

PRESS RELEASE FROM
PRESIDING OFFICER DUWAYNE GREGORY



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Leaders Gather For First Meeting of the Suffolk Community College Budget Committee

Members elect chair, discuss plans for creating five-year plan



Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory addresses members of the Suffolk County Community College Budget Committee, which has been tasked with developing a five-year plan to stabilize tuition, as committee member and student Maria Gomez, right, looks on.

HAUPPAUGE, N.Y. – A committee formed to create a five-year budget plan for Suffolk County Community College (SCCC) elected a chair and discussed its primary goals at its first meeting on Feb. 19.

The Community College Budget Committee is the result of [legislation](#) sponsored by Suffolk County Legislature Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory that provides for the creation of a five-year plan to stabilize the cost of tuition at SCCC.

Funding for SCCC, the largest community college in New York State, comes from tuition, county funding and state funding. Much of the conversation among committee members last week addressed challenges in balancing the “three-legged stool” and the impact that government funding can have on student tuition.

Presiding Officer Gregory said access to a quality, affordable education is critical for keeping young people on Long Island.

“Suffolk County Community College is one of our greatest assets, for it has continued to adapt to a changing world to give its students a top education and a bright future,” Presiding Officer Gregory said. “However, for too long, the financial burden of that education has been shifting to the students. The college’s financial sustainability is one of my top priorities. Coming up with a five-year plan will give some certainty to students’ tuition expectations and will give the college the assurance it needs to properly plan for its future.”

Terry Pearsall of Yaphank, who retired in 2014 after 40 years with the county during which he served as chief of staff to three presiding officers, will chair the committee as the designee of Presiding Officer Gregory.

The other committee members include: 9th District Legislator Monica Martinez, chair of the Legislature’s Education and Human Services Committee; SCCC President Dr. Shaun McKay; SCCC Board of Trustees Chair Theresa Sanders; Legislature Budget Review Office Director Robert Lipp; representatives from County Executive Steve Bellone’s office; and Maria Gomez, a representative of the SCCC student government association.

“As chair of the Education and Human Services Committee, it gives me great pleasure to be part of the SCCC Budget Committee,” Legislator Martinez said. “Holding productive discussions on how to improve the college while keeping tuition down is vital to our students’ continued success and for the residents of this great county.”

“Working with our elected officials through this committee, I am confident we will reach an agreement on the development of a long-term plan that will ultimately benefit the academic success of Suffolk’s students, while simultaneously bringing value to the county and its taxpayers,” said Dr. McKay, who estimated that more than 80 percent of SCCC’s graduates stay on Long Island. “Like every investment made in the college, those funds help our institution, and its students, achieve impressive results.”

“The college’s board of trustees is dedicated to keeping the cost of tuition affordable for our students,” Ms. Sanders said. “However, it is also our responsibility to advocate for adequate funding from New York State and our sponsor, Suffolk County. Our conversations today are a good first step in finding an acceptable path to easing the financial burden on our students, while

simultaneously providing families with an ability to plan ahead when it comes to budgeting to cover the costs of the first two years of a college education.”

The burden that rising tuition puts on SCCC’s students and their families was made clear when Ms. Gomez told her fellow committee members that for many of her peers, the choice to invest in their education often comes at a great sacrifice.

“Suffolk students don’t take things for granted,” Ms. Gomez said. “We really want to succeed in life. Many of us are the first generation in our family to go to college. We want to be the ones that make them proud and make the difference. Giving certainty to our tuition and minimizing our contribution would be such a help to us. It makes sense that tuition should be low because we’re the ones who are going to go out there and make this county a better one.”

The budget committee, which will meet again next month, is expected to present a nonbinding plan to each member of the Legislature as well as the County Executive.

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