

TESTIMONY OF ALEXANDRA JUHASZ, CHAIR OF FILM DEPARTMENT, BROOKLYN COLLEGE

BEFORE THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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I came to Brooklyn College one year ago after 25 years working at small, private, liberal arts colleges. I was thrilled to make this move when I was hired as an outside chair of the Brooklyn College Film Department in the Fall of 2016. I made an active, educated career choice to come to CUNY at perhaps the pinnacle of my academic career for three clear reasons:

1) I believe in the mission of CUNY, providing the highest quality academic instruction for the poor and working class residents of the city of New York at a low cost; that is to say CUNY as a class mobility engine;

2) I was honored to work with the unimaginably diverse, motivated, and deserving students who benefit daily and across their lives from this excellent education; and,

3) because of the superb quality of my peers within the system and the impressive work that is and has been generated by CUNY faculty.

While all of these motivators have proven to be true—and I am proud to work with my students and colleagues every day—arriving at Brooklyn College at the height of my career and also at what might be its lowest moment of state and city support in decades, has been utterly disturbing, actually downright shocking, particularly as seen from my vantage as a newcomer.

I'm sure that others will observe how a decimated budget radically affects the morale of staff, faculty, and students by making Brooklyn College into a dirty, smelly, often broken place to work where many of its core functions are not operating at normal levels. So, I will speak instead specifically as a highly productive senior faculty member and chair looking in from the outside. I felt upon arrival to this great institution a deep and chilling, utterly noticeable curtailing of my scholarly and administrative ability because of the gutting of support for what I understand to be the baseline undergirding of my profession: the funding of research, travel, departmental and inter-departmental interaction, scholarly and institutional innovation, and day-to-day teaching.

When I think about my year at Brooklyn College, I am moved to the point of tears about how much is done for what would be a pittance in my previous places of employment. How my staff and fellow faculty members and students keep the amazing work of this institution alive with ever less because we all know how important CUNY is. But if you asked me now will I stay? Honestly, I'm on the fence. At the

top of my game, entirely committed to working with our students and faculty and in this great city and state, why would I do my work in an environment where so much of my effort is spent not on teaching or research, professional interactions or institutional innovation, but instead on maintenance, morale, and working against the mediocrity born of disinvestment?

The Governor's signature on the MOE and other legislation that would begin to reverse the State's disinvestment is one small step in retaining me, and the many others like me who continue against all odds to make CUNY great. Without such signs of support, CUNY is bound to disintegrate not just in what we already feel daily in its operational infrastructure but perhaps in its greatest strength: the committed labor, intelligence, teaching, and scholarly productivity of its faculty and hence the students and community we seek to serve.