

FINANCING PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

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Statement of Position

As announced by the State Board, June 1999

The League of Women Voters of New York State believes higher education contributes to individual gains in the quality of life, but more important, it improves the collective good of the state. The State University of New York (SUNY) system provides the majority of the state's teacher education and offers programs ranging from the liberal arts to engineering and medicine. The community college system offers worker retraining programs, occupational studies and transfer degrees. Because of these extensive services, the League believes it is clearly in the public interest to fund public higher education.

The League recommends both increasing financial aid for students and increasing state operating aid to all campuses. Lack of finances has made it more difficult for New York state students to attain access to public higher education. Tuition increases and cuts in the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) have raised the level of student indebtedness. Increasing financial aid for students and state aid will help individual students as well as strengthen programs and improve facilities on the SUNY four-year and two-year campuses.

The League believes that all state colleges should charge the same tuition for similar programs. Charges should not vary depending on an individual campus' operating costs or geographic location. Tuition should be the same for all students and not based on student or family income.

The League supports sharing of resources among campuses: classes (distance learning), libraries, services, facilities, and accounting systems. The League supports closer alignment of undergraduate and transfer requirements, articulation agreements¹, and joint teaching and

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degree-producing arrangements among the campuses. Cost containment in operations is important. Any reforms, however, must not negatively impact academic standards or the quality of services on the state campuses. The League supports retaining and finding mechanisms to enforce the existing funding formula for financing the community system, 1/3 tuition, 1/3 state aid, and 1/3 county support. Both the state and county sponsors should be obligated to pay their chartered proportion.

¹agreements made among different educational institutions, in this case two and four year colleges, to ensure a seamless transition with regard to requirements and courses.

The League of Women Voters of New York State undertook a study of the financing of public higher education in response to member interest and delegate support at the June 1997 Convention. League members were interested because of the dramatic policy changes that had occurred in the SUNY system. Tuition rates had increased sharply from 1995 to 1996; remedial education was under fire; the Tuition Assistance Program had been severely cut; and a mission review was introduced for the entire SUNY system. Some League members were aware that many policy shifts were underway; yet, there was little public awareness or discussion of these shifts. A League study on the issue of Financing Public Higher Education could potentially raise the level of public awareness of higher education issues, and it followed the just completed study on Financing Public Education K-12. After eighteen months of study, local Leagues, led by the State Committee on Financing Public Higher Education concluded their study and consensus.