

**TESTIMONY OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY
BOARD OF TRUSTEES HEARING, NOVEMBER 21, 2011**

Calendar Items 3.A, 3.E and 5.A

Delivered by Dr. Barbara Bowen, President

Good afternoon. As president of the Professional Staff Congress, I am offering testimony on behalf of the 25,000 faculty and staff members the union represents. Other PSC officers will speak in more detail about specific calendar items; I will outline our major positions on items 3.A, 3.E and 5.A.

We strongly support the University's budget request, particularly its inclusion of funds for adjunct health insurance. On September 26, as 500 faculty and staff demonstrated outside this room to demand adjunct health insurance, and two thousand more signed petitions and letters, Chancellor Goldstein announced that funds for adjunct health insurance would be included in the University's budget request. That announcement represented the most significant shift in CUNY's approach to adjunct health insurance since the benefit was first negotiated, 25 years ago. Thank you for responding to our demand and recognizing that health insurance for adjuncts who teach multiple courses should be considered a normal part of the budget, just as health insurance for full-timers is. Adjuncts are not a marginal, occasional or *adjunct* part of CUNY's workforce; they teach half of the University's courses. They are a core part of the faculty. It's true that the net number of full-time faculty has risen substantially in the last ten years, but the number of adjuncts—and their share of the teaching—has risen even faster. There are now 13,000 adjuncts at CUNY. Those who make the largest commitment to CUNY should be provided with access to full health insurance, just as qualifying adjuncts are at SUNY.

The PSC appreciates how important a statement CUNY's request for adjunct health funding is, and we are grateful for the efforts by Chancellor Goldstein and many others that lie behind that request. At the same time, we recognize that the inclusion of these funds in the budget request is only the first step in securing permanent, stable health insurance for eligible adjuncts. The next step is to make sure it is funded by the State. On behalf of the entire PSC—full-time employees and well as part-time—I urge you to maintain the commitment to adjunct health insurance funding throughout budget negotiations. The pressure on all public institutions to accept reductions in funding this year will be intense; faculty and staff are here in numbers to urge you not to waver on adjunct health insurance. For many of the 1800 people whose insurance is now at risk, this is a matter of life and death.

Further, I ask you to ensure that the benefit is fully funded. Adjuncts who are eligible for health insurance must become full participating members of the plan to which they are transferred. The transfer of adjuncts onto a State or City health plan is a pathbreaking structural change; it's important that we be able to do it right.

While the union supports the University's budget request, we firmly oppose two other issues before the Board. First, the revisions of the University Bylaws: despite some important changes to the original document, the overall effect of the changes will be to increase the power of the chancellor and eliminate traditional rights of the faculty. There is a consistent pattern in the revisions of shifting decision-making power to the chancellor and providing little review or transparency. The PSC calls on the Board in the

strongest terms to change at least Articles 11 and 6 before the document goes is submitted to a vote. If allowed to stand, the revisions to these articles will diminish the integrity of the job descriptions for both faculty and staff, while depriving the PSC of any meaningful opportunity to challenge the improper use of titles. Nearly a thousand PSC members sent messages within a single day to the Board when these and other changes were first proposed; I ask you to take seriously the level of opposition that outpouring represents and change at least these two articles.

The second issue on which we register strong opposition is the resolution for a *five-year schedule* of tuition increases. There can be no doubt that CUNY needs more funds. The PSC has advocated tirelessly for increased funding for CUNY, putting thousands of members on the street in Albany and New York, and working closely and effectively with individual legislators on the budget. We have also made funding for public higher education a priority for the statewide teachers' union, NYSUT. Our members, the University's faculty and staff, are on the front lines of the funding crisis: we experience the classes that are too large to teach well, the labs that are too old to do current scientific work, the long lines of students forced to wait for a single counselor, the grossly unfair two-tier labor system, the speed-up as enrollment soars and funding fails to keep pace.

But charging students more in tuition is not the way to solve the University's budget crisis. The only stable basis for funding of this public institution is public funds. Shifting the cost to students—and this *is* a shift of costs—will inevitably mean that some students will be forced to leave, and many more will give up before trying. The idea that financial aid will cover all needs is, unfortunately, a consoling myth. Under current structures, financial aid simply does not cover all of our students. When your family's annual income is below \$30,000 a year, as it is for more than half of CUNY students, a \$300 increase every year for the next five is not trivial. Constant tuition increases, adding up to 26% since fall 2011 for the senior colleges and 33% for the community colleges, have changed CUNY's student population and will change it further.

CUNY has a unique mission, in a unique city. At the center of that mission is making college accessible to populations to whom higher education has traditionally and actively been denied. There are hundreds of colleges that serve students who can afford multi-thousand-dollar tuition; there is only one college founded on the principle of educating the children of the whole people. That principle is compromised as tuition climbs into the \$6,000 range and beyond. CUNY should do better. The PSC will continue to advocate for public funding, and for the fundamental changes in the State budget that would make increased funding possible. We believe that represents the real future of this university.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify, and again, for the bold step of including a request for funds for adjunct health insurance.