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New Jersey Higher Education Funding Increase Needed to Offset Cuts

State's largest highest education union agrees with report's call for increase in support

EDISON...New Jersey needs to invest in public higher education instead of leaving the state's students perilously close to economic ruin, according to a report issued today. "This year's state budget will exclude many from academic opportunities especially if compounded with the impact of a federal sequester," said Dr. Susanna Tardi, a William Paterson University sociology professor and Executive Vice President of the American Federation of Teachers New Jersey (AFTNJ), representing approximately 20,000 higher education faculty and staff members at public state four-year colleges, universities and county colleges. "The high tuition/high assistance model that depends on limited grants and costly loans is not working as evidenced by mounting student debt which has skyrocketed past one trillion dollars nationally."

The union federation agrees with the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities' (CBPP) report (*Recent Deep State Higher Education Cuts May Harm Students and the Economy for Years to Come*) conclusion that reinvesting in higher education should be a high priority for state policymakers, according to Dr. Tardi. She noted New Jersey's key strategic advantage of attracting businesses by having highly educated workers when many employers require college-educated workers.

"Despite the prevailing mythology that tax rates are the major factor in business location decisions, the evidence is overwhelming that it is the *quality of the workforce* that is most important," said New Jersey Policy Perspectives president Gordon MacInnes. "Nothing better measures workforce quality than educational levels, which is one of New Jersey's greatest, but largely ignored, assets."

Citing the CBPP finding that New Jersey has cut funding for higher education by 27 percent since 2008 when adjusted for inflation, Dr. Tardi decried the decrease that amounts to more than \$2,500 per student as "a shocking loss of opportunity" for New Jersey students and "detrimental to the state's overall economy."

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Any additional cuts in federal funding would compound the impact of the neglect. As it stands now, the federal sequester would make cuts to student financial aid, work-study jobs and college access programs, said Dr. Tardi. Both the economy and scientific progress could be hampered as federal programs whose grants sustain university research — the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health, as well as the National Endowment for the Humanities — face significant cuts.

New Jersey higher education unions have further questioned whether funding will be sufficient to cover costs for the coming merger of most of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ) with Rutgers and Rowan University's move to research status while absorbing the operation of UMDNJ's School of Osteopathic Medicine.

The AFTNJ advocated in favor of last November's successful bond referendum for construction of new academic facilities to increase student capacity, but that will not help individual students afford continued high tuition costs, according to Dr. Tardi. "We need New Jersey legislators to provide much-needed general funding for higher education instead of putting the burden on New Jersey students and their families to shoulder costs and accumulate debt. The CBPP report should serve as a wake-up call to fund higher education for the sake of our students and the state as a whole."

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The American Federation of Teachers New Jersey is the largest higher education union in the state, representing full and part-time faculty, all levels of administrative, professional and supervisory staff, graduate workers, and postdoctoral researchers. Rutgers faculty and staff are AFT affiliates through AFT Rutgers. All four state colleges and five state universities are AFT locals through the Council of New Jersey State College Locals. We represent faculty and staff at 11 county colleges.