

**Testimony before the Joint Fiscal Committees
on the SFY 2010-11 *Executive Budget*
Higher Education Hearing
January 27, 2010**

**Presented by
Karen Schimke, President and CEO
Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy**



*Shaping New York State public policy
for people in need since 1872*

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My name is Karen Schimke and I am President and CEO of the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (SCAA). Since its founding in 1872, SCAA has provided a strong advocacy voice for New York State's most vulnerable citizens.

SCAA has been doing policy work on tuition assistance and, in particular, on how it works—or doesn't work—for New York State's vulnerable youth, namely young adults who have aged-out of the foster care system.

The statistics are staggering, depressing...and unacceptable. Of the 150,000 18-25 year-olds in foster care who are college-qualified in New York State, only 30,000, or 20%, attend postsecondary education. This number should be greater. And it would be if we invested more in educating these youth.

We believe that when children enter the foster care system, they become our own. The state is responsible for educating, housing, feeding, clothing, and supporting them. The state is liable for their health care—both physical and social-emotional. That responsibility should not end when the child turns 18. Last year, New York State extended Medicaid eligibility for foster care youth from 18 to 21 years of age. This is a huge step in the right direction.

We should not write these children off. They have bright futures in this state and can contribute both socially and economically. But we need to help them out—just like we have helped our own, biological, children with their educational needs.

When it comes to higher education, we applaud the Governor for proposing a new TAP schedule for certain financially independent students. The *Executive Budget* increases the maximum award from \$3,025 to \$5,000 for orphans/wards of the court and other students under 22 years of age who meet certain criteria that establishes their financial independence. These students would receive an award similar to that for students who are declared as dependents by their parents. This is another step forward.

We have three recommendations that we believe the state should follow in order to make TAP a truly beneficial resource for this vulnerable population.

1. Do not decrease the maximum award for independent students who are married without children from \$5,000 to \$3,025. While this is consistent with the award provided to single adults with no children, we would argue that foster care youth, married or not, must often rely on tuition assistance to attend college. This assistance should not be decreased for any reason.

2. Do not reduce the maximum TAP award for two-year degree programs. Most foster care youth attend two-year programs because they must work to make ends meet. A recent Gates Foundation study found that 81% of foster care youth who did not graduate from college said that part-time students should qualify for financial aid. Decreasing the award from \$5,000 to \$4,000 would create a hardship for many of these students.
3. Do not reduce all TAP awards by \$75. For these youth, every penny counts. If we want them to not only attend college, but complete college with a degree, we must support them financially in that endeavor.

Again, we applaud the gains the state has made in recent years with respect to foster care youth transitioning out into the “real world” of work and life. We urge you to continue to support their pursuit of higher education and not make it harder for them to succeed.

Thank you.