The Honorable Sean Ryan
NYS Assembly Member
LOB 540
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Assemblymember Sean Ryan,

As a current student at Hilbert College, a private, not-for-profit College in Hamburg, I write to ask your support for expanding the availability of financial aid for all New York students, whether they attend public or private colleges and universities in our state.

We all agree that helping New Yorkers achieve a higher education makes economic sense. A well-educated population is vital to New York’s successful future. The proposed Executive Budget has helped focus attention on higher education and how to assist families with paying for college. However, the much discussed “free tuition” proposal limits educational choices for New Yorkers, and would be doing a disservice to New York’s taxpayers. It creates two classes of students in New York State and also presents a competitive imbalance that would jeopardize Hilbert College’s ability to compete for students. The impact on enrollment and hence the economic vitality of our institution would be seriously compromised. It also represents a departure from a long held public policy goal of New York State — student choice.

The proposed Excelsior Scholarship Program signals an interest from state government to make a significant new investment in student aid. An infusion of support for financial aid is welcome news, and would be most effective if directed to the proven state Tuition Assistance Program known as TAP. New York families know and trust TAP to help them meet their college expenses, and investing in expanding the amount of funds for each student and extending the program’s eligibility so more students can receive support would be a timely, cost-effective and wise move. Currently at **Hilbert College, one in two families rely on TAP** to finance their education.

**Investing in TAP for all students holds great promise. By increasing the maximum TAP award to $6,500 and expanding the income eligibility to $125,000, you would enable more students to attend SUNY or CUNY tuition-free, while also maintaining your commitment to the hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers for whom private colleges offer the best opportunity for success and economic mobility.**

Students, taxpayers and our community's economic base all win when students are given financial aid from the state and are able to use it at the college, whether public or private, that best meets their academic, social, career and financial needs.

I know you appreciate the importance of **Hilbert College** to the Buffalo Niagara economy. We are responsible for more than **$43.1 million** **annually** in total economic impact. Before signing onto the Executive Budget proposal I urge you to learn the facts and to consider the impact that "free" tuition at SUNY and CUNY would have on student choice, the communities in which we are located, and our taxpayers.

The Independent Sector and **Hilbert College** will continue our core mission: providing access, diversity and **choice for all New Yorkers.**

Sincerely,

Hilbert College Student