

## Push for college help for foster care youth

By Yancey Roy

### Spin Cycle

News, views and commentary on Long Island, state and national politics.

ALBANY - It's one of the smaller items in the state budget fight, but advocates say a little money could greatly enhance the chances of foster-care kids reaching college.

A coalition, dubbed Fostering Youth Success Alliance and featuring former New York Chief Judge Judith Kaye, has asked state lawmakers for \$3 million to fund tutoring, advisers, college-transition support and application help for students in foster care. The group said 22 other states provide such help.

Just one in five foster-care students ever attend college – compared to three in five of other New York state high-school graduates, the group said. About 4,000 children in the state's foster-care system currently are college age; 111 on Long Island.

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*Dr. David Hegarty,  
Hope for Youth, Amityville*

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Ratep, a Long Island resident who asked to use his first name only, said Hope for Youth, one of the Foster Youth Success partners, helped steer him to Suffolk Community College after high school.

After moving through five schools and three foster homes during his high school years, Ratep said “I wasn't really focused on it,” meaning college, until hooking up with the program.

“They sat me down when I graduated high school,” Ratep, 19, said. “They told me ‘This is what college does for you.’ ... That motivated me to want to go to college.”

The program tries to guide foster students through the application and financial aid process and find summer placements, among other things.

“Ratep's experience is not unusual,” said David Hegarty, executive director of Hope for Youth. “We see so too many kids who get frustrated with the process. The system is not user friendly for kids in foster care.”

The Democrat-led state Assembly has called for \$1.5 million for a “Foster Youth College Success” initiative in its state budget proposal. Neither the Republican-led Senate nor Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo have included similar funding, advocates said. The three sides are trying to settle a \$142 billion budget before April 1, the beginning of New York's fiscal year.