

**TESTIMONY OF DR. JAMES DAVIS, PRESIDENT
PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY**

New York City Council's Preliminary Budget Hearing - Higher Education

March 22, 2022

Good afternoon, I am James Davis, President of the Professional Staff Congress (PSC). We represent 30,000 faculty and staff at the City University of New York. Thank you Chairman Dinowitz and members of the Committee on Higher Education for your recent passage of the council resolution in support of the New York State Legislature's New Deal for CUNY legislation. As you know, support for higher education in Albany is at historic levels this year. After years of disinvestment, and buoyed by Governor Hochul's Executive Budget and the activism of PSC members, CUNY students, and community allies, legislators in Albany have proposed \$500 million for CUNY above last year's budget. Rest assured, the PSC will fight for every penny until the budget is passed and we are honored to have you beside us.

We are here because New York City also has an obligation to invest in CUNY - an investment in students, workers, and communities that will lift up New York in its continued recovery from the pandemic. Last year, Comptroller Scott Stringer's office [released a report](#) finding that in 2019, CUNY graduates paid \$4.6 billion in state taxes and earned \$28.6 billion more than they would have without a postsecondary degree. Moreover, in 2017, a team of economists at Stanford found that "CUNY propels almost six times as many low-income students into the middle class and beyond as all eight Ivy League campuses, plus Duke, M.I.T., Stanford and Chicago, combined."

CUNY must be excluded from the Mayor's PEG to bring back faculty

I am here to urge you to support our members' work - especially at the community colleges, which rely on the City for substantial operating funds. We are thankful the Mayor did not baseline most of last year's cut to CUNY general operating funds. But we are deeply concerned about the 3% PEG to city services. That would seriously impede CUNY's ability to replenish the full-time faculty lost to attrition or retirement during the pandemic. This year's PEG cut of \$8.5 million would then expand over three years to \$14.6 million and is baselined. According to the Mayor's Preliminary Budget, CUNY would be able to fill only 18 of the 146 full-time faculty positions lost since the pandemic began, leaving 128 or 88% unfilled to satisfy the PEG.

In fact, in the early months of the pandemic, CUNY laid off 2,900 adjuncts and brought back approximately 1,000 of them. This leaves tremendous pressure on those who remain; they often face larger classes and it is difficult for students to register for the classes they need to meet degree requirements. Our members should not have lost their jobs during the pandemic, when so many of them needed the income and the access to health insurance that some receive through CUNY employment. Investing in the community colleges means returning faculty to the classroom and reducing class size.

Our community colleges were already struggling before the pandemic. While federal stimulus funds helped, they have not made CUNY whole and are not expected to. I could tell you many stories. Libraries cannot afford to buy books or subscribe to databases that support research for faculty and students. Colleges are unable to properly staff computer labs and other academic support facilities. These are not extras, they are fundamental services that go to the core functions of a university. CUNY was already deficient of full-time faculty before the pandemic; [a report by the University Faculty Senate last fall](#) showed that colleges that serve high proportions of students of color are less likely than colleges with whiter student bodies to have access to full-time faculty, deepening racial inequality. Simply stated, CUNY must be exempt from the mayor's PEG.

And while some campuses have lower enrollment, fewer students don't equate savings. Staff is needed to welcome students, help them onboard into the CUNY system and be a guide for them to access a quality experience through their academic career. More faculty will not only teach students but faculty understand how to develop new curriculum and ensure programs meet the needs of the future of our city's economy. CUNY can and should be the centerpiece of the city's revitalization and strong academic and wrap-around programs will help make that happen.

Make Programmatic Investments in CUNY

1. Move toward ASAP for All with an increased investment of \$20 million

ASAP provides comprehensive student support and advising (ideally at a ratio of 150 students to 1 advisor), career services, tuition assistance, free MetroCards, and free textbooks. It has been widely touted and serves as a model that community colleges seek to emulate across the country.

ASAP's three-year graduation rate is more than double that of non-ASAP associate degree students at CUNY's community colleges; a CUNY analysis found that the program narrows existing graduation gaps for Black and Hispanic males. A move toward ASAP for All would provide many more students with access to advising and the wrap-around support they need to graduate. The city should baseline this increase in funding and dramatically expand this program..

2. Increase the City's lump sum funding for CUNY's Senior Colleges from \$53M to \$60M to account for inflation.

City funding for Senior Colleges has not increased since 2019. The money could fund programmatic expenses for important services such as mental health and academic advisors.

3. Council funded initiatives will help reach this goal. Please support our Council-funded priorities in this budget cycle by including:

- a. \$10 million for Mental Health Counselors: CUNY now averages one mental health counselor for every 2,700 students. Funding would help bring this ratio closer to 1:1,000 as per the International Accreditation of Counseling Services. Services are especially needed to support students since the pandemic.
- b. \$2.5 million for Remediation: Properly supported remediation programs help to increase graduation rates. CUNY Start program provides the least prepared students with dedicated advising and small class sizes, but some instructors are part-time hourly employees, creating inequity and insecurity. Funding for full-time hires (and to expand the program overall) is needed to ensure student success. For \$500,000, the CLIP program, which provides intensive English-language instruction, could be expanded to better serve the city. This program helps generate new enrollment and serves the most vulnerable, but at BMCC, for example, a CLIP program had a waitlist of 125 due to low capacity.
- c. \$4 million for Investment in Childcare: Students cannot come back to campus without viable childcare options. Nationally, one in four college students are parents with dependent children, and over 40 percent of those are single mothers.¹ The State FY23 budget proposes expanding childcare to the eight CUNY campuses without centers. However, existing centers need more funding, especially for younger children who are more expensive to care for.

Earlier this month students and PSC members took to Twitter with the hashtag #CrumblingCUNY. The images are breathtaking. CUNY facilities are badly in need of repairs and upgrades to become safe and welcoming spaces to learn once again.

Your support and advocacy with the Mayor for CUNY students and our members is not only the morally right thing to do, it will help our communities thrive because CUNY works to address life-defining racial disparities in college attainment and is an economic engine for the city. CUNY lifts up the lives of its students, approximately 80% of whom are people of color and 35% are foreign-born; half come from households with incomes below \$30,000. CUNY's mission along with its faculty and staff uplift those most in need.

Thank you.

¹ Institute for Women's Policy Research
<https://iwpr.org/iwpr-issues/student-parent-success-initiative/4-8-million-college-students-a-re-raising-children/>