

**Testimony of Mary Refling, Assistant Professor
Before the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York**

**Concerning Funding for Adjunct Health Insurance
In the CUNY Budget Request (Calendar Item 3.A.)**

21 November, 2011

Please consider my case and how it represents 1,800 people like me who teach at CUNY. And please do everything you can to make sure that funding for adjunct health insurance is included in the final state budget for CUNY.

Given the impossible job market in the humanities, after finishing my Ph.D. in Italian literature at Columbia University in 1997, I thought myself very lucky when I landed a full-time job as a lecturer at a private university in the Bronx. Ten years later, however, my contract was terminated, in part, because the faculty senate at the school where I was teaching considered the proliferation of full-time non-tenure track lines at our school to be a threat to the tenure system.

Within six months I managed to find work as an adjunct at CUNY/Staten Island—a part-time teaching gig that involved a five hour daily commute from my home in Chappaqua. I chose to teach at CUNY rather than at a private college in Westchester County, which also offered me work as an adjunct, in part because CUNY offered health benefits to its adjuncts. Despite the commute my husband supported my decision, as he shares my belief in the value and importance of higher education, especially for the population that CUNY serves.

As soon as I was eligible, we enrolled our family in PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund health insurance. My husband's company offers health care coverage to its employees, but in the eternal search for lower premiums, it was constantly changing health care providers, and each successive health care provider offered less coverage with no guarantee that our family doctors would be in the network. We preferred to pay \$12,000 per year for family coverage through CUNY in order to maintain some stability in our family's medical care. If CUNY allows this benefit to end, my husband will enroll our family in his company's health care, but the coverage will be inferior to what we had through CUNY, and at roughly the same price.

Luckily, after two years at CSI/CUNY I found work a bit closer to home, at Bronx Community College, and this year things have lightened up a bit for us financially, as I have been appointed to a full-time substitute position in my department. The termination of health care benefits for CUNY adjuncts will involve a very painful decision when my substitute appointment ends, however. Rather than resume teaching as an adjunct, but this time without health care benefits, I may very well decide to abandon my academic career. I can't continue to expect my husband to shoulder the burden of our family's finances like this. Given the falling institutional support for degree programs in modern languages, and the likelihood that the Pathways initiative will reduce CUNY's need for adjunct language instructors, it is starting to feel morally irresponsible to pursue an academic career in the humanities. With all my heart I believe in CUNY and its mission, but there is a limit to the sacrifices that one can ask of one's husband and children.