



# NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign **PRESS RELEASE**

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## **AS ALBANY NEGOTIATES A STATE BUDGET, NYC COLLEGE STUDENTS CALL FOR FREE AND REDUCED PRICE TRANSIT FARES FOR EDUCATION ACCESS**

***During Budget Negotiations NYC Students Side with Senate and Assembly and Call for More State Funding to Avert the Hike***

(New York, NY) – Last week, as Governor Hochul and lawmakers negotiated the budget, college students were at the state Capitol delivering over 7300 signatures endorsing the *Student Bus Rider Platform*. The *Platform* calls for City and State legislative leaders to support free Metrocards or Omny cards for all CUNY students, fare discounts and free transfers for MetroNorth and LIRR for college students, and the expansion of Fair Fares to include all current CUNY students and other New Yorkers at 200% of the federal poverty level. For New York City’s college students, affording a Metrocard swipe or Omny tap can be the difference between earning a degree or dropping out altogether and the need to address transit affordability to support educational attainment could not be more pressing.

Last year, Mayor Adams called Fair Fares, the City’s half-priced MetroCard program, “transformative,” and it truly has been, proving to be a huge success since its inception in 2019. Yet, there are hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers who are eligible for the program but are not enrolled due to strict income requirements. Financial woes and transportation affordability get even worse for New York City college students, where costs extend beyond the classroom, too often forcing students to choose between paying their fare and getting their education. While individuals with a college degree continue to have better career opportunities and higher wages than those with less education, a recent survey by the Center for an Urban Future found that affording a Metrocard was the biggest financial barrier cited by students when discussing college costs and barriers to affording their education.

“Honestly free or reduced cost transportation would be one less thing to worry about. With paying for school and bills, it would make life a little easier in general,” said **Angel Ybiles, Borough of Manhattan Community College student and NYPIRG member.**

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“I am an international student at BMCC so I pay a lot of money for school. During a previous semester, I had four classes. Four days a week coming back and forth is about 20 dollars a week. And I think that is too much. I think they should make it more affordable for people who need help, so that they can get to class,” said **Sadia, Borough of Manhattan Community College student and NYPIRG member.**

“Acknowledging the importance of mass transit to education equity, New York City’s K-12 students receive free Metrocards, yet that resource doesn’t exist for higher education. And with housing and food cost increases outpacing wage growth in the City, the need to address transit affordability to support educational attainment could not be more pressing,” said **Natasha Elder, New York City Director of Equity and Resiliency Projects with NYPIRG.**

The *Student Bus Rider Platform* calls on Legislators on the City and State level to make critical investments in transportation affordability:

**Support Fare Equity: Expand Fair Fares:** Fair Fares is a program that provides a 50 percent discount on subway and eligible bus fares for New York City residents living at or below the federal poverty level. Nearly half of CUNY undergraduates come from families whose annual income is less than \$20,000. Expanding the Fair Fares program eligibility from 100% to 200% of the federal poverty level would greatly benefit low-income students.

The *Student Bus Rider Platform* also highlights actions the MTA should take to speed up buses and support fare equity. State and City Legislators should urge the MTA to:

**Support Fare Equity: Permanent OMNY Fare-Capping:** The OMNY fare-discount pilot launched in March is a major step forward for riders who pay-per-ride. This is an equity issue: the benefits of an unlimited fare-payment (such as weekly MetroCards) should be available to everyone, regardless of the ability to pay upfront. This program should be made permanent and students in every borough would feel the benefit of those free rides after 12 OMNY payments.