Coalition (EIO)
Goddard Riverside Community Center
“I Have A DREAM” Foundation
Labor-Religion Coalition of New York State
Lets Get Ready
Long Island Jobs with Justice
Make the Road New York (MRNY)
Minkwon Community Center
New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC)
New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG)
New York State Association for College Admission Counseling (NYSACAC)
New York State Disability Services Council (NYS DSC)
New York State AFL CIO
New York State Financial Aid Administrators Association (NYSFAAA)
New York State Higher Education Political Action Committee (NYSHEPAC)
New York State Interfaith Network for Immigration Reform
New York State School Counselor Association (NYSSCA)
New York State United Teachers (NYSUT)
New York State Youth Leadership Council (NYSYLC)
New York Students Rising (NYSR)
Professional Staff Congress/ CUNY (PSC)
The Door
University Student Senate / CUNY (USS)
United University Professions / SUNY (UUP)
The Urban Assembly

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