

**Testimony of Matthew Mercier, Adjunct Lecturer
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

As an adjunct professor, I recognize the major step that the City University of New York (CUNY) has taken by including funds for adjunct health insurance in the state budget request. I thank you for that first step. However, I realize the challenges you face in negotiations with the State, so please know that I am willing to work with you to reach a solution, as the continuing availability of health insurance is vital to my role as a teacher and a citizen of New York.

I have been working at CUNY as an adjunct for five years. I began as a student, acquiring a Fiction MFA in the Graduate Writing program. After graduation I was hired to teach, although I was shocked at how little the job paid and how few the benefits were. I spent many hours prepping for my classes and many hours correcting papers well beyond the classroom hours, which, as you may know, is the sole period we are compensated for. I always give extra time for students if they need it, and I am happy to do so. I see it as a basic responsibility of a university employee; however I do not consider myself a saint, and each time I go above and beyond the allotted payroll hours, I think of how nice it would be to have this work recognized. But it's not.

CUNY should have the integrity to treat its part-time workers better than this. I have the professional skills to teach full-time, and I would love to have the security of a multiple-year contract, but it's my understanding that CUNY does not have the funds to hire more full-time professors. It relies on adjuncts as a core part of the workforce. This is an unfortunate imbalance, but the health care coverage has always been a saving grace. It should be noted that since I work part time, the health insurance is part time. It is not full coverage, but it's something, and I am grateful for it.

My wife and I are low income, and I work a second job on the weekends to make ends meet. We do not have the resources to handle a sudden illness. I have remained healthy for the most part, but it was brought home to me, a few years ago, how important it is to have the insurance in case of an emergency. In 2009 my mother died suddenly and terribly, and I began seeing a counselor for my mental health. Together we have continued to work on a number of issues around my mother's death, but if adjunct insurance is cut next summer, I will not be able to afford my sessions with him. In addition, I have recently been experiencing lower back pain for which I will soon be receiving treatment. None of this will be possible without the HIP plan that I am currently on.

I implore you to consider not just my story, but 1,800 people like me, whose lives will be drastically affected.