

**TESTIMONY OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES HEARING, NOVEMBER 21, 2011**

**Calendar Item 3.E**

*Delivered by Arthurine DeSola, Secretary*

Thank you, Chancellor Goldstein and members of the Board of Trustees, for the opportunity to address Calendar Item 3.E, the University's revised tuition and financial aid schedule. I will be speaking on behalf of the 25,000 staff and faculty represented by the Professional Staff Congress.

CUNY needs investment, and we share the concern that the University needs stable funding. Faculty and staff struggle daily to make up for the damage wrought by years of underfunding even as enrollments continue to grow. Administrative offices are seriously under-staffed. Academic departments are operating on shoestring budgets and are short of necessary supplies. Libraries and language labs have been forced to limit their hours. Students wait in long lines for basic services and attention, and classes students need for graduation are sometimes unavailable.

However, we disagree that tuition alone can or should make up for the cuts in public funds. Charging undergraduate senior and community students \$300 more per year this year and for the next four years will create a hardship for many. The tuition increase is a tax increase in disguise. At the community colleges, tuition this year is already \$3,600, which makes CUNY community colleges among the most expensive in the country. The national average tuition for community colleges is \$2,960.

At CUNY, we educate a student body that is disproportionately low-income and immigrant, and largely Black, Hispanic, and Asian. Fifty-four percent come from families with household income less than \$30,000. Many simply cannot afford a \$300 tuition hike per year even when financial aid is taken into account.

Increases to the federal Pell Grant programs in recent years have made a big difference for many of our students; the University estimates that half of all CUNY undergraduates will receive tuition assistance from Pell or the state TAP program. Forty percent will have their tuition fully covered. But as tuition rises, less Pell Grant money will be left over to cover students' other expenses, such as books, fees, transportation expenses and living costs. The federal Pell Grant program is a perennial target of Congressional budget hawks, and low-income students lost access to summertime Pell grants in the last federal budget. If this resolution is adopted, CUNY undergraduate tuition will increase by \$1200 over the next four years; it is anyone's guess whether Pell Grant levels will be able to keep up.

Changes to State education law this year will help some low-income students by requiring that CUNY discount their tuition for the amount which exceeds the maximum Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) grant. But this will do nothing to help the thousands of students who are ineligible for TAP. Part-time students and undocumented immigrant students who qualify for in-state tuition fall through the cracks in the TAP program, as do many working-poor adults and others. They will be faced with the full "sticker price" of increases between 6 and 8% more per year over the course of the next five years.

Finally, we strongly urge you to reconsider the sharp increases in tuition for CUNY's professional and graduate programs. Graduate student TAP was eliminated entirely last year and other sources of support have become harder to get in this economy. Combined with the high cost of living in New York City, many qualified students—especially low-income minority, first-

generation and immigrant students – will be unable to continue their studies. For many, CUNY represents the only affordable way to achieve a graduate or professional degree. Our city will be poorer if they are unable to complete their advanced degrees.

As the faculty and staff of CUNY, we stand in solidarity with the students who have called on the University to pursue a better budget strategy than endlessly increasing tuition. The right strategy is public investment. Higher education is not a private privilege—it is a right, and a public good.