



*The Commission on*  
**INDEPENDENT**  
*Colleges & Universities*  
*in New York*

**Testimony of  
The Commission on Independent  
Colleges and Universities**

**Before the New York State Assembly  
Committee on Higher Education**

**November 30, 2021**

Good morning Chair Glick and members of the Assembly Higher Education Committee. It is my privilege to serve as the President of the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities. I appreciate the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Independent Sector about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education and the outlook moving forward.

The Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities (CICU) educates 40 percent of the state's 1.2 million students, including approximately 250,000 New Yorkers.

### **The Immediate and Lasting Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic had an immediate and severe impact on private colleges and their students. CICU member campuses were among the first in the nation to shut down in the face of the virus, incurring billions of dollars in expenses and losses in order to protect public health.

Amidst the chaos in March 2020, CICU campuses volunteered to act as overflow sites for hospitals, helped students quickly and safely return home, and worked around the clock to continue their educational missions in the face of the unknown.

First, let me take a moment to discuss the human cost of the pandemic. Our campus communities have experienced far too many tragic losses. We will always remember the students, faculty, staff, and family members who died and those whose lives have been changed forever by the COVID-19 virus. The wounds of this pandemic will live on far past any financial impact.

The Independent Sector came together as never before to identify best practices, meet the needs of their students and communities, respond to requests and mandates from the state, and, quite simply, survive.

Thousands of students paused their studies, dropped out, or put off college entirely in the face of the pandemic and the ensuing economic crisis.

Overall, the Independent Sector saw a 4 percent enrollment decline from 2019 to 2020. This decline was most severe at small institutions, and those serving primarily New York students.

One of CICU's members — Concordia College — lost a large percentage of its student body due to the pandemic and announced its closure earlier this year. Thankfully, New York has strong protections for students in the case of institutional closure. However, this closure shows that colleges are not immune to economic pressure, and outside events like COVID.

Early data indicate that enrollment has stabilized this year, but has not fully rebounded. It is still the smallest institutions with the most local student bases that are suffering the greatest impacts from the pandemic. These impacts will reverberate for years to come, as local economies see fewer graduates ready to enter the workforce.

### **Operating Safely During the Pandemic**

Over the past two years, private colleges in New York have been national leaders in efforts to combat this pandemic. CICU campuses were at the forefront in monitoring and safeguarding against the virus through innovative methods, including pooled testing and wastewater monitoring.

CICU campuses conducted approximately 4 million COVID-19 tests during the 2021 academic year, with an overall positivity rate of just 0.33 percent, significantly lower than the state at-large.

These efforts were expensive: COVID-19 cost New York's private, not-for-profit colleges and universities more than \$3.9 billion as of June 2021 — and that total has grown during the current academic year.

The losses include \$947 million in tuition revenue among schools that experienced enrollment declines; \$1.4 billion in lost auxiliary revenue in sales and services to students, visitors, and community members; \$1.1 billion in pandemic-related expenses, such as COVID-19 testing, PPE, and HVAC upgrades; and \$500 million in room and board refunds.

Thankfully, the federal government provided relief to campuses through the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF). This funding kept colleges and universities from closing, prevented mass layoffs, and provided hundreds of millions of dollars in financial aid and other support to our students.

Unfortunately, the relief covered only 22 percent of the losses incurred by our member campuses. Adding to the damage, Bundy Aid — the only source of unrestricted aid to New York's Independent Sector colleges — was cut by 5 percent as the result of a withholding from the State Division of the Budget.

## **The Future Outlook**

Despite the challenges the pandemic brought, and the many challenges colleges faced before COVID-19, New York remains uniquely positioned for success because of the strength of its higher education ecosystem.

The future of our state is in the hands of the students on our campuses today. Fifty-nine percent of New York's future teachers, 57 percent of nurses, and 61 percent of STEM graduates will earn their degrees from a CICU member campus.

On behalf of these colleges and their students, I urge the Legislature to adopt policies that will strengthen the pipeline for these critical careers by supporting all students.

Chair Glick, thank you for your leadership on the recently enacted legislation to reform admissions requirements to graduate education programs, which will help diversify and strengthen our teacher workforce. CICU is grateful for your partnership on this important issue.

We encourage the Legislature to continue its support for increasing the pipeline of healthcare workers. CICU notes that Governor Hochul recently announced the Nurses for Our Future Scholarship that will cover tuition for 1,000 new healthcare workers at SUNY and CUNY to achieve an RN degree.

We urge the Legislature to include students at independent colleges in scholarships or programs designed to strengthen the pipeline, and address the State's healthcare worker crisis.

The Legislature can also help students directly by investing in student aid programs. Our member campuses contributed \$6.7 billion in financial aid to students from our own resources last year, but we cannot meet students' needs alone.

Last year, the Legislature took a huge step by providing the largest increase to TAP awards in nearly two decades. But students in need are still being left behind because the income limit for TAP eligibility has remained stagnant, as has the minimum award.

The Legislature should increase the TAP income limit from \$80,000 to \$110,000 and the minimum award from \$500 to \$1,000. Students and families need this help now more than ever.

This pandemic also taught us that although most students want to study in person, remote education is an important option for many, and colleges proved they can effectively deliver courses virtually.

Along those same lines, we urge the Legislature to examine potential improvements to the State Education Department's program approval process (A.8389 / S.6592) that will enable our colleges to respond to students' needs quickly and efficiently.

Again, I thank the committee for the opportunity to testify. CICU is grateful for the Legislature's continued partnership, and we look forward to continuing this important conversation.

I am happy to answer any questions you have at this time.