

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE CUNY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

DR. BARBARA BOWEN, PRESIDENT, PSC/CUNY

November 24, 2014

Good afternoon. I am here to speak to Calendar Item 3.F., the University Budget Request. An essential component of the current and future CUNY budgets must be funds to support collectively bargained raises and improvements in vital working conditions. You will hear from scores of CUNY faculty and staff today, and many more who would like to have spoken were teaching or doing other important work. We will all speak to particular needs in a new contract, but I hope you hear a single, collective message: CUNY is in crisis because of the University's failure to make an economic offer.

You may not feel the crisis yourselves, but listen to our voices today, and you may begin to understand the urgency felt by faculty, staff and students. You may think that CUNY is okay because we keep working even though we have gone five years without a contractual raise. You may think CUNY is okay because the faculty and staff have such a strong commitment to our students that we don't allow the quality of our work to diminish along with our salaries. You may think CUNY is okay because you heard Chancellor Milliken's speech last week at ABNY on the challenges facing the University, and he never once mentioned the need for a new contract.

I am here to tell you that CUNY is *not* okay. The University is in crisis because the people who make it work are suffering, whatever their position. Research faculty have no time to do research, academic departments are losing faculty because of low salaries, instructors at every level cannot give students the attention they need, professional staff are struggling to live on salaries below the cost of living, remedial instructors teaching full time are being paid part-time wages, and adjuncts working essentially full time at CUNY can end up on food stamps. If that's not a university in crisis, what is?

No one assumes that it is easy to address the political complexities of producing an economic offer for a university that receives funds from both City and State. And no one underestimates the cumulative effect of years of planned disinvestment in CUNY, leaving base budget problems to be addressed in the contract. But a full summer and nearly a semester have passed since serious bargaining began and other contracts were settled. While we appreciate that the chancellor has voiced his support for settling the contract, the 25,000 faculty and staff I represent are demanding action.

It is time for the trustees and the CUNY administration publicly to take on the austerity politics that leave the public sector, and especially public higher education, starved of funds while State surpluses regularly go to corporate tax breaks. There is a \$5.1 billion surplus in Albany right now; that money should be prioritized for reinvestment in public higher education, which has taken a disproportionate share of statewide cuts. As the elected representative of CUNY's miraculous, diverse, idealistic, undervalued faculty and staff, I call on you to produce an economic offer before the end of the semester that will restore our salaries and begin to create working conditions that support us, rather than obstruct us, in doing the work we believe in.