

Immediate Release

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Higher Education Cuts Hurt West Virginia's Future

(Charleston, WV) This West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy Issue Brief, *State Budget Cuts Hit Higher Education Hard*, released today, details the impact of multiple years of budget cuts to the state's public higher education institutions.

Falling public support for the state's two- and four-year universities and colleges has led to tuition rising, making the reality of higher education much less attainable for many of West Virginia's families. Simultaneously, state and federal financial assistance programs for higher education have also decreased in value, leading to increased debt among graduates of West Virginia's higher education institutions.

"Now more than ever West Virginia needs to invest in its higher education institutions," Sean O'Leary, report author and WVCBP Senior Policy Analyst said. "Investing in higher education to keep tuition affordable and quality education at public colleges and universities would help West Virginia develop the skilled and diverse workforce it will need to grow its economy."

The report also shows West Virginia's higher education institutions are economic drivers themselves. West Virginia's 21 public higher education institutions contributed approximately \$2.7 billion to the state's economy in 2014, and supported 22,000 jobs.

Key Findings

- Average tuition at West Virginia's public colleges and universities has increased by \$4,200 since 2002, a 147 percent increase, and far outpacing inflation.
- Tuition increases, in large part, have been fueled by falling public support for higher education. Since 2008, state spending in higher education has declined by \$130 million, adjusting for inflation.
- As tuitions have increased, so has student debt. The average debt of a college graduate in West Virginia has increased by 70 percent since 2005. West Virginia also has the second highest student loan default rate in the country.
- Tuition increases have eroded the value of the state's financial aid programs. The share of tuition covered by the PROMISE scholarship has fallen from 100 percent to 70 percent.
- Investments in higher education provide significant economic benefits. Improving the levels of educational attainment in West Virginia's workforce will help ensure the state's economic future.