



Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies

Statement Prepared For:

NYS Assembly Higher Education Committee
Public Hearing

**The State Commission on Higher Education
Preliminary Report
February 8, 2008
New York City**

Prepared By:

**Jill Poklemba, Senior Policy Analyst
Income Security & Workforce Development
Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies**

Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, Inc.
281 Park Avenue South
New York, New York 10010
Phone: (212) 777-4800
Fax: (212) 414-1328

Fatima Goldman
Executive Director/CEO

My name is Jill Poklemba, and I am the Senior Policy Analyst for Income Security and Workforce Development at the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA). For over 85 years, FPWA has been a leading policy advocate for individuals and families served by our almost 300 member human service agencies and churches in and around New York City. Our mission is to promote the social and economic well-being of greater New York's most vulnerable by strengthening human service organizations and advocating for just public policies. FPWA also sponsors several advocacy coalitions and task forces, including the Welfare Reform Network (WRN) and its Policy & Advocacy Committee (PAC), which meets regularly to develop strategies to improve policies impacting families in poverty, particularly those that can expand access to higher education and career opportunities for welfare recipients.

We commend you Chairperson Glick and the Assembly Higher Education Committee members for convening these hearings and for recognizing that higher education is the key to strengthening the State's economy, reducing poverty, and achieving broader workforce development goals. While we are very pleased that the Commission on Higher Education has been established, we are concerned that the findings and recommendations in the Preliminary Report do not go far enough to break down what can be nearly insurmountable barriers to earning a college degree and achieving economic security through higher education.

Many of the recommendations included in the Preliminary Report reflect a positive first step toward expanding these opportunities. However, in developing the Final Report to be published by June 1, we would like the Commission to expand upon several of its recommendations so that greater numbers of disconnected youth and low-income working adults, single parents, and families receiving public assistance may also have the opportunity to attend college. As you are well aware, access to higher education and vocational training is essential to empower individuals to rise out of poverty.

Therefore, we recommend the following expansions related to specific parts of the Report:

1. Workforce Training Initiative:

We strongly support the goal of linking higher education policy to workforce development by focusing on regional training needs. In addition, we support funding for community colleges to provide vocational non-credit training courses and new credit-bearing programs that allow colleges to adapt to students' schedules and workforce training goals.

We also urge the Committee to consider the following:

- Expand outreach to populations with greater barriers to access, such as welfare recipients, families near and below poverty, and working low-income parents, and ensure that community college programs are accessible to them.
- Create contextualized adult literacy and ESL courses for students with a goal of entering higher education, so that they can develop basic literacy skills and vocation-specific skills simultaneously. Since participation in these courses counts within the definition of “vocational education” as an allowable core work activity for welfare recipients for up to 12 months, they are an excellent way to support educational opportunities for this population.
- Facilitate stronger partnerships between employers, community colleges, workforce intermediaries, and local Workforce Investment Boards to build sustainable education and training networks throughout the State.
- Invest in employer-developed course models that teach students specific skills demanded by industries that offer opportunities for career advancement.
- Develop modularized programs that allow students to achieve short-term benchmarks or credentials recognized by employers, resulting in faster incremental wage gains.¹

In addition, the SFY 2008-09 Executive Budget includes \$200,000 in funding to the SUNY Office of Diversity and Educational Equity for ESL and Language Immersion. A portion of this funding should be used to re-design traditional ESL programs into classes that combine basic language instruction with training for a specific vocation based on effective contextualized education models. This will help individuals with limited English skills gain employer-recognized credentials more quickly to increase their earning potential and advance on a career path.

¹ Recommendations adapted from: a) Mazzeo, Christopher, et al. (Dec. 2006). “Working Together, Aligning State Systems and Policies for Individual and Regional Prosperity,” Workforce Strategy Center.
b) Mazzeo, Christopher, et al. (Jan. 2003). “Building Bridges to College and Careers,” Workforce Strategy Center.
Both available at: www.workforcestrategy.org.

2. College Readiness Act:

While we support programs that expand opportunities for youth to attend college, the requirement that students participate in classes “separate from college” in order to gain acceptance has the potential to create a barrier for disadvantaged students by taking remediation out of community colleges. Remediation located on college campuses is good for retention, as it allows students to attend college while taking the courses they need to improve their skill levels in certain areas.

We also urge the Committee to consider the following:

- Expand opportunities for disconnected youth and adult learners to transition from Adult Basic Education (ABE), ESL and GED preparation courses into higher education programs. These programs should serve as “feeders” to provide graduates with a direct link to community colleges.
- Develop financial incentives for community colleges to recruit more students coming out of ABE, ESL and GED programs.
- Create accelerated learning and dual enrollment opportunities for students to participate simultaneously in ABE, ESL, and/or GED preparation and courses for college credit.
- Establish multiple points of entry, exit and re-entry, to break down unnecessary barriers for students to enter college and make steady progress toward earning their degree.²

The CUNY College Now program³ that prepares high school students for college is an excellent model, particularly in offering students dual enrollment opportunities. This model should be expanded and replicated in other areas of the State. It could also provide a framework for designing programs for other populations that face barriers to higher education, especially welfare recipients and low-income working adults.

3. Opportunity Programs for Educationally and Economically Disadvantaged:

We support increased funding for all financial aid programs for low-income students, including College Discovery (CD), Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge (SEEK), the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), and Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP).

² Recommendations adapted from: U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Occasional Paper 2007-03, “Adult Learners in Higher Education, Barriers to Success and Strategies to Improve Results,” March 2007. Available at: http://wdr.doleta.gov/research/FullText_Documents/Adult%20Learners%20in%20Higher%20Education1.pdf.

³ Information about the CUNY College Now program is available at: <http://www.collegenow.cuny.edu/>

We also urge the Committee to consider the following:

- Require SUNY and CUNY to conduct more outreach efforts so that potentially eligible college applicants know how to apply for and receive this financial aid.

4. Tuition Assistance Program (TAP):

We support the expansion of TAP for youth aging out of foster care, independent students, and part-time students. In addition, we support the reduction of fees and increased funding for Aid to Part-Time Study (APTS) program.

We also urge the Committee to consider the following:

- Expand TAP even more extensively by raising the income qualifications so more students have access to this financial aid.
- Eliminate the requirement that part-time students must complete one year of full-time coursework to qualify for TAP. This requirement only creates one more barrier for students to attend college, particularly low-income parents and welfare recipients who cannot attend school full-time due to other work and family obligations.
- Conduct more community outreach to students who could qualify for TAP and APTS financial aid programs.

5. Low Cost Student Loan:

While this option is certainly a better alternative for students than high-interest loans, it is better to extensively expand TAP or other forms of financial aid for low-income students. We strongly recommend that students have access to information about all other forms of tuition assistance and scholarships before taking out a loan for higher education. Educational debt merely imposes greater barriers for individuals to rise out of poverty, and researchers have found that lower income students typically owe the most money upon graduation.⁴ Across the U.S., increases in college tuition have made higher education less affordable for most American families. In addition, most financial aid packages have not kept pace with the rise in tuition costs.⁵ Therefore, it is critical to expand TAP and other financial assistance programs that do not impose a substantial debt burden on students with limited resources, which can severely limit the economic benefits of a college degree.

⁴ Boushey, Heather (March 2003). "The Debt Explosion Among High School Graduates," Center for Economic and Policy Research. Available at: http://www.cepr.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=392.

⁵ "Losing Ground: A National Status Report on the Affordability of American Higher Education," The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2002. Available at: www.highereducation.org.

*** Additional Legislative Recommendations:**

In addition to the “College Readiness Act,” we would like to see in the Commission’s Final Report a policy goal to expand access to college for populations facing greater barriers to higher education. Legislation is needed to accomplish this and to sustain success for low-income students, particularly working adults, single parents and welfare recipients.

ABE/GED to College Program: The State must promote access in other ways besides financial aid eligibility rules. Specifically, we urge the Legislature to consider a programmatic change in the structure of the adult education system to strengthen linkages for these students and particularly for adult GED-holders to access higher education. Academic schedules, course curricula, and career counseling services should be offered and tailored specifically to the needs of non-traditional college students who are more likely to be older, working full-time, and to have substantial family obligations.

Legislation to create a “GED to College Transition” Program should promote or include:⁶

- Direct links to college advisement and enrollment assistance for ABE, ESL, and GED students and those who recently passed the GED.
- Transferable credits between community colleges and standardized course material.
- Flexible class schedules that allow for multiple points of entry, exit and re-entry.
- Learning cohorts that build a group of students and teachers to progress together from GED completion to college entrance and degree completion.
- Academic counseling that is tailored to meet the needs of low-income working adults and welfare recipients. Specifically, all welfare recipients should receive information about Work-Study and Internship programs that make it possible for students receiving public assistance [under NYS Social Services Law §336(8)] to participate in higher education programs.
- Ongoing support and assistance to ensure that students receive all available information about financial aid and scholarship programs.
- Advocacy teams within community college and vocational training programs to assist low-income students and particularly welfare recipients with enrolling and maintaining participation in these programs. These teams would work with social services caseworkers and employers or worksite managers to ensure that students have a manageable schedule that does not compromise their compliance with work activities or receipt of benefits. In addition, teams would link students to other services that support their educational success.

⁶ Recommendations adapted from: a) Strawn, Julie (Sept. 2007). “Policies to Promote Adult Education and Postsecondary Alignment,” National Commission on Adult Literacy. Available at: www.nationalcommissiononadultliteracy.org.
b) “Breaking Through: Helping Low-Skilled Adults Enter and Succeed in College and Careers,” Jobs for the Future & National Council for Workforce Education, Nov. 2004. Available at: www.jff.org.

To build upon these efforts, the SUNY and CUNY systems should set new recruitment goals to enroll a greater percentage of “non-traditional” students, including GED-holders, welfare recipients, and working parents. Over time, this would not only reduce the numbers of people in poverty in our State, it would also enrich and broaden the range of diversity on our public university campuses. Most importantly, it would help us build a sustainable and well-educated workforce necessary to promote economic growth.

*** Recommendations related to SFY 2008-09 State Budget:**

Lastly, we have some suggestions pertaining to the Commission’s Report that we urge the Higher Education Committee to consider during the upcoming SFY 2008-09 budget negotiations:

Work-Study Programs

Work-Study programs and Internships are an excellent opportunity for low-income students to access higher education. In addition, since these programs count as an allowable core work activity for welfare recipients, they provide a unique bridge to college for this population. Furthermore, under the new Final TANF Rule, which goes into effect on October 1, 2008, participation in a 4-year degree program counts within the definition of “Vocational Education” as a core work activity for up to one year and then as a non-core activity after one year.⁷ So, work-study programs and internships could make the dream of higher education a reality for this population. However, there are currently not enough work-study slots for those who qualify under the federal program rules. Therefore, New York State should expand Work-Study opportunities by creating a new State funding stream that could not only increase the number of slots, but also support outreach to greater numbers of low-income individuals and welfare recipients to inform them about to apply and enroll.

Green Building Projects

The SFY 2008-09 Executive Budget includes \$75 million for “Greening of CUNY.” This funding should be used to expand workforce training opportunities for low-income individuals and welfare recipients. Specifically, low-skilled adults who are currently unemployed or working in low-wage positions should have access to training programs to learn how to retrofit buildings and modify CUNY campuses to make them more efficient and “greener.” Participants in these training programs should also receive information about how to enroll in CUNY programs and should receive tuition reimbursement for their contribution to the improvement of CUNY campuses. FPWA also urges the State to coordinate with New York City and other local governments to expand training opportunities for more individuals to obtain jobs and a career path in the green labor market.

⁷ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services News, February 5, 2008. “Final Welfare Reform Regulations Announced.” Available at: http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/news/press/2008/final_welfare_reform.html.

Career Pathways Proposal

FPWA has endorsed the Career Pathways proposal supported by The Workforce Alliance and other organizations representing a range of employment, adult education, literacy and workforce training providers; businesses; labor unions; and advocates for low-income populations and welfare recipients. The State should create a \$50 million Career Pathways Fund with money from the TANF block grant and other federal, state, and private funding sources. The fund would support strategies for Career Pathways for low-income New York adults and youth, with an emphasis on cross-system and cross-institutional collaboration.

Eligible grantees would be community or technical colleges, other training providers, local workforce investment boards or one-stop centers, employer or industry associations, local social services districts, educational agencies, or other “intermediary” organizations that can bring together key stakeholders.

Funded activities would include convening partners and planning strategies, paying tuition for trainees when other funds are not available, funding training organizations that are part of the collaboration to improve or enhance their curricula or add new instructors, financing supportive services, and paying for stipends, internships or work release for trainees.

Funding priorities would include applicants demonstrating their ability to work collaboratively with key stakeholders in the regional economy, use industry or labor market analysis to select industry sectors that demonstrate a demand for skilled workers and advancement opportunities, involve employers and unions to validate career pathways and determine relevant skills and competencies, ensure that training results in industry-recognized certificate or credential, and leverage additional public and private philanthropic and employer resources to fund program partnership strategies.

State agencies should work together with community colleges facilitate these partnerships to the fullest extent possible, and help sustain them regionally as they are developed in areas throughout the State.

Scholarship Program for Foster Care Youth attending College in the SUNY and CUNY system or participating in a Vocational Training program

Unlike their peers, foster care youth who age out of the system have few supports and little to no adult or family guidance. They experience higher rates of mental health illness, criminal activity, homelessness, and unemployment.⁸ Current and former foster care youth who successfully navigate the difficulties of growing up in the child welfare system and graduate from high school must be encouraged to pursue post-secondary education.

Despite the demonstrated link between education and later success, former foster care youth struggle to access the same educational opportunities available to their peers. Foster youth who age out simply do not have the financial resources or family support, encouragement, and guidance that many children rely on as they advance through high school and contemplate options for higher education. While nearly two-thirds (64%) of former foster care youth in a Chapin Hall study had graduated from high school or obtained a GED, less than 12% were enrolled in a two or four-year college.⁹

The expense of attending college is out of reach for most foster care youth. In New York's public university system, tuition, fees, and living expenses at SUNY's four-year baccalaureate program adds up to over \$17,000 per school year.¹⁰ Foster care youth with any hope of affording a post-secondary education are forced to piece together numerous grants or take on loans, a process that can be extremely daunting without family help, guidance counselors, or the many other supports upon which non-foster youth rely. Even the maximum award amounts under tuition assistance programs like New York State's TAP, the Federal Pell Grant, the Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant, and Federal Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs) are insufficient to cover tuition, fees, and living expenses in a degree-granting program. For instance, ETVs, which are available specifically for foster care youth, only provide *up to* \$5,000 per youth. Out of the 810 youth across the State who received an ETV award in FFY 2006-2007, 46% received awards of less than \$4,000.¹¹

Investing in post-secondary opportunities for foster youth will ultimately benefit the State. Research shows that workers with an associate's degree or a bachelor's degree experience less unemployment and earn higher wages than workers who have only graduated from high school. Nationally, the

⁸ Mark Courtney, "Youth Aging Out of Foster Care," Network on Transitions to Adulthood: Policy Brief, Issue 19, April 2005. Available at <http://www.transad.pop.upenn.edu/downloads/courtney--foster%20care.pdf>.

⁹ Mark Courtney, Amy Dworsky, Gretchen Ruth, Tom Keller, Judy Havlicek, and Noel Bost, "Midwest Evaluation of Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 19," Chapin Hall Working Paper, May 2005.

¹⁰ "2007-08 Typical Expenses for Undergraduate Students at a SUNY College," The State University of New York.

Living expenses include room and board (assumes SUNY student lives on campus), books and supplies, transportation, and personal expenses. Available at http://www.suny.edu/Student/paying_tuition.cfm.

¹¹ Data obtained from OCFS.

unemployment rate for high school graduates in 2006 was 4.3%, compared to 3.0% for workers with an associate's degree and 2.3% for workers with a bachelor's degree. As for wages, workers with a high school diploma could expect a 28.7% increase in earnings with an associate's degree and a 61.5% increase with a bachelor's degree.¹²

Seventeen states currently offer some form of education tuition waiver assistance to foster care youth.¹³ A State-sponsored higher education scholarship program that provides assistance with both tuition and living expenses would allow New York foster care youth to eliminate cost as yet another barrier to their pursuit of higher education and a better life.

Higher Education Endowment Fund

If the \$4 billion Endowment Fund that the Governor has proposed is established, at least some portion of the funds raised should be directed to expand access to higher education for those facing the greatest barriers to enrollment and degree completion.

Specifically, a significant percentage of the Endowment Fund should be set aside to:

- Create more Work-Study slots and increase outreach to potentially eligible students;
- Build Career Pathways models;
- Design ABE/GED to College programs;
- Expand Contextualized Adult Literacy, ESL and GED Preparation courses; and,
- Fund a Scholarship Program for Foster Youth entering College.

We hope that you will seriously consider the points we have presented and use your influence to ensure that the Commission directly addresses them in its Final Report. Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to testify.

¹² "Education and Training Pay," Postsecondary Education Opportunity. Available at <http://www.postsecondary.org/archives/Posters/EducationTraining.pdf>.

¹³ The states are: Alaska, Connecticut, Florida, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Maine, Minnesota, North Carolina, New Jersey, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and West Virginia.