

'THIS IS THE FINAL PUSH'

Bucking 'socialism,' Nicole touts TAP hike

Legislator sides with state's private colleges

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As Gov. Andrew Cuomo and the state Legislature wrestle over his proposal to make tuition free for middle-class students at public colleges, Republican Assemblywoman Nicole Malliotakis on Monday took another stab at getting support for her years-old proposal to expand the state's existing tuition assistance program, or TAP, as an alternative to Cuomo's proposal that excludes private schools.

Earlier this year, Cuomo proposed giving free tuition to New York's public colleges for families earning up to \$100,000 beginning in fall 2017, increasing the threshold to \$110,000 in 2018 and \$125,000 in 2019.

The proposal is for tuition only — it doesn't cover room and board, and other expenses, like transportation and books.

That plan has several shortcomings, opponents argue, including that students attending private colleges would lose out.

Cuomo's budget proposal would offer TAP only to students who attend colleges that have tuition increases

below \$500 or the annual increase in the Higher Education Price Index, whichever is greater.

Cuomo is also threatening to cut off direct institutional, or Bundy Aid, to colleges that exceed the increase maximum.

This could hurt private colleges, which tend to be large employers and economic drivers in their communities.

Administrators of private colleges and other opponents of the plan cite studies that show those institutions will see a significant drop in enrollment, with more students attending public colleges that may be unable to accommodate the large increase.

They argue Cuomo's plan would limit choice for students and create an uneven playing field, making it hard for private colleges to compete with the free tuition at state schools.

Eligible students at private colleges could still get TAP funding but Cuomo's plan calls for an extra \$163 million to be used to cover the remaining tuition costs for students at public colleges.

Calling the governor's proposal "socialism," Malliotakis (R-East Shore/Brooklyn) doesn't believe the government should hand out a free college education, she said Monday morning at Wagner College.

Instead, expanding the TAP program would help more people afford college, she and Dr. Richard Guarasci, president of Wagner College, and Dr. James O'Keefe, vice provost of St. John's University, Staten Island campus, agreed.

First introduced in 2014, Malliotakis' bill would increase the income cap for TAP from the current \$80,000 to \$100,000, making more people eligible. She would be OK with expanding that to \$125,000 given the governor's proposal.

The maximum annual award would increase from the current \$5,165 to \$6,470, the current SUNY tuition.

That would have the same effect as providing free tuition to CUNY/SUNY schools for people who qualify, while still allowing students at private colleges to get state aid.

Malliotakis also wants to bring back TAP for graduate students, a funding stream that was eliminated in 2010.

The governor has proposed making CUNY and SUNY tuition-free.

While she didn't mention it Monday, Malliotakis has often tied her TAP proposal to debate over tuition assistance for undocumented immigrants. She has argued that TAP should be expanded to cover more legal New York state residents before covering undocumented students.

NO INCREASE SINCE 2000

The Republican assemblywoman noted the TAP income cap hasn't increased since 2000, a fact that is "shocking because everything else has increased, cost of living, tuition," she said. "TAP is so important to so many middle-class families."

Malliotakis is hoping her proposal will be included in the state budget that's being negotiated with a Friday deadline.

A member of the minority party in a house controlled by Democrats, Malliotakis is heartened by support for her bill in the Senate by Staten Island's two state senators, Andrew Lanza, a member of the Republican majority, and Diane Savino, a member of the Independent Democratic Conference.

Assembly Republican Minority Leader Brian Kolb supports a GOP alternative to Cuomo's proposal.

"This is the final push," Mallotakis said.

In New York, private colleges confer a slim majority of bachelor's degrees, while the vast majority of master's and doctoral degrees come from private institutions.

"The governor's proposal really discriminated against private institutions," Guarasci said. "It didn't do anything for private institutions, in fact we're at a horrible disadvantage."

More than 80,000 private-college students receive state aid in New York.

O'Keefe said of TAP, "This money is essential to our students and to our university and to our mission."

Cuomo's office didn't respond to a request for comment.