

# Student Assembly

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## Resolution 54: Expanding Free and Subsidized Student Parking at Cornell University

**Abstract:** This resolution proposes that Cornell University expand access to free and subsidized parking for students across campus. The current parking permit system imposes high costs that disproportionately affect low-income, commuter, and off-campus students, many of whom depend on vehicles to access education, employment, caregiving responsibilities, and essential services. By reducing or waiving parking fees for eligible students, Cornell can remove structural transportation barriers and promote equity and campus accessibility.

**Sponsored by:** David Duan '28, Davian Gekman '27, Sara Almosawi '25

**Type of Action:** Recommendation

**Originally Presented:** 04/23/2025

**Current Status:** Adopted by the Assembly, 19-4-0, 05/01/2025

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### Context & Problem Statement

**Whereas,** Cornell University currently charges between \$600 and \$1,200 annually for most student parking permits, with limited availability even at that price, creating a significant cost burden for students with financial need;

**Whereas,** students who live off-campus or commute from surrounding areas often have no viable alternative transportation, especially those working night shifts, attending clinical placements, or residing in housing not served by TCAT's main lines;

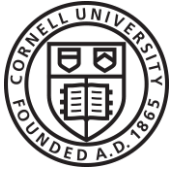
**Whereas,** over 55% of undergraduates students live off campus (based on Cornell's 2023 Factbook), and many of these students rely on personal vehicles for:

- Groceries and essential errands (especially in food deserts around Ithaca)
- Medical appointments off campus
- Jobs and internships, particularly at Cayuga Medical, Cornell Tech, and rural sites

**Whereas,** nontraditional undergraduates, student parents, and disabled students are often disproportionately impacted by the high cost and limited flexibility of Cornell's parking system;

### Comparative Institutional Models

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**Whereas**, several peer institutions offer free or significantly reduced-cost parking options for eligible student groups:

- University of Michigan: Offers tiered parking rates and free park-and-ride permits for low-income students and graduate assistants.
- UCLA: Implements “Bruin ePermit Waivers” for students with financial need or hardship due to medical and caregiving responsibilities.
- University of Florida: Includes subsidized parking in student activity fees and offers night parking permits at no cost.
- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: Offers transportation hardship waivers for parking based on financial documentation.

**Whereas**, Cornell currently offers no formalized waiver process for parking costs, and the hardship accommodations for transportation are limited in transparency and reach;

## **Financial, Equity, and Sustainability Benefits**

**Whereas**, implementing subsidized or free parking for eligible students would:

- Reduce Financial Barriers: For students paying \$700+ annually on parking alone, this reform could result in up to \$3,000 saved over four years, enabling students to better afford tuition, housing, and food.
- Enhance Academic Participation: Students with clinical rotations, off-campus internships, or night classes would be able to access campus consistently and safely.
- Support Mental and Physical Health: Students would avoid overreliance on limited transit systems and have better access to off-campus healthcare and support services.
- Advance Equity: Parking subsidies would particularly benefit:
  - First-generation and Pell Grant students
  - Students with disabilities without ADA parking permits
  - Students juggling jobs, research, and teaching

**Whereas**, the Disability Advocates Union has advocated eliminating fees on accessibility permits, which currently cost \$333.16 annually and impose an unjust burden on students with disabilities who rely on personal vehicles;

**Whereas**, the parking waiver program will be implemented with specific consideration for students holding accessibility permits, to ensure equitable access to financial support;

**Whereas**, subsidized parking reforms must address broader accessibility and affordability barriers, especially for disabled students, in alignment with universal design principles and peer institution models;



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**Whereas**, the environmental goals of reducing vehicle use can still be met by limiting waivers to need-based applicants, encouraging carpool permit programs, and pairing implementation with increased EV charging capacity and shuttle incentives;

**Whereas**, the Student Assembly's Students Helping Students (SHS) Fund—administered by the Office of Financial Aid and supported by the First-Generation and Low-Income (FGLI) Office offers eligible students up to \$500 per semester to cover emergency expenses not included in the standard cost of attendance;

**Whereas**, the SHS Fund already operates under established criteria and a review process through the Financial Aid Review Committee (FARC), minimizing the need for the Student Assembly or Cornell Transportation Services to create a new eligibility infrastructure;

**Whereas**, integrating the proposed parking waiver program into the existing SHS system would reduce administrative complexity, avoid duplicative review mechanisms, and ensure that support is distributed through a familiar and trusted process;

## **Implementation & Feasibility**

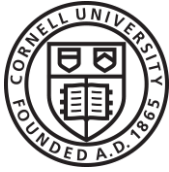
Whereas, Cornell can adopt a multi-phase rollout strategy:

1. **Phase 1 (Pilot Year - 2025–2026):** Provide free or 90% subsidized parking permits (including accessibility permits) to up to 200 students demonstrating financial or transportation hardship through FAFSA documentation or health referrals
2. **Phase 2 (Evaluation Year - 2026–2027):** Conduct a satisfaction and transportation impact study; expand program to more undergraduate students and DACA recipients.
3. **Phase 3 (Sustained Integration):** Make need-based parking waivers a permanent component of Cornell's transportation equity plan.

**Whereas**, the cost of subsidizing 200 student permits at an average of \$800 would total \$160,000, which could be partially offset through:

- Unused permit inventory
- Internal reallocation from commuter program surpluses
- A sustainability grant application through the Campus Sustainability Office
- Student Assembly funding

## **Resolution Statements**



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**Be it therefore resolved,** that Cornell University establish a free and subsidized student parking waiver program beginning Fall 2025, prioritizing financial need and demonstrated hardship;

**Be it further resolved,** that the Student Assembly advocate for the full inclusion of students with disabilities in Cornell's transportation policies by working toward the elimination of accessibility permit fees, ensuring their unique needs are prioritized in the waiver program, and consulting with groups like the Disability Advocates Union to inform long-term, equity-driven solutions;

**Be it further resolved,** that Cornell Transportation Services, the Office of Financial Aid, and the Student Assembly work together to determine application criteria, waiver amounts, and annual allotments for eligible students;

**Be it further resolved,** that the Student Assembly work with the Office of Financial Aid and the FGLI Office to integrate the parking waiver program into the existing Students Helping Students (SHS) Fund infrastructure, using its established eligibility criteria and distribution process to administer parking subsidies;

**Be it further resolved,** that this program include flexible eligibility for:

- Students with Pell Grant or Federal Work-Study status
- Students with ADA-documented or temporary mobility impairments
- Students with off-campus health care, internship, or childcare responsibilities
- DACA and international students facing public transportation barriers

**Be it further resolved,** that Cornell Transportation Services provide an online application with a guaranteed response within 14 business days;

**Be it further resolved,** the Student Assembly advocate for long-term integration of waiver program into the Student & Campus Life budget;

**Be it finally resolved,** that the Student Assembly, through the Pulse Committee or any other committee at the discretion of the President of the Student Assembly, conduct semesterly reviews of the waiver program in partnership with Transportation Services, collecting usage data, participant feedback, and unmet need statistics, to ensure equitable expansion and sustainability.

Respectfully Submitted,



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