

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

**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL FISCAL YEAR 2023 EXECUTIVE BUDGET HEARINGS**

**May 25, 2022**

Good morning, 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 Brannan and members of the Finance Committee for the opportunity to testify today and for your passage of the Council resolution in support of the New Deal for CUNY state legislation in March. As you know, support for higher education in Albany reached historic levels this year with \$220 million in additional funding. This year the value of public higher education resonated because PSC members came together with CUNY students and community allies to amplify our message to Governor Hochul and legislators in Albany.

CUNY needs this level of support from the New York City budget too. We are counting on you to build off the work done in Albany and deliver for our members and students. We are asking for an additional \$62.6 million above last year's City budget. An investment in students, workers, and communities will uplift 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 is a sound fiscal investment and an unrivaled vehicle for economic mobility and racial equity.

**CUNY must be excluded from the Mayor's Program to Eliminate the Gap cuts**

The PSC is opposed to the Mayor's insistence on leaving 128 faculty positions vacant in order to achieve a \$14.6 million PEG reduction. Governor Hochul and the State Legislature just invested in new faculty for the first time in recent memory, adding 540 new full-time faculty lines in its April budget. The Mayor's cut would seriously impede CUNY's ability to replenish the full-time faculty lost to attrition or retirement. 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.

Our community colleges were already struggling before the pandemic. Federal stimulus funds helped, but 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 and science labs and other academic support facilities. These are not extras, they are fundamental services that go to the core functions of a university. CUNY already lacked 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 inequity. If CUNY is deprived of the City funding to fill those 128 faculty lines, the racialized disparity in access to full-time faculty will increase. Simply stated, CUNY must be exempt from the mayor's PEG.

The Mayor has made two proposals that would impact CUNY: \$4.8 million for the CUNY Inclusive Economy Initiative, an investment in connecting students to growing industries and improving their employment opportunities and; \$2 million in a partnership with the Mayor's office of Media and Entertainment to develop a degree program in Game Design. While we appreciate targeted programs at the forefront of emerging fields, these programs should not advance until and unless our existing programs are fully funded and properly staffed.

CUNY laid off nearly 2,000 adjunct faculty during the pandemic, along with hundreds of adjunct lab technicians. The pressure that creates on those who remain is immense; they often face larger classes and it is difficult for students to find the classes they need to meet degree requirements. Investing in our community colleges means returning faculty and staff to classrooms and labs and reducing class size.

### **CUNY Reconnect; Complements PSC Budget Priorities**

Speaker Adams has proposed a \$23 million "CUNY Reconnect Initiative," a welcome proposal that complements our union's priorities. To bring back students who have obtained college credits but not completed a degree, staff are needed to support their return and transition, to guide them through their academic experience to graduation. They need access to full-time faculty, not only in gateway classes but also as they advance through innovative curricula that meet the needs of the future workforce. CUNY can be the centerpiece of the city's revitalization and strong academic programs and wrap-around supports will help make it 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 costs of 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 an additional:
  - 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 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.
  - d. *\$33.5 million to support CUNY's capital request:* This spring 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 - especially to relieve CUNY of his 3% cut - is not only the right thing to do, it will also help our communities thrive, because CUNY works to address life-defining racial disparities in college attainment and

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<sup>1</sup> Institute for Women's Policy Research

<https://iwpr.org/iwpr-issues/student-parent-success-initiative/4-8-million-college-students-a-re-raising-children/>

is an economic engine for the city. We know that CUNY helps to transform the lives of our students, approximately 80% of whom are people of color and 35% foreign-born; half come from households with annual incomes below \$30,000. The faculty and staff serve CUNY's mission to uplift those most in need. Increasing funding for the City University of New York will promote racial equality, boost our economy, and ensure safer communities through higher education and skills development.

Thank you.