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Dear members of the City Council Higher Education Committee:

Thank you for facilitating this dialogue on Pathways. It is precisely this kind of dialogue and democratic participation that was lacking in the development and implementation of the program. It is notable that for a program that calls for seminal shifts in curriculum - an area primarily of faculty expertise - it is faculty voices that have been shut out. CUNY faculty, however, have spoken loud and clear through governance bodies at all levels on campuses by passing resolutions calling either for an outright repeal of Pathways or a moratorium on it until substantive issues are democratically resolved. Our position has most strongly been expressed in the 92% vote of No Confidence in the referendum on Pathways last May. Our sustained resistance is based on the fact that we view Pathways to be detrimental to the interests of our students.

Will Pathways improve graduation rates? The primary reason for low graduation rates in CUNY has to do with the demographics of our student body. Our largely immigrant and working class students have to negotiate work schedules and family responsibilities while attending college. Based on conversations with my students over the years, I know that the decision to drop out is always an extremely difficult one. Their decision has little to do with curriculum; it is almost always a question of time and financial resources. How will a program like Pathways that streamlines curriculum help with this core problem? It might be argued that the smoothening of the transfer process - the ostensible rationale for Pathways - will motivate students to complete their degrees in spite of other difficulties. This is, however, a speculative projection and one that does not address the real reason for student dropout. Further, the transfer problem in CUNY, a very real issue, can be addressed without major curriculum overhaul.

While we do not know whether Pathways will have an impact on graduation rates, we do know that it will vastly diminish the value of a CUNY degree. The reduction in the general education curriculum ensures that our students are denied a well-rounded liberal arts education. It means students could graduate with a bachelor's degree without ever having taken a literature or a history course or without any training in a foreign language or reduced time in Science labs. Our students are denied the intrinsic value of a good education. We also know that for higher levels of the job market both in the public and private sectors, employers seek candidates with well-honed analytical skills, something acquired through a well-rounded and not a vocationalized education. Pathways ensures that our students will be equipped to fill only a certain stratum of the job market. It is deeply unjust to promise the working class, immigrant and minority population of our city an education, only to have it equip them for the lower rungs of the market. Pathways works against CUNY's admirable mission to provide quality education to the underprivileged population of the city. As educators we know that our students are capable and deserving of the best. We do need to engage with the question of graduation rates, but let us not try to do that at the expense of providing the best possible education to our students.