February 10, 2017

Dear Members of the Legislature:

I am writing to outline New York University’s (NYU) institutional priorities as the Legislature begins consideration of the Governor’s State Executive Budget proposal for FY 2017-18. It was a pleasure to meet many of you last week on my first trip to Albany since becoming president of NYU, and I thank you for the warm reception. During my time in Albany, I had an opportunity to discuss both NYU’s overall priorities and proposals contained in the Governor’s Executive Budget that are of concern for private institutions of higher education across the state.

I applaud the Governor for his willingness to tackle higher education affordability and accessibility. Affordability is an important conversation – one that NYU has taken on and will continue to address. However, the Governor’s proposal to limit the Excelsior Scholarship Program to students at public institutions, and his proposal to tie the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) and Direct Institutional (Bundy) Aid to an institution’s financial decision on tuition, will have a series of unintended consequences on private institutions and our students.

There is a long standing, highly successful, tradition in New York State that has supported a robust system of higher education with three strong pillars: the city public system of CUNY, the state public system of SUNY, and the independent sector. One of the enviable strengths of the New York State system is how policymakers have ensured equilibrium among these sectors, giving New York students maximum choice and access to the institution of their choice. Limiting these choices by restricting state financial aid has the potential to deny access to higher education for students from lower or middle income families, for whom a private college is the best fit for them both academically and personally. Freedom of choice has long been a guiding principle in allocating need-based financial aid at the state and federal level. I hope that as you continue the budget process, you consider how these proposals will impact students across the state.

Many institutions, including NYU, have made it a priority to serve students from lower and modest income families. Private institutions in New York have provided over $5 billion in institutional aid annually to their students; at NYU we provide over $600 million in financial aid directly to students. The Governor’s proposals will undercut an institution’s efforts to address affordability in innovative ways. I have enclosed some information that highlights recent initiatives undertaken by NYU to address affordability.
The Governor has also proposed reducing funding for the Opportunity Programs, which go beyond financial aid support and provide students with critical academic and mentoring services. As the institution with the largest Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) in the state, serving over 600 students, we hope that funding for all Opportunity Programs will be restored to last year’s enacted budget levels.

The New York State higher education system has been a remarkably fertile ecosystem, with all three sectors – aided greatly by state support – doing their part. NYU and other private institutions hope to continue our long-standing partnership with the state to develop and train the workforce that our global economy demands while serving as an engine of innovation for our communities.

I have enclosed a summary describing additional priorities for NYU during the annual budget process. Again, thank you for the warm welcome to Albany last week and for your leadership on education and innovation issues. I look forward to the opportunity to work with you in the years to come.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Andrew Hamilton
President
New York University