



ADJUNCTS A win on '3-years'

The union
wins 3-year
appointments
for
members.

PAGE 5



Dave Sanders

REOPENING 2021

FIGHTING FOR SAFETY

The union marched on campuses throughout the city, led safety walk-throughs and met members at their worksites. The PSC has won a lot in terms of a safe reopening, but there is more work ahead.

PAGES 3, 6-7

OBITUARY

Remembering Aronowitz

Stanley Aronowitz was an inspirational teacher and political theorist of the left. He was also a major figure in the founding of the modern PSC.

PAGE 2

POLITICS

Winning a fair budget

With Andrew Cuomo out of Albany, the PSC sees a chance to push for more state funding for CUNY. PSC activists prepare for the fight ahead.

PAGE 4

MEDICARE

Changes to retiree health

There have been some big changes to health-care plans for NYC municipal retirees. The PSC has done its best to ensure retired members are fully covered.

PAGES 10-11



MENTAL HEALTH

Call for more services

PSC members and students met with city councilmembers about the ongoing shortages of mental health-care services on CUNY campuses.

PAGE 12

Remembering Aronowitz, a PSC activist

By CLARION STAFF

Stanley Aronowitz – distinguished professor of sociology and urban education at the Graduate Center who was a founding force of the new PSC leadership that came into power in 2000 – died at the age of 88 in August. PSC members reflect on his legacy.

Making today's union

By NANCY ROMER

After years of a dormant union leadership, Stanley, along with about 75 other progressive activists across CUNY, helped define a social justice union with an expansive view of what the labor movement in general and our own local union could accomplish. After the devastating Reagan-era cuts to the city and state's public services including CUNY, in the 1990s, PSC members were ready for change.

In the several years of run-up to the 2000 PSC election, Stanley served on a range of campaign steering committees, and he served as one of the New Caucus coordinators. There, and then on the Executive Council to which we got elected, Stanley was a constant voice for deep member participation and education, and solidarity with students, the broader labor movement and the community. Stanley was an intellectual, no doubt, with a stunning grasp of so many ideas and social movements. But he was a very practical strategist with a

Building the modern PSC



Courtesy of Stanley Aronowitz's family

Stanley Aronowitz inspired students and fellow unionists.

clear-eyed analysis of the power of capital to limit the power of the working class. He fought against capitalism through working-class organization, racial, class and gender unity, and brilliant teaching and writing. I want to focus on the humanity and love that Stanley shared with others.

A MOVEMENT LEADER

One incident that struck me as quintessential Stanley, evidence of his complete comfort with his role as an intellectual and movement leader, took place at the Graduate Center during one of our adjunct recruitment drives. Prior to the leadership change in 2000, the PSC was quite uninterested in having adjuncts be members despite the fact that they were in our bargaining unit. As part of that adjunct membership drive, adjuncts organized a musical night featuring grad student bands.

Stanley was one of the emcees and spontaneously took over the stage, alone, with a hand-held mic and sang a capella several labor songs – songs he cherished from his youth in a lefty family. Stanley had a beautiful voice; but moreover, he was bursting with joy to see so many people, many of whom were his students, engaged in political struggle through culture. Culture, education and politics were the bread of life for Stanley, and it was a joy to witness his total delight in what group struggle could produce!

We held untold numbers of in-person meetings, first at various CUNY campuses, and once we took office, at the union. Stanley would frequently leave by 7:30 pm so he could go home and cook dinner for his beloved daughter Nona and wife Ellen. I have a wonderful memory of him working at his cubbyhole of a home office where he wrote several books and many articles. Stanley didn't need anything fancy; he was perfectly satisfied to work wherever he could under whatever circumstances. But in that small Greenwich Village apartment, Stanley's daily joy was so evident. He adored his family and was crushed when Ellen died of cancer, much too young.

GOVERNOR'S RACE

Stanley was the Green Party candidate for New York governor in 2002 and used his campaign to educate New Yorkers on the importance of working-class power and taxing the rich. His campaign slogan was "Tax and Spend," which attempted to upend the hegemony of neoliberalism that seemed completely ubiquitous at that time. Stanley campaigned across the state in delight, educating large and small groups of people on the class struggle.

Stanley leaves a legacy of left-wing intellectual thought, that is always connected to action. To Stanley, ideas without action were sterile, and Stanley was never sterile. He was on the front lines as a brilliant and inspiring teacher, a great pub-

lic intellectual, a union and movement activist, a devoted family man and a friend. We will miss Stanley Aronowitz.

Nancy Romer is professor emerita of psychology at Brooklyn College.

Labor's intellectual

By PENNY LEWIS

In the best sense, Stanley never let anyone off the hook. Whether he wrote about the limits of labor law or the union contract; or insisted his students read Marx by starting with Spinoza, Hume, Kant and Hegel; or spoke forcefully about the expansive possibility of our radical imagination – at all moments. Stanley asked us to think hard and critically about the conditions we find ourselves in. He challenged us to think, and then act, in a transformative manner. He was a radical in the precise sense of radicalism, getting to the root of things; he performed, as few others did, the Marx's charge of a "ruthless criticism of all that exists."

For close to six decades, Stanley shared trenchant critiques and an inspiring vision with generations of labor activists, leaders, students and scholars. In works including *False Promises, From the Ashes of the Old, How Class Works, The Death and Life of American Labor*, and many more, Stanley wrote about labor's shortcomings, advances, pitfalls and potential. I've assigned his work at the School of Labor and Urban Studies, a program Stanley helped found and lead, and it resonates deeply with my students, nearly all of whom are adult union members or staffers. In classes where I don't assign him, he is quoted to me. In classes where I do, few authors create such heated debate and discussion.

CLARION CALL

Stanley wrote deeply, richly, about American labor, bringing rigorous historical and theoretical insight into a world my students inhabit every day. His work was a clarion call that labor education must be central to our labor movements.

As a unionist, he was never shy about looking inward. He is well-known for his critique of trade union bureaucracies, of post-New Deal labor relations, and his embrace of non-reformist reforms, such as shorter hours and guaranteed income. Stanley always pushed for

intersectional analyses of gender, race, and sexuality in our work as labor activists and scholars. I sat on committees where he challenged us to understand how housing, cultural production, educational reform and transportation are labor issues that demand being included in a labor studies curricula. Stanley rejected the separation of labor from community, of a worker from their life as lived in all of its 360 degrees.

His provocations and critique further solicit from all of us – practitioners and scholars, leaders and rank-and-file – an honest grappling with the shortcomings as well as strengths of our efforts. For many of us in the labor movement, loyalty is a core value, and for good reason. Stanley encouraged labor activists and students to embrace solidarity, but not shy away from hard questions with and among one another.

AGAINST CONDESCENSION

And this brings me to the next level as to why Stanley's work is critical to our movement and finds such ongoing purchase. Early on in the *Death and Life of American Labor*, Stanley writes that the failure of today's labor movement to organize and fight does not "reflect a lack of resources, but, a lack of faith." Stanley's faith in his students and readers is evident in every page and in every action. He never spoke down to people; Stanley believed everyone can do the work.

Encountering his writing, students usually know that Stanley is "one of us," that he wrote from within the movement, with our best interests in mind. They don't always agree with him, but they take him seriously, and their interaction with his ideas changes their own. It is Stanley's core respect for his fellow workers and his commitment to our collective cause that compels these readers to take up his work with such gusto.

My students have spent their adult lives as union workers, and they join a labor studies program out of a commitment to making the labor movement and its sister movements stronger, more powerful and more effective. Stanley's own radical imagination encourages us to take up this fight more thoughtfully and rigorously, while continuing to have faith that we can win. We can repair and honor such loss in part through our ongoing collective efforts in education and struggle.

Stanley Aronowitz, rest in power.

Penny Lewis is PSC secretary.

Delayed 2% raises to be paid

CUNY has circulated guidance to college human resources offices about paying the long-awaited November 15, 2020 2% contractual raise.

October 7, 2021 is the pay date for the lump sum payment of the salary increase retroactive to November 15, 2020 for state-funded employees (senior colleges).

October 15, 2021 is the pay date for the lump sum payment of the salary increase retroactive to November 15, 2020 for city-funded employees (community colleges).

All employees who were eligible for a salary step increase on January 1, 2021 will have that step reflected in their retroactive payment. Employees who were eligible for a salary step increase on July 1, 2021 will have that step reflected in their retroactive payment. CUNY has announced that the November 2021, 2% across-the-board raise will be in our paychecks in November 2021, consistent with the contract.

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Members push safety as CUNY reopens

By ARI PAUL

As professional staff returned to Hunter College a week before classes started, many shared fears about a lack of ventilation. Some complained that public safety officers weren't always wearing their masks inside. And some professional staff noted that even though they had medical issues and had been working perfectly well from home since the pandemic began, they were still being called into work and not granted an accommodation.

Some members at Hunter expressed mixed feelings about the return. Daniel Chan, the assistant director at the office of accessibility, said he was "feeling ambivalent" about returning to in-person work at Hunter, and that the return felt "whiplashy," adding that he "was much more productive" working from home because the environment was less stressful. While generally not afraid to return and in a good mood upon his return, Chan brought an air purifier for his workspace, purchased at his expense, as an extra layer of protection against the coronavirus.

Others like Philena Latcha, an athletic trainer at Hunter, told union officials upon her return that she felt safe because of the PSC's COVID-19 health and safety work. "One of the reasons I felt so comfortable coming back was because of [the union]," she said. "I knew [the PSC] had our backs."

INSPECTING SPACES

The union has, indeed, been hard at work ensuring that safety measures are in place at campuses where faculty and staff are returning to in-person work. The union is conducting walk-through inspections, and union officers and organizers have been meeting members on campuses about their concerns on masking, accommodations and spacing on campus. (See photos on pages 6–7 for more.)

As a result of union pressure, conditions on most campuses are safer, and with the notable exception of Hunter, much fewer people are present this fall. The problem, according to PSC President James Davis, has been that some campuses have proceeded with reopening less carefully and safely than others. Those that are more problematic continue to have structural problems with their physical plants, such as a lack of ventilation. An issue on some campuses, like Hunter, is that accommodation requests are being routinely rejected. "It's very uneven," he said. "CUNY Central has increasingly devolved decision-making onto the campuses." (See Davis's remarks, "What is to be done at CUNY?")

Some CUNY staffers felt that their workspaces were safe and that management provided the proper protective equipment for workers and students. At John Jay College, on the West Side of Manhattan, Mechelle Grayson, a career advisor in the department of public management,

Rallying members citywide



Jen Gaboury, PSC chapter chair at Hunter College, leads a march of students and PSC members.

told union organizers she felt safe in her office as she walked over to get her weekly COVID-19 test, which was provided in a college building across the street from her building. And many faculty listserves and social media posts testify to the excitement that some feel coming back to in-person teaching.

But questions around CUNY's communications and policies, and the resultant safety issues on campuses, have consistently arisen in the first weeks of reopening. During a press conference outside CUNY's headquarters August 24, Cindy Bink, the PSC HEO chapter chair, said, "We are being asked to work face-to-face with people we cannot guarantee are vaccinated and that could have COVID. For those who have loved ones at home, who are immunocompromised, or have health issues themselves, some HR departments are denying their request for 100% remote work. As a result, HEOs are being asked to choose between the health of themselves and their family and their job." Worse, for many PSC-represented professional staff, situations like this are easily avoidable, but short-sighted administrators won't budge, Bink said.

ROLE PLAYING?

With so many students still studying remotely, mandates that staff nevertheless come to campus make staff feel like they are being treated like props in the play of return-to-work. "Many of us will commute hours and arrive to a poorly ventilated, broken-down buildings, only to sit in front of computer to work remotely [with students]," Bink said.

Within the uneven conditions of reopening, some campuses stand out as particularly troubled. Members rallied at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn, where faculty and staff have said that the administration has failed to respond to their concerns

about safe reopening. Many members spoke about poor communication from the administration about safety and poor ventilation in buildings.

One adjunct at MEC said that in her building there were "no distancing measures, no schedule to make sure people aren't in the office at the same time." A library worker at MEC said that in the library there

are "no masks, no wipes, no hand sanitizer," and added that management "brought one bottle [of sanitizer] and one [packet] of wipes for the whole staff."

Clinton Crawford, the PSC chapter chair at Medgar Evers, said, "people cannot afford to expose themselves to a place where the ventilation is horrendous at best." While the chapter voiced concerns about ventilation and distancing over the summer, upon reopening it seemed as if "none of these things were addressed."

Hunter College has emerged as an outlier in terms of its in-person density on campus: most of the in-person teaching happening in the system is happening at Hunter. To *Clarion's* knowledge, a greater percentage of its professional staff has been called back. There were many Hunter College staffers who felt that the administration wasn't taking proper precautions in terms of accommodations and maintaining physical safety on campus.

Jen Gaboury, the PSC chapter chair at the college, concurred, telling *Clarion*, "It's scaring the crap out of us.... We all deserve a lot better from our school." At a "safe return" rally with more than 75 union members and CUNY students on the first day of in-person classes, Gaboury said that many of Hunter's reopening plans "don't follow the CDC guidelines" and have "significant problems with implementation." Rosa

Squillacote, PSC vice president for part-time personnel, said at the rally that "adjuncts and part-time workers...are forced to interpret Hunter's confusing policies," while "faculty and staff are in rooms where the only ventilation is an open window, and the union has found that those open windows are often closed." She added, "Hunter is treating our lives as if they are just numbers on a page."

While the union has planned other protests, actions and safety inspections, activists like Gaboury believe that with all of the unknowns regarding the Delta variant of the coronavirus, the fight for safety on campuses will be a long one.

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

"This is not even the beginning of our struggle and it's not the end of our struggle," she said. "We are going to have to fight and struggle across the term and maybe longer to make sure we are staying safe."

First Vice President Andrea Vásquez noted, "Organizing around health and safety issues has become a top priority for the PSC. We must continue this work that has made us stronger as a union, especially as we push for funding at the federal and state levels and as we begin planning our contract campaign. March 2023 is just around the corner and health and safety issues will be on the table."

What is to be done at CUNY?

At the beginning of the Fall 2021 semester, PSC President James Davis told reporters what CUNY was doing to implement safety on campuses, and what more could be done:

- **Student vaccination and in-person classes:** Since the Spring, CUNY has emphasized that students taking in-person classes must be vaccinated. But the requirement was contingent on FDA approval for non-emergency use. CUNY told students they had until September 14 to submit proof of vaccination. CUNY also told students in the same notification, that they had 45 days after FDA approval to submit their proof of COVID vaccination. These are contradictory messages. In-person instructors were led to believe that their students would be vaccinated. That's New York State guidance, and it's what CUNY had followed until this summer. Now it turns out there will be a mix of vaccinated and unvaccinated students in classrooms until October 7. In response, some colleges are permitting faculty to begin in-person classes online, but some campuses are denying faculty requests. **We urge that CUNY permit remote instruction until the state guidance can be met and in-person students are fully vaccinated.**

CUNY Central must take more action.

- **Social distancing:** CUNY has told us: "we are at 6 feet" because of the high rates of community transmission in the city, but colleges are all over the place on this. They're asking unvaccinated individuals to self-identify and self-segregate on the honor system. **That practice is not workable.** We need clear, consistent policies on distancing for all CUNY facilities that adhere to CDC guidance.

- **Professional staff:** A big thanks goes out to all the HEOs and CLTs who are preparing us for the Fall semester. If their work can be performed just as well remotely, why should they be compelled to come to campus at this point in the pandemic? Professional staff that don't absolutely need to be on campus should be permitted, if they request it, to work remotely – just as they've done the past 18 months. While community transmission rates are high and vaccination rates remain low, this is the safe approach to begin the semester.

- **On walk-throughs:** Our members conducted walk-through inspections with CUNY management at more than 50 buildings across the university. Some were in decent shape, but

many required repair and remediation. Keep in mind that CUNY colleges have deferred maintenance for many years due to budget cuts. Our members identified some facilities of particular concern, and the PSC has requested ventilation checks. CUNY has not responded after nearly a week. We need to confirm that the airflow in some of these buildings is safe, even without mechanical ventilation. They're located at Queens College, Hunter College, Baruch College, Medgar Evers College and Bronx Community College. CUNY must comply with the union's request to spot-check the air flow in these buildings.

- **On COVID testing:** CUNY has contracted for testing on-site, which is great. But we know how quickly the Delta variant spreads, and a one-week window for testing negative for COVID is too wide. We are urging that CUNY require a negative COVID test within 72 hours to access campuses while the rate of community transmission is high. As well, the data on testing of both unvaccinated and vaccinated members of the campus community must be made available to each college community: the number of people tested, and the number of positive tests. Transparency inspires confidence.

The state budget fight ahead

By ARI PAUL

It's never too early for the PSC to plan its state budget fight. And in this campaign, the state budget will be finalized in April of next year. The union has reason to be optimistic about its struggle for the full funding of CUNY. The union has an energized membership and the chief advocate for austerity at CUNY, Andrew Cuomo, has been forced out as governor by a sexual harassment investigation.

Luke Elliott-Negri, the PSC legislative representative, said that the union has a golden opportunity to work with the new governor, Kathy Hochul, on a fair budget for CUNY. "We at the PSC are excited to engage with her on the vital importance of CUNY, not just to New York City but to the whole state," he said. "The stars are aligned for a big higher education year in 2022, and we are confident that Governor Hochul will play a key role in making transformative investments in the CUNY and SUNY systems when the state budget is finalized next April 1."

STATE STRATEGY

Spring is just around the corner, so the union's Legislative Committee is organizing now for a budget campaign. The governor is the most important player in the budget process, but is also influenced by others toward whom the union must direct its advocacy: the leaders of the state legislature and CUNY administration, including but not limited to the assembly speaker, senate leader, CUNY chancellor, the CUNY Board of Trustees and the chairs of the Assembly and Senate Higher Education

PSC focuses on Albany



Mike Groll/Office of Governor Kathy Hochul

Will Governor Kathy Hochul hear what PSC has to say?

Committees. With both legislative houses controlled by Democrats, including progressives who ousted Republican-aligned incumbents in 2018, as well as labor-oriented democratic socialists, the upcoming budget cycle is an opportunity to push for more progressive taxation on the wealthy to fund vital public services and education, including CUNY.

The new executive in Albany also creates an opportunity for CUNY's Board of Trustees to become a vocal advocate for fair funding for CUNY, PSC President James Davis said. For the last several years, the union has

been critical of the board for acquiescing to the Cuomo administration's austerity budgets, leaving the union and its allies like the CUNY Rising Alliance to push publicly for robust CUNY funding. With Cuomo gone, the union sees the chance for trustees to advocate more vigorously for the university system with which they are entrusted.

As PSC Secretary Penny Lewis put it, the political climate in the state makes it possible to frame CUNY as "the kind of New Deal investment happening in other parts of our society," and that the union is "seeing

that there is excitement around public institutions and CUNY should be at the center of that."

Hochul, a centrist from Buffalo, may be more open than Cuomo to progressive demands. Because she is likely to seek a full term next year, she will likely need support from unions and other progressive organizations based downstate. The *New York Times* also pointed out that Hochul was going to great lengths to distance herself from her predecessor, including "providing a more complete coronavirus death toll," introducing "a new ethics training requirement for all state employees" and "replacing most of Mr. Cuomo's inner circle with top staffers of her own," while also making a point of "meeting with elected officials who warred with Mr. Cuomo, including Mayor Bill de Blasio." Many PSC political activists see this change in state government as crucial to securing a good state budget for CUNY.

James Vacca, a distinguished lecturer of urban studies at Queens College and a former city councilmember recalled, "I found her to be a very good listener, and that's what you need."

LESS HOSTILE

Nancy Silverman, an academic program coordinator at the Graduate Center who is active on the union's Legislative Committee, said, "It seems that Hochul is not as hostile toward New York City and to the left, which is pushing our New Deal for CUNY in the state legislature. With Hochul, we have an opportunity because she seems open to at least thinking about these ideas [and] hopefully supporting them."

Silverman hoped that one immediate first step the new governor could take to improve the union's relationship with the executive branch is to remove Robert Mujica, the state budget director, from the CUNY Board of Trustees, as he has served as Cuomo's key austerity enforcer for CUNY. Despite being a CUNY alumni, Mujica, who joined the board in 2016, helped the governor consolidate his control and limited the board's independence to pursue needed tax-levy resources

CUOMO THE CRUEL

To many CUNY observers, Cuomo was especially harsh on CUNY, which serves a population of more than 270,000 students, approximately 70% of whom are people of color. He once attempted to cut state aid by almost \$500 million, and his aggressive austerity led to a severe overreliance on adjunct faculty and contributed to delays in the union's collective bargaining with the university. Cuomo quietly vetoed the union-backed "maintenance of effort" bill, which would have required each annual state budget to include funds for both CUNY and SUNY to pay for the inflationary increases in operating costs at the four-year colleges, such as rent, utilities and contractual salary increases. Only under continued pressure from the PSC and its allies, did Cuomo agree last year to begin closing the "TAP gap," which was draining the operating budgets at CUNY colleges.

"To reverse years of racialized austerity at CUNY will require political will and a different vision for what public higher education can be," said Davis, "and that is exactly what we will press Governor Hochul to deliver."

It may be a new day for state budget organizing. The PSC plans to seize the opportunity.

New governor, new strategy

A new city council in '22

By ARI PAUL

While the state is responsible for the majority of CUNY's operational budget, the university's two-year colleges are heavily reliant on city funding. That's why PSC's political organizing that targets NYC City Council is so important, and it is why PSC officers and activists met with many of the Democratic nominees who are all but assured to be entering – or reentering – city council in 2022.

At the CUNY 101 Breakfast on September 22, the PSC made its political objectives clear: the University needs more funding to meet the needs of its students, the majority of whom come from working-class communities and communities of color that have been acutely impacted by the health crisis and economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the nominees who are assumed to

Two-year colleges rely on city funding.

enter city council next year who attended the virtual event were Lincoln Restler (Brooklyn), Crystal Hudson (Brooklyn), Shahana Hanif (Brooklyn), Shekar Krishnan (Queens) and Lynn Schulman (Queens). Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, will likely rejoin the city council next year (she served in the council before becoming the borough president), was also in attendance.

Heather James, an assistant professor of political science at Borough of Manhattan Community College and an active member of the PSC's Legislative Committee, told the assembled nominees, "Trust me, we will be coming to you in the FY 2022 budget fight," noting that while the state is the biggest funder of CUNY, the community colleges depend largely on city funding.

"We were shocked to find that the mayor's budget proposed \$77 million in cuts to CUNY," she said, adding that the union's lobbying power in the city council was critical in saving \$10 million for CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) in this summer's city budget process, noting, "We rolled back an illogical cut with [the city council's] help."

UNION POWER

That's a demonstration of the power both the PSC and a progressive city council can have, James said, adding that there's much more work to be done in terms of gaining more city funding. For example, she noted, many of CUNY's community colleges suffer shortages in mental health services and other advisory services. This, she said, was an enormous disservice to students and created work



Dave Sanders

Heather James gave nominees a free political science lesson.

overloads for PSC members. "Some campuses have just one advisor for every 1,000 students," James said.

PRESSURING TRUSTEES

PSC President James Davis noted that a major priority for the city council in the coming years should be to put pressure on the CUNY Board of

Trustees, where the mayor holds one-third of the appointments. "The board has not done its job adequately," Davis said, referring to the board's lack of public advocacy for full funding of CUNY. "We've had to do the work to advocate for CUNY. This is another area where the mayor and the council can assert their influence."

Union wins for adjuncts at City Tech

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

College administrations do not typically relent at the first stage of the grievance process, but this August the PSC won, or in grievance speak, received a remedy that the union sought in the Step One hearing. The victory: three City Tech adjuncts who were wrongfully given one-year with guidance appointments were given three-year appointments.

“Just by three brave souls speaking up and coming to us and really putting their stories on the line, it had a ripple effect to eight adjuncts,” said Carol Rial, the PSC adjunct grievance counselor who presented the case. The union had filed a class action over the same issue for all adjuncts in similar situations at City Tech. When the decision came, it was extended to them. “So that’s always thrilling to watch one person get something and then maybe a whole group. It just escalated from there.”

PSC INVESTIGATES

For the union’s contract enforcement team, pursuing this grievance meant collecting information, pouring through contract language and other agreements, looking at administration guidance and finding other members at the college who were affected by the same issue. In the case of the three adjuncts, they were up for renewal for their three-year appointments and instead received one-year with guidance appointments.

Rial’s argument was this: a one-year with guidance appointment is not an option when an adjunct is up for a three-year renewal. Rial used Appendix E of the PSC-CUNY contract, which deals specifically with multiyear appointments for teaching adjuncts, to support her claim.

“Rial is meticulous in her grievance work. She leaves no stone unturned in her advocacy for our members,” said

Enforcing the PSC contract



Carol Rial, a PSC adjunct grievance counselor, and adjunct lecturer at Hunter and Baruch Colleges, led the union’s case.

Renée Lasher, PSC’s outgoing director of contract administration. At the PSC, there are more than two dozen grievance counselors who are trained in the intricacies of contract enforcement. Rial is part of a team of four who solely represent adjuncts. “She crafts her presentation carefully and maintains a laser focus on the primary issues and strongest arguments, so that CUNY’s labor designee cannot avoid addressing them head-on,” Lasher said.

The union stewardship structure also contributed to the positive outcome in this case. Rial learned about the issue with the three grievants through other PSC members who are trained in contract and adjunct

issues, respectively, and who by coincidence teach in the same department as the affected adjuncts. Patricia Rudden, City Tech chapter grievance counselor, and Katie Albany, City Tech PSC adjunct liaison, immediately got in touch with Rial when they learned about the issue.

Albany recalled that the adjuncts each came to her separately, confused about why they did not receive their three-year appointments. Once the adjuncts approached her, she put them in touch with one another and with the PSC.

“If something does not sound right, they have to get right on it. There is a short window of opportunity

for them to grieve,” said Albany, an adjunct lecturer in the English department at City Tech. A member has 30 working days to file a grievance from when a violation occurred or when they learned of a violation. “They have to reach out to see what can be done,” said Albany.

Getting right on it meant being in touch with Rial and Rudden. Rudden, a longtime professor in the City Tech English department, has served many times on that department’s appointment committee in the past. She’s a self-proclaimed “contract crusader,” she said, noting that she’s been a grievance counselor for the PSC for decades. Both her parents were grievance representatives at their unionized workplaces.

“Adjuncts need to assert their rights. [Adjuncts] are getting more and more of them. They’re getting more and more security,” said Rudden, an English professor who was once a CUNY adjunct. “They have to show that the university depends on them, and they are a vital part of it.”

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Rial, who is also an adjunct lecturer at Hunter and Baruch Colleges, was able to build on her argument through Rudden’s experience serving on the Appointments Committee and Rial’s intricate knowledge of the collective bargaining agreement. According to the PSC-CUNY contract, a department personnel and budgeting committee can issue a one-year with guidance appointment in rare instances, but these one-year appointments should not be applied to three-year renewals.

On July 20, the union presented its case on the “improper, arbitrary and capricious one-year with guidance appointment in lieu of a subsequent three-year appointment,” and won. In mid-August, before the start of the academic year, City Tech issued its decision, and the three adjuncts named in the grievance and the other five adjuncts at City Tech who were affected by the issue, received three-year reappointment letters. (A related grievance on the comprehensive review process for three-year adjunct appointments is awaiting a Step Two decision. At *Clarion* publication date, a decision from CUNY Central had not been issued.)

It felt good to get a victory, Rial said, but because of the two-tier system at CUNY, she could not celebrate for too long.

“You can play a little music and dance around the living room, but you’ve got to get back to the calls and the emails and see what you can possibly file as a grievance always with an eye on winning on behalf of adjuncts,” Rial said.

Understanding this year’s adjunct raises

By JAMES DAVIS
PSC PRESIDENT

CUNY has announced that the 2% across-the-board raises scheduled for November 20, 2020 will be paid by **October 7, 2021** at senior colleges and by **October 15, 2021** at community colleges. Retroactive pay for adjuncts has been complicated because CUNY initially applied the 2% increase to Fall 2020 pay rates, then rescinded the increase when it decided to withhold the 2% increase for everyone in the bargaining unit. Adjuncts will receive retroactive pay from the first pay date of the 2021 Spring semester when CUNY rescinded the 2% increase.

As well, please note that **July 1, 2021** is the date on which eligible adjuncts should have received a step increase. If you were eligible for a

Contractual step increases

step increase from that date, please review your paystub and contact your human resources office to ensure that it was implemented. (See eligibility conditions below.)*

RISING WAGES

Salaries of teaching adjuncts increased significantly in the last round of contract negotiations, raising minimum adjunct pay by more than 70% by the Fall 2022 semester: a minimum of \$5,500 per three-credit course and \$6,875 per four-credit course. These increases were made possible by moving teaching adjuncts to single rates, effective August 25, 2022, rather than applying the final 2% increase on November 1, 2022:

- Adjunct Lecturer: \$91.67 per hour
- Adjunct Assistant Professor: \$100.00 per hour
- Adjunct Associate Professor: \$108.33 per hour
- Adjunct Professor: \$112.50 per hour.

Because teaching adjuncts on the top three steps of the Adjunct Professor title and the top step of the Adjunct Lecturer, Adjunct Assistant Professor and Adjunct Associate Professor titles will be paid at a higher hourly rate than the new single rate effective August 25, 2022, these teaching adjuncts will be held harmless and will receive the final 2% raise on November 1, 2022, instead of receiving the single

rate for their title. For those of you on those steps, the PSC and CUNY agreed to “red circle” your rate of pay. Your pay will continue to be calculated based on the number of hours worked, including office hours, multiplied by your red-circled hourly rate. Collectively we fought hard for every part of this provision, and we want to ensure that those who should advance a red-circled step by August 25, 2022 are moved correctly.

Making sense of the PSC contract

Because CUNY delayed the 2% across-the-board salary increase that was scheduled for November 15, 2020, the current steps from which eligible adjuncts should receive their increases appear in the October 2019 column of the salary schedule. For example, if you are an Adjunct Lecturer on the second salary step, your current

hourly rate is \$77.45. If you meet the criteria above, your hourly rate will increase to \$80.59 on July 1. **You should submit a request to both your department and your campus HR office to ensure your salary is increased to the appropriate rate, effective July 1.**

Adjuncts can check the salary schedules to determine their appropriate salary step at tinyurl.com/adjunct-salary-schedules.

**According to Article 24.2 (b) of our contract: “An Adjunct in a teaching or non-teaching title who on July 1, shall have served six semesters University-wide over a period of the preceding three years and who has not received a movement within schedule during that period shall receive a movement within schedule to the next higher dollar amount.”*

PSC fights for justice as CUNY ca

The PSC has rallied against unsafe reopening. The Environmental Health and Safety Watchdogs have trained activists to do safety walk-throughs of work locations, and union officers are meeting faculty and staff at their campuses to talk

to them about their experiences. Some campuses are doing better than others in terms of ensuring a safe work environment (in terms of COVID-19), and others are failing to follow basic CDC guidelines. All the while, the PSC is demanding



Clarence Elie Rivera

Walk-through

A member-led safety and health team inspects a Hunter College classroom to determine if it is COVID-compliant for in-person instruction.



Medgar Evers rally

The PSC rallies at Medgar Evers College, where members complained about lack of hand sanitizer and poor ventilation in buildings.



Dave Sanders

Talking to CUNY Central

Abigail Thomas, a student activist at City Tech, speaking out about safe reopening standards at a PSC-led rally outside CUNY Central.



Pat Arnow

Campuses reopen

that CUNY Central takes on a bigger leadership role in ensuring safety at CUNY campuses during an uncertain time. Below is a sampling of the all-out PSC mobilization across CUNY as campuses began reopening to faculty, staff and students returning for in-person instruction.



Erik McGregor



Dave Sanders

Getting the word out

A PSC organizer (left) meets with a Medgar Evers college laboratory technician.



Pat Arrow

Testing

Mechelle Grayson, a Higher Education Assistant at John Jay College, gets tested for COVID-19.



Dave Sanders

LaGuardia and Hunter

Members attend union-led rallies at LaGuardia Community College (above) and Hunter College (below).



Dave Sanders

Meeting workers

Union officers reach out to professional staff at Hunter College (left) and LaGuardia Community College (above).



Desiree Rios

AFT grant awarded to the PSC

By **ANDREA VÁSQUEZ**
PSC First Vice President

The PSC's national affiliate, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), has awarded the PSC a grant of nearly \$100,000 to support, "activities by our locals that help their communities feel safe, supported, and welcome in a return to in-person learning. These activities could include vaccination drives, outreach to vaccine-hesitant staff or students, enrollment campaigns, small-dollar grants to students with one-time obstacles to getting to or staying enrolled in school, etc." Below is an excerpt of PSC First Vice President Andrea Vásquez's presentation to the AFT about the PSC's use of the grant:

Because we serve 260,000 mostly poor, working-class students (80% people of color, 60% with annual family income below \$30,000 per year), we know the importance of in-person learning for our students to succeed. As faculty, we understand that high-quality online learning is possible and is not necessarily a poor pedagogical method of teaching and learning. CUNY students need small classes and face-to-face engagement with their professors and other staff charged with their academic development and overall well-being. The biggest challenge our members face

To help with reopening

is not knowing if they and their students will be fully vaccinated and safe. While CUNY nominally requires student vaccinations, they are also making plans to accommodate unvaccinated students, and their policy does not take effect until FDA provides full approval of the vaccines. We want to do everything we can to encourage students to get vaccinated. With some buildings over 100 years old, and after decades of disinvestment, our ventilation systems are not what they should be, so vaccinations and masking will be crucial.

VACCINATION PRIZES

Using joint faculty-student in-person tabling, social media paid advertising, and unpaid social media engagement, we aim to popularize a raffle for vaccinated CUNY students with grand prizes of \$2,000 (and with 25 "lesser" prizes of MacBook Airs and backpacks). Through this program, we seek to incentivize vaccination and encourage mask usage for CUNY community members in order to make classrooms and public spaces at our 19 colleges safe for teaching and learning in the Fall. Right now, according to a recent CUNY survey

(1/3 response rate), 59% of CUNY students are at least partially vaccinated. We believe that we can substantially increase this percentage.

National union helps out in NYC.

Upon receiving the grant, we will design social media images encouraging CUNY student vaccination and promoting a rolling fall raffle for any vaccinated CUNY student who provides proof of vaccination. Every weekend of the Fall semester, we will raffle two MacBook Airs on Facebook and Instagram Live, and on the final weekend we will raffle one MacBook Air, and five grand, cash prizes of \$2,000 each.

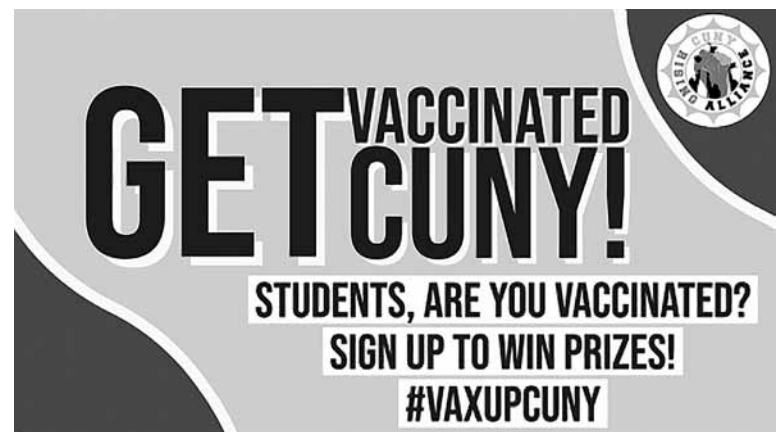
Over the course of the semester, we will aim to conduct 200 days of tabling across CUNY campuses. These in-person tabling events will be hosted by a CUNY student activist – recruited through the CUNY Rising Alliance – and a PSC member, recruited by the PSC. Each tabling activist will receive a \$25 gift card for food when they table. Tables will have fliers promoting vaccination (in addition to materials about our campaign for a New Deal for CUNY and the national campaign for A New Deal for Higher Education), snacks to give away and, im-

portantly, free KN95 masks. The tables will have "I'm vaccinated because...." papers that students can write on. The tablers can then take their picture with their phones and encourage them to post the images to social media with the hashtag #VaxUpCUNY. All students who show up to the table and provide proof of vaccination will be entered into the raffle (using a platform like GalaBid).

BROAD COALITION

PSC's coalition partners in the CUNY Rising Alliance (CRA) will help to administer the program and oversee outreach. With ongoing support from the AFT and PSC,

CRA is well-staffed and has proven to have strong ties to CUNY communities, legislators and other activist groups. At a recent rally for city funding, NYC Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, Brooklyn Borough President Democratic Nominee Antonio Reynoso and others spoke in support of CUNY students and a safe return to college. In addition to promotion on social media, CRA will organize PSC faculty members to contact their students and the University Student Senate to announce the opportunity throughout the summer and we will ask legislators to tweet about this opportunity for students. Dozens of CUNY Rising Alliance community partners can also help to promote the raffle. This program will not only help us make our city and university safe, but it will strengthen and increase member and student engagement.



Federal boost for higher education?

By **CLARION STAFF**

As this newspaper went to press, Congress began considering an ambitious higher education spending package as part of the Biden administration's Build Back Better Agenda. "Tuition-free community college would become a reality under the bill through a program referred to as America's College Promise," Inside Higher Ed reported that the legislation "would create a federal-state partnership grant to eliminate the cost of tuition at a community college or a tribal college or university," and that the "federal government would contribute 100 percent for the first year, decreasing its share by 5 percent for each subsequent year."

BILLIONS AT STAKE

PSC First Vice President Andrea Vásquez noted that the bill "includes \$111 billion for higher education, most significantly to make community college free and support historically Black colleges, Hispanic-serving institutions and tribal institutions, all of which include four-year colleges." While the timing of congressional votes on the measure is uncertain, Vásquez explained that higher education advocates have been pushing on many fronts, and the PSC wants "to see free public college for all students" at two-year and four-year colleges. The union has also pressed for the

What could be gained



inclusion of additional operating funding, plus provisions to maintain a baseline of full-time tenure-track faculty, to convert faculty on contingent appointments and to hire additional staff and improve adjunct salaries.

A PSC action letter for members to send lawmakers praised the proposal in the Build Back Better Agenda to increase the maximum Pell

Grant that many low-income CUNY students receive, and the \$9 billion Retention and Completion Grant program modeled after CUNY's own ASAP (Accelerated Study in Associate Programs) and ACE (Accelerate, Complete, and Engage) initiatives. For these investments and many others, the Build Back Better Act deserves your support. But other provisions

A chance to fund free college?

pushed by higher education advocates that are not in the proposed act must not fall by the wayside: "Fully funded, free four-year college education is what this nation needs to create an equitable economy and broad prosperity. Federal funding should be leveraged to enforce strong labor protections that ensure a living wage for all higher education workers, pay parity for adjunct and contingent faculty and a professoriate that is at least 75 percent tenure-track."

DETAILS

According to a fact sheet from the American Federation of Teachers, the PSC's national affiliate, the bill will include the following:

\$1.5 billion in direct (institutional) investments for 5 years

- Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) (\$113.7 million each year);
- Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Post-secondary Minority Institutions (\$113.7 million each year);
- Tribal Colleges and Universities (\$34.1 million each year);
- Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions (\$17.1 million each year);
- Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs) (\$5.7 million each year); and
- Native American-serving Non-

tribal Institutions (\$5.7 million each year).

Research and Development Competitive Grants

- \$2 billion grant program for 4-year HBCUs and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) to improve research and development infrastructure
- Institutions can receive planning or implementation grants to improve research and development infrastructure.
- Allowable uses of funds for this infrastructure includes several references to faculty, including "hiring and retaining faculty" and "creating new, or expanding existing, academic positions."

But Higher Ed Labor United, a coalition of more than 80 unions and other groups in higher education, believes much more can be done. The group said the bill should also include:

- Free college in both 2 and 4-year institutions
- 75% tenure-track floor for all institutions with conversion of job type for existing contingents
- Pay parity for adjuncts, living wages for all staff, and union neutrality
- Spend all excess federal funds to institutions on increasing wages and tenure density

The group also noted that much more can be done to protect labor rights in higher education. It said that the final version of the bill should include "pay equity for all faculty and staff with access to benefits and the right to organize collectively."

The history of the retiree health-care change

By THE PSC

Why is retiree health insurance being changed to Medicare Advantage? The real answer lies in the outrageous cost of health care in the United States, the inability of organized labor to blunt economic austerity policies and the absurd American premise that access to health care is a privilege of full-time employment. There is also a strong case to be made that the underlying problem – the lack of universal health care in the United States – is at least partially rooted in racism. One reason we don't have universal health care is that the former slaveholding states consistently voted to block the development of federal programs *because* they would benefit African Americans. But there are local and immediate reasons for the switch to Medicare Advantage, and we will focus on those.

MORE THAN RETIREES

First, a few basics. Employees who receive CUNY health insurance, with the exception of graduate employees, have coverage through the New York City Health Benefits Program, regardless of whether they are on the state or city payroll. Under a 1966 agreement and NYC municipal code, the Municipal Labor Committee (MLC), an organization of city employee unions, negotiates the terms of health insurance with the city for all workers represented by these unions, including the PSC.

The change in retiree health insurance negotiated by the city, the MLC and the health insurance companies this year is designed to be permanent. Current retirees will be affected immediately, starting January 1. Unless there are future changes, everyone who retires on city health insurance will eventually feel the impact. The change from government-administered Medicare to privately-administered Medicare Advantage is an issue for the whole union.

ZERO-SUM GAME

To understand the shift in retiree coverage, we need to go back to 2013, when all 153 unions that negotiate with the City of New York – including the PSC – were working under expired contracts. That was the period of the PSC's six-year fight for the 2010–17 contract. Mayor Michael Bloomberg, then in his last term, was determined to weaken municipal unions, in part by depleting the city's labor reserve fund while giving lavish tax breaks to real estate and finance. Bloomberg demanded that union members give up their hard-won benefit of premium-free health insurance, a benefit that is increasingly rare for any workers. The municipal unions refused, and the result was citywide contract stalemate.

Soon after Mayor Bill de Blasio took office in 2014, his administration broke the logjam by negotiating a health "savings" agreement that reduced the rate of growth in the city's health-care costs and thereby freed

A long road of struggle to where we are



PSC retirees rallied against the plan this summer.

up funds for contracts and union welfare funds. In return for preserving no-premium health insurance and generating money for raises, the municipal unions agreed to work with city government to identify cost reductions for the city. All 153 contracts, including the PSC's, were resolved.

ACCEPTING AUSTERITY

But that agreement, the product of a crisis engineered by Bloomberg in the interest of the ruling class, set a dangerous precedent: acceptance of the premise that even cost-of-living increases in workers' salaries should be paid for by shifting costs for health care to workers. The PSC voted against it. The PSC asserted that a workforce of 365,000 NYC workers had the power to mobilize against this zero-sum approach.

The overwhelming majority of municipal unions, however, accepted the agreement. Many of the measures it employed to cut costs were essentially accounting adjustments and efforts at behavior modification, and the agreement opened the door to settling desperately needed contracts. For example, the agreement imposed steeply increased co-pays for emergency room visits and urgent care for employees in active service. But none of the provisions were a structural change in the delivery of health care.

STRUCTURAL CHANGE

The structural changes came with the second health agreement, in 2018. No longer facing a contract logjam and enjoying years of budget surpluses, New York City nevertheless sought another health "savings" agreement when the second round of bargaining under de Blasio began.

The city's rationale was that health-care costs were skyrocketing – and they were. As a result of hospital consolidations and other factors, New York City's health-care spending for municipal workers, retirees and their dependents had more than doubled in ten years going from \$5 billion to \$11 billion. Meanwhile, the joint labor-management health-care fund that has added money for union welfare funds and paid for certain high-cost prescription drugs for all municipal unions, including PSC, was rapidly being spent down. The United Federation of Teachers, which was then in contract negotiations, openly stated that shifts to health-care costs would generate money for raises.

The PSC and a few other unions again voted against the agreement, but the majority voted yes. Other unions cited the fact that active employees had already experienced increased costs, and the overriding importance of maintaining premium-free health coverage for both active and retired members. These concerns are justified and urgent, but there are alternatives to shifting costs to workers or retirees. They all involve organizing and challenging the austerity paradigm.

BIGGER CHANGES

The savings that were easiest to make had already been made in the 2014 agreement. The second time around, finding reductions was harder. As a result, the 2018 agreement committed the city and the MLC to considering several fundamental shifts in the way health care was covered.

The first was the mandatory assignment of all new city employees

(including full-time CUNY employees) to the HIP HMO from EmblemHealth insurance for their first year of employment. That change has been in effect since 2019. The second was the switch from traditional Medicare for retirees to a group Medicare Advantage plan designed for municipal retirees.

Even though the PSC leadership grasped the urgency of stabilizing health costs, having fought and won the battle to stabilize the PSC's own welfare fund, the PSC voted no on the proposed Medicare Advantage group plan. Significantly, the PSC was joined this time by every health care union in the MLC that represented nurses, doctors, medical interns and residents. Building on the organizing of the PSC's Retirees Chapter, the PSC representatives to the MLC pushed for greater transparency and the consideration of alternatives. Although the opposition was outvoted again, the PSC's vocal opposition had a measurable effect on the program that was negotiated. Several improvements were made to the original design in response to PSC objections, and the PSC will aggressively monitor both the financial and the health impact of the new program.

THE ECONOMICS OF THE DEAL

The impetus for the shift to Medicare Advantage, as we have seen, was to cut the city's health-care costs. Both the MLC and the city maintained that they could do so without sacrificing the quality of health care. In fact, both have claimed that the new, privately managed Medicare Advantage Plus program, designed

uniquely for NYC retirees, will not only maintain but enhance members' health care.

The key to the agreement between the city and the MLC is the subsidy offered by the federal government – through Medicare itself – exclusively to private insurers that assume the financial risk of covering the components of retiree health care that would otherwise be provided by Medicare. Such plans, now called Medicare Advantage plans, are regulated by Medicare and are required to follow Medicare guidelines. Why Medicare incentivizes private insurers to take over its responsibilities is part of a longer story than we can tell here, but it has much to do with the resistance to public health care in the United States, demands to cut federal administrative costs, and the unquestioned premise that workers are a "cost," not a resource.

The city was not benefitting from the federal subsidies because Senior Care, the supplemental coverage that most city retirees currently belong to, covers the 20% of health-care costs not covered by Medicare, but it does not qualify for the federal rebates. Only Medicare Advantage programs, which cover hospitalization, doctors' visits and other health-care needs, in addition to the 20% gap, are eligible for the federal subsidy. By switching to a private insurer, the city could take advantage of the substantial subsidy and eliminate the \$600 million annual cost of Senior Care. From this calculation, and the promise by private insurers

The roots of the current problem

that they could provide better care for less money, the city's Medicare Advantage Plus program was born.

Two insurance companies with long histories with NYC municipal employees, EmblemHealth (a non-profit merger of GHI and HIP) and Anthem (part of the for-profit Blue Cross network) teamed up and won the bid for the huge contract with the city. They will receive a rebate from Medicare for every participant they enroll, and will have to follow Medicare regulations in administering the plan.

NYC Medicare Advantage Plus (MA+) will be premium-free to NYC retirees. Retirees who opt out of the plan in order to stay in their current health plan will pay monthly premiums, with a modest one-year subsidy from the city, because the city is paying a modest premium to MA+. After 2022, the city will no longer pay any premium for retiree health insurance plans. That is how the city is "saving" money.

Whether the "Alliance" can deliver on its promise of better health-care coverage at lower cost remains to be seen, and the PSC will carefully monitor the care available to its retirees. At the same time, however, the PSC and its Retirees Chapter will continue to press for universal health care that is both fair to public employees and in the strongest traditions of the labor movement as a movement for all working people.

Dave Sanders

RETIREES

Navigating retiree health insurance

By DEBORAH BELL

Retiree health insurance is changing for PSC retirees. Effective January 1, 2022, the NYC Employee Benefits Program, with the assent of most unions in the Municipal Labor Committee (MLC), is changing the structure of premium-free health insurance available for Medicare-eligible retirees. They will be transferred to NYC Medicare Advantage Plus (MA+), a private health plan that will manage both Medicare and supplemental benefit payments to providers. The new plan will charge no premium to retirees and is run by the “Alliance,” an amalgam of two companies experienced with serving New York City employees and retirees, EmblemHealth and Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield Retiree Solutions. The latter is part of the national health insurance company, Anthem Health. The Alliance is required to provide the same benefits as traditional Medicare. The initial contract between New York City and the Alliance is for five years.

The PSC sought a delay in the decision to change the structure of city retiree health care, and ultimately voted in the Municipal Labor Committee against the transition to MA+ along with the unions representing doctors and nurses. PSC President James Davis said, “Our members are deeply troubled by the MLC’s rush to vote on this proposal. This austerity measure opens the door to further cost-cutting and diminished benefits in future contracts.”

FALL MAILINGS

The Alliance, in coordination with the New York City Office of Labor Relations (OLR), has sent mailings to Medicare-eligible retirees currently enrolled in Senior Care for their supplemental health coverage describing the new plan and comparing its provisions to Senior Care. (These materials are also on the OLR website.) Retirees enrolled in other supplemental plans should have received mailings in late September. PSC retirees should review the materials carefully. If you are satisfied that the new plan meets your health-care needs, you and the Medicare-eligible dependents currently on your plan will be *automatically enrolled* in the new Medicare Advantage plan for January 1, 2022. Dependents on your plan who are not Medicare-eligible will continue to be covered by their current insurance plan (usually GHI-CBP). Medicare-eligible spouses must enroll in the same plan as retirees.

However, if you do not wish to be automatically enrolled in the new MA+ plan, you must take action. You must affirmatively “opt out” of the MA+ plan by filling out the opt-out form in the mailing for yourself and a separate opt-out form for any Medicare-eligible dependent. (Your Medicare-eligible spouse or dependent must opt out if you do.) The different ways you can submit the opt-out form are spelled out on the form itself.

If you opt out, your only option is to stay in the plan in which you are currently enrolled, which, starting in 2022, will likely charge a significant monthly premium. For example, Senior Care, in which the vast majority of retirees have been enrolled, will cost \$191.57 per month for a retiree starting in 2022 and \$383.14 per month for a family (spouse). The 2022 premiums for all



plans are available at www1.nyc.gov/assets/olr/downloads/pdf/health/retiree-rates-jan-2022.pdf. PSC retirees do not need to pay for prescription drug coverage in any of the plans because they will continue to be covered by PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund benefits. There is other useful information on the NYC Employee Benefits Program website as well, including benefit comparisons and the MA+ plan description.

Retirees currently in Senior Care who pay for the 365-day hospitalization rider will, if they opt out and remain in Senior Care, continue to be covered by and charged for the rider (\$2.83 per month for an individual and \$5.66 per month for a family). If you are currently enrolled in Senior Care and are unsure if you are covered by the rider, call EmblemHealth Customer Service at 212-501-4444 and inquire. If you are not covered by the rider and wish to be covered starting in 2022, contact the NYC Employee Benefits Program during November 2021 to sign up. Information about how to do that will be on the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund and Retiree Chapter web pages. (The rider has not been needed or offered to retirees in other health plans.)

OPT OUT

The decision to opt out requires careful consideration because of cost and access to providers. The only premium-free plans in 2022 will be the NYC MA+ plan, Aetna Medicare Advantage and HIP VIP. (The latter two are only available to those already enrolled in those plans as of December 31, 2021, who opt out of MA+ to stay in them.) Every fall, the NYC Employee Benefits Program will have a retiree health plan annual “transfer period” when retirees can decide to transfer into the MA+ plan or out of it into Senior Care. The other plans will not be available except to those retirees currently enrolled who remain enrolled or those who enroll in MA+ in 2022 and want to switch back to their old plan in 2023.

Understanding the new system

Some PSC retirees may choose to waive NYC Health Benefits Program coverage altogether and purchase a supplemental “Medigap” health plan on the open market. To do that, instead of the opt-out form, you must waive coverage by completing the NYC Health Benefits Application/Change Form linked at www1.nyc.gov/assets/olr/downloads/pdf/health/health-benefits-application.pdf.

However, New York City will continue to reimburse for Medicare Part B and IRMAA only if you are enrolled in a NYC Health Benefits Program health plan. *If you waive NYC retiree health plan coverage, you will NOT be eligible for the reimbursement by the city for the Medicare Part B premium (or IRMAA), based on current practice.* The PSC is checking into the legality of these reimbursement restrictions. You may re-enroll in city retiree health benefits during the next transfer period.

Take action now to be sure that the NYC Employee Benefits Program has your correct mailing address, particularly if you did not receive a Medicare “Notice of Change” letter from NYC last summer. The form to submit is at www1.nyc.gov/assets/olr/downloads/pdf/health/retiree-change-of-address-form.pdf. Also be sure both PSC-CUNY and the Welfare Fund have your correct address by entering your name and correct mailing address and psc-cuny.org/update, and mailing it to the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund at 61 Broadway, 15th floor, New York, NY 10006.

PSC ACTION

The PSC Retiree Chapter has held a series of meetings about the new plan and the issues and concerns our members have raised. The chapter also organized several protests over the spring and summer urging a delay and greater transparency in the city’s decision-making process. As retiree chapter chair Bill Friedheim has said repeatedly, “Privatizing retiree coverage and shifting the main premium-free NYC retir-

ee health plan away from traditional Medicare with a supplemental plan to a private Medicare Advantage company is a move in the opposite direction from where we should be going, towards a national single-payer program.” The Retiree Chapter web page on the PSC website is an important source of information www.psc-cuny.org/whats-happening-retiree-healthcare and the chapter endeavors to keep it as up-to-date as possible.

THE ALLIANCE

Most NYC-area and many national hospitals and doctors are part of the Alliance’s “network.” Retirees can use the Alliance website and click “Find Care” in the middle of the page to find providers in their network.

The Alliance will also cover care provided by providers who accept Medicare rates but are not in its network. However, some retirees’ individual doctors have told their patients they will not participate in a Medicare Advantage plan, even though they may accept Medicare rates. Alliance representatives respond that, because NYC MA+ is an employer-based PPO, not an HMO, providers will not face the same restrictions as with other Medicare Advantage plans. The Alliance has also assured retirees that if the provider still refuses to accept MA+ even after talking to an Alliance “concierge,” the Alliance will reimburse the member for covered treatment at the Medicare rate.

PSC retirees are also concerned about how they will pay premiums if they opt out of NYC MA+. Most NYC retirees belong to a “defined benefit” pension, including PSC retirees who receive pension benefits from TRS or NYCERS. Those retirees will pay premiums out of their monthly pension benefit checks (or deposits). However, the majority of PSC retirees have pensions though TIAA, a defined contribution plan, and CUNY has long required them to maintain a reserve and a lifetime annuity with TIAA to cover retiree health plan expenses. The NYC Office of Labor Relations

Continued on page 11

SINGLE-PAYER

CUNY needs the New York Health Act

By EILEEN MORAN and BARBARA KATZ ROTHMAN

Have you heard of the New York Health Act? Most of us haven't, but it's important – New York State could lead the United States into the developed world in terms of modern health care. The New York Health Act, backed by Assembly member Richard Gottfried and State Senator Gustavo Rivera, would provide comprehensive, universal health coverage for every New Yorker, replacing private insurance companies with a universal state-wide system. The goal is everybody in, nobody out, a plan that will include not only our faculty and staff, but all of our students and their families. Think about it – no network restrictions, everything covered – primary, preventive, specialists, hospital, dental, vision, drugs, long-term care – all of it. And without the profit-making private insurers, this will save money for all of us, the state, the city, CUNY, and individual people.

Save the time negotiating with insurance coverage, time spent by doctors, hospitals, employers or patients trying to fill out the forms in the right way, the way that will get costs covered. The administrative savings alone will be in the millions of dollars. By the state directly negotiating for drug costs and medical devices is expected to bring prices down by over a third. No more premiums, deductibles, co-pays. No more systemic inequality, no more different standards of care for uninsured, Medicaid, or privately insured. We would all be equal, equally covered, equally cared for.

NEW YORK LEADING WAY

New York is on the verge of doing what every other country in the developed world does: guarantee all of its residents access to medical services.

Americans have taken the unthinkable high, unaffordable costs of medical services as a given. We know we cannot afford these services if needed, so we buy private insur-



Assembly member Richard Gottfried rallying for single-payer in Albany.

ance. Medical services drive Americans into bankruptcy because these services cost a fortune. This country spends more on medical services than any other country in the world, often twice as much – and has worse outcomes.

We call it “health care” – the industry that provides those services has encouraged that. But it's not actually about health or care – health care is actually publicly available and funded, however poorly. Fresh air, clean water, protective food laws, those are about health and we do see them as “public health,” as governmental functions. They are not, we know well, evenly distributed and very much vary along class and race lines. That is something we acknowledge as a social problem to be solved socially, and collectively. The COVID pandemic made that all the more clear: crowded living and lack

of access to fresh air played out in higher death rates. And lack of access to medical services meant some people were forced to keep going to work in spite of the risks, even when they suspected they might have and be spreading COVID-19.

Medical services – doctors' appointments, drugs, surgeries, hospitalizations – those are provided one-on-one, not neighborhood by neighborhood, or state by state. And unlike everywhere else in the developed world, Americans have come to view such services as individual not public problems. The closest we have come to responding collectively has been through the work of unions. Workers in unionized jobs can get insurance for these expenses as a “benefit” of their employment. Having your suspected early cancer treated while it's still treatable is a nice benefit. Getting your child's developing scoliosis treated before she's permanently damaged by her curving spine – nice benefit.

Unions are about a collective, an “us.” We need, we deserve, we will negotiate and bargain for our needs. Some countries have a national sense of “us,” of who “we” are. Explaining why medical costs are covered by the state, Dutch, German and British folks explain – “It can happen to anyone.” Any of us. The other country that did not have national medical coverage was South Africa. Then they ended apartheid and got a national system. Take what lessons you will from that.

MORE THAN THE UNION

As a union, the PSC has done a good job of negotiating medical coverage for us. But is that the most meaningful “us” in your life? Your fellow union member has coverage, but your aunt does not. The adjunct down the hall who helped you pick out the new intro text – maybe they have medi-

cal coverage. Some of our adjuncts qualify and the union fought for that, but many of them do not.

Nowhere in the developed world, nowhere but in the United States, do students, faculty and university staff have to depend on their university to figure out how to afford medical care. Why should the CUNY community have to depend on the university for this basic need? Why do we have to take this on?

HELPING CUNY

Think about what it would mean for CUNY to have a state-wide insurance program. Graduate students wouldn't have to compete for fellowships so they can afford to treat their asthma. Being an adjunct or on a tenure-track won't determine whether you can afford the bills for the birth of your new baby, let alone get new glasses or a toothache treated. The part-time department secretary won't have to try desperately to move to full-time status so her husband's diabetes medicines get covered. The university's human resources department won't need to keep part-time staff under 20 hours to avoid providing health coverage.

More and more of CUNY is moving to part-time, adjunct status. We saw it first with the faculty, and we're seeing it now along administrative lines. Full-timers retire and adjunct lines replace those positions. One of the driving factors is avoiding the benefits costs of full-timers. Take those benefits off the negotiating table and think about what the PSC could be working on: smaller classes, academic freedom, wage increases, even the “public health” issues of better air quality and food on campus.

Given its long-standing commitment to single payer, the PSC supports the New York Health Act as a work in progress. A payroll tax, where employers pay the costs for lower paid workers and a cost sharing system for higher paid, will mean that most New Yorkers – and specifically PSC members – will pay less and our union can work on other issues we care about. Unions in the public sector, like ours, will work on the New York Health Act to make sure that our members do not face added payroll taxes, but once that system is in place, our time can be spent working on other issues.

Access to basic medical services should not be a privilege, a benefit our university, or any other institution, doles out selectively. Nor should such services be something a university has to skimp on so it can afford to pay its teachers. Our students, most of all, have more than enough to worry about, to strive for. They should be able to spend their time studying, not seeking medical care for their parents, not researching ways to get an undocumented relative early cancer treatment, not trying to figure out how to get their little brother's hearing loss attended to. These services should be universal, as they are in most of the world. New York State can choose to join the developed world.

Let's work for universal guaranteed health care for all New Yorkers by building support for the New York Health Act. Let's lighten our load. We have more than enough to do for our students, our staff and our faculty to assure all of us have access to the medical services we need.

This could really happen, and we have to work to make sure it does.

Eileen Moran and Barbara Katz Rothman are members of the union's Task Force of the Social Safety Net Committee.

Retiree health insurance

Continued from page 10

has assured PSC that they will directly bill TIAA participants whose annuities are insufficient to pay their premium. PSC leaders have been meeting with CUNY and OLR to press for a direct billing option for all TIAA participants who elect to pay premiums, but the reserve and annuity requirements are unlikely to be changed before retirees must make their opt-out decision. The PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund website and PSC Retiree Chapter web page will provide updates.

PSC retirees seeking answers to questions which aren't answered here, should take these steps in order: (1) Check the PSC retirees Medicare Advantage webpage at www.psc-cuny.org/whats-happening-retiree-healthcare. (2) Check the NYC Office of Labor Relations FAQs at www1.nyc.gov/assets/olr/downloads/pdf/health/ma-faqs-09-01-21.pdf. (3) If they don't find

the answers there, they should call the Alliance toll-free number at 1-833-325-1190, Monday to Friday, 8 am to 9 pm. (4) If they still haven't received accurate answers to their questions, they should check the FAQs on the Welfare Fund website at www.psc-cuny.org/nyc-hbp-medicare-advantage-faqs.aspx. (5) If they don't find the answers there, only then should they send an email to communications@pscunyw.org.

The decision by the city and the MLC to change PSC retiree health care is frustrating, and has forced retirees to make a difficult and complex decision in a short period of time, in too many cases without adequate information. However, the PSC will continue to fight for our retirees' rights, by demanding clear information and communicating it promptly.

Deborah Bell is the former executive director of the PSC.

Good insurance is no longer enough



15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

New to the PSC?

Are you new to CUNY this year? If so, and you haven't joined the PSC, now is the perfect time to do so. By joining you ensure our union has the resources to protect your rights at work and to fight for better pay and benefits, improved working conditions and quality education for CUNY students. PSC membership also grants you the right to vote in union elections and contract ratifications and gives you access to certain member benefits and discounts.

Sign up online at <https://www.psc-cuny.org/join-psc>.

Professional Staff Congress/CUNY
61 Broadway, 15th Floor
New York, New York 10006
Return Service Requested

NonProfit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
New York, N.Y.
Permit No. 8049

Mental health services improve, but slightly

By MAURIZIO GUERRERO

CUNY has increased the number of mental health counselors it is making available for its students and getting closer to the standard suggested for universities worldwide. However, most of the new clinicians are just working part-time, and all of them were hired on a temporary basis.

The increase has not resulted in better services either, according to Anna Compton, a Hunter College senior student who testified at a City Council Higher Education Committee hearing on September 20. She waited up to six weeks to see a school clinician, only to be referred to outside professionals, a step that takes eight additional weeks – if the external counselors take her insurance. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Compton's therapy sessions have been constantly interrupted. "We are now in Fall 2021, and I am starting this process all over again," she said.

CRUCIAL SERVICES

Mental health services are especially crucial now, as the pandemic has taken a heavy toll on college students. A CUNY Graduate School of Public Health report published last March found that 54% of the 274,000 students enrolled in CUNY expressed experiencing depression and anxiety. Those conditions, the survey found, were compounded by "disturbingly high levels of financial instability."

"This is unacceptable," said Remysell Salas, an adjunct lecturer in ethnic and race studies at the Borough of Manhattan Community College and campaign director of CUNY Rising Alliance, at the hearing. "The COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating to all students, who are trying to cope with that impact in their lives while pursuing their education," he said. CUNY still has to fulfill its responsibility of providing students with the mental health tools they need to thrive, he added.

Gregory Kuhlman, director of the personal counseling program at

Mostly temporary workers

Brooklyn College, agreed that CUNY has not been up to the challenge of providing sufficient mental health services, especially for students of the most disadvantaged groups.

"It is really important to have permanent, full-time counselors for continuity of care," Kuhlman said. "If a student comes in on Monday seeking services because they're suicidal, it's not a great idea to have a counselor not available until the following Monday."

College students are at an extremely vulnerable age, according to research cited by New York City Council Higher Education Chair Inez Barron during the hearing. From 18 to 25 years of age, a period known as "emerging adulthood," mental health disorders are more likely to emerge. "With the exception of dementia, emerging adults experience more of every diagnosed mental health disorder than any other group," she said.

Young adults are experiencing higher rates of anxiety and depression than any other social group, except for essential workers and caregivers, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) study. "This is compounded by the continued racism, white privilege and oppression that exists in our everyday lives," Barron added.

Compton emphasized that campuses require more staff who are sensitive to students with disabilities, students of color and LGBTQ students. "We needed them before the pandemic and we certainly need them now," she said.

Since last October, when the city council's Higher Education Committee and Mental Health, Disabilities and Addictions Committee held their first meeting on mental health resources

for students at CUNY, the administration announced a \$5 million expansion of these kind of services with funds from the federal CARES Act. That allowed the University to increase its clinical staff and its capacity to provide online counseling.

By the official numbers, the investment impact seems remarkable. According to Denise Maybank, CUNY's interim vice chancellor for student affairs and enrollment management, the University had a mental health staff-to-student ratio of 1:2,595 last year. With the CARES Act funds, CUNY added 54 part-time and nine full-time clinicians, which

improved the mental health professionals-to-student ratio to 1:1,621.

The numbers, however, do not quite match. There are a total of 164 counselors, full and part-time, working at CUNY, according to Maybank. Considering CUNY's student body (274,000), that's a ratio of 1:1,876, which is better than last year's ratio, but still far from the 1:1,500 ratio recommended by the International Accreditation of Counseling Services (IACS).

TIME IS LIMITED

The new hires are also temporary. The clinicians were hired with federal stimulus money and, as Maybank explained, the resources are "time-limited." She estimates that the new mental health counselors would be funded for the next three years.

The union's New Deal for CUNY legislation, in fact, calls for more long-term state funding for mental health counselors, in addition to funding free tuition and more full-time faculty.

"Beyond that," Maybank said, "we're going to need some additional resources or ways to make certain that those positions can be made permanent."



Remysell Salas

Dave Sanders

PSC takes on bullying

Veiled negative references to an employee's productivity, increased workload without compensation and isolation from collective work projects are all examples of bullying that happen at CUNY. CUNY – despite its historic mission of inclusion – is not immune from bullying in the workplace.

October is National Bullying Prevention Month. The PSC Anti-bullying Committee has organized a month of virtual events in October and for the rest of 2021 to confront workplace bullying. Join your colleagues and fellow union members to share ideas on how to curtail bullying in the university and how to shine a public light on an issue that is often clouded in secrecy and shame. (For a full list of events, go to www.psc-cuny.org/anti-bullying.)

MONDAY, OCTOBER 4, 6:30 pm | Bullying 101
A session on the costs of bullying at CUNY

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 6:30 pm | Listening Session
A discussion of anti-bullying contract provisions and policy language

WEEK OF OCTOBER 18–22 | Freedom From Bullies Week
A concentrated week of events to highlight workplace bullying

MONDAY, OCTOBER 18, 6:30 pm | Graciano Matos Remembrance Event
Matos, a PSC delegate and a staunch advocate against bullying at CUNY, was committed to changing policy and contract language related to workplace bullying.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 19, 6:30 pm | Personal Story
A City College CLT tells his bullying story.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 6:30 pm | Unity Day
Building solidarity to end bullying at CUNY

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 21, 6:30 pm | PSC Delegate Assembly Presentation
Committee members share information on the PSC's anti-bullying work at the union's monthly Delegate Assembly.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 22, 12:30 pm | Towards a Better Workplace
A lunchtime discussion on a #BullyFreeCUNY

Thursday, OCTOBER 28, All Day | Anti-Bullying Digital Media Action Day
Through coordinated social media, PSC members will share stories, tweet and post about the tactics, effects and costs of workplace bullying.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 6:30 pm | Anti-Bullying Workshop
A discussion on how to handle disagreements

MONDAY, DECEMBER 6, 6:30 pm | Anti-Bullying Workshop
A discussion on communicating in the CUNY workplace

Note: During the last contract negotiation, the PSC won a commitment from CUNY management for a joint labor-management campaign on bullying. To read the agreement, go to psc-cuny.org/joint-anti-bullying-statement.