

**TESTIMONY OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY:  
MAYOR'S PRELIMINARY 2020 BUDGET**

*Delivered by Dr. Barbara Bowen, President, PSC  
March 7, 2019*

- Thank you, Chairpersons Daniel Dromm (Finance) and Inez Barron (Higher Education), and members of the Council for the opportunity to testify this morning on CUNY's budget needs.
- We are grateful for the Mayor's commitment over his term in office to increase funding for STEM and ASAP programs at the community colleges, and to fund City workers' contracts. At a moment in the state when not all public-sector contracts are being fully funded, that commitment is especially meaningful to the nearly 400,000 City workers and the members of the PSC.
- We are pleased to see a modest increase in Preliminary Budget of \$8.3 million for the CUNY community colleges. But we are concerned that the \$6.8-million cost-savings target, or PEG, will eat up most of this gain.
- Additionally, we are disappointed that the Mayor has zeroed out \$11.8 million in critical programs such as child care services. These should be included in the base budget.
- We applaud the City's commitment to keeping community college tuition affordable and are pleased that CUNY has not had to raise community college tuition for four years. The PSC strongly supports freezing tuition and takes the position that CUNY tuition could once again be free, but CUNY needs additional public investment. Resources on the campuses are stretched to the limit, and the only long-term solution is greater investment in this formidable resource for the city.
- With the State's continued austerity budgeting, CUNY was required to settle the last contract through "efficiencies." As a result, the colleges' operating budgets have been cut to the bone, and they are increasingly turning to low-paid, part-time adjuncts to teach most courses. The City could make a significant difference in the economic austerity in the four-year colleges by increasing its investment, as requested by CUNY.
- Under Mayor de Blasio, New York City has leapt ahead in its support for education at the earliest levels of schooling. We in the PSC believe that additional investment in CUNY, the national leader in enabling low-income students to move out of poverty, should be a centerpiece of the Mayor's progressive agenda on education.

## **CUNY's funding is in crisis.**

- We have three critical requests of you and the Council as you negotiate the City budget. CUNY's community and senior colleges need an investment of \$112.8 million in next year's budget to be able to continue providing a quality education to all its students. This includes:
  - \$70 million to cover mandatory cost increases (\$35.1 million), including building rentals, fringe benefits and the negotiated agreement to provide more opportunities for faculty to work with students outside the classroom (\$35 million). Collective bargaining is a normal cost of operation and should be fully funded. Without State and City funding, however, the colleges have been forced to squeeze funds from already strained budgets. One result has been that CUNY is hiring increasing numbers of low-paid adjunct faculty to cover courses.

Last year we joined CUNY in asking for \$35 million to fund the negotiated agreement to reduce annual teaching hours at the community college. The goal of the agreement is to grant fulltime faculty more time to mentor students, support internships and student research, deliver academic advisement and perform research. The contract is being implemented over three years. But without funding to cover the agreement, colleges have had to redirect funds from other purposes resulting in hiring freezes, larger class sizes and service cuts to student services including libraries, writing centers, laboratories and counseling centers. Conditions at the senior colleges are especially bleak.
  - \$32.8 million to cover two decades of inflation in the City's standard senior college contribution. It is past time to increase this modest amount. The investment would repay the City many times over in gains for college completion among New Yorkers who attend CUNY.
  - \$10 million to eliminate the TAP Gap for Associate's degree students attending CUNY comprehensive colleges. We also call on the City Council to join the PSC in urging the New York State Legislature to fix the TAP Gap this year. The TAP Gap is creating a deficit of \$74 million in CUNY senior colleges' operating budgets that will grow to \$86 million next year as tuition rises.
- In addition, CUNY has dealt with *chronic* underfunding and growing enrollments by relying on low-paid, adjunct faculty to cover an increasing share of undergraduate courses. Over 60% of all undergraduate instruction at CUNY senior colleges is now performed by low-paid adjunct faculty. The community colleges have fared somewhat better, as enrollments have leveled off, but community colleges also rely heavily on exploited adjunct labor. Fully 47% of community college courses are taught by adjuncts.

## **Pay Adjuncts Fairly**

- Adjunct lecturers are paid on average \$3,500 per 3-credit course, the equivalent of \$28,000 for an adjunct teaching a full course load. In addition, adjunct work is by nature contingent and irregular.
- Many adjunct PSC members report they live in constant anxiety not knowing whether they will be called back the following semester. They race from campus to campus to cobble together enough courses to earn a minimal living. The result is that CUNY now has college instructors who are low-wage workers, and CUNY students are shortchanged because their instructors do not have time to provide the individual support they need.
- The PSC asks for the Council's support as we work to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement that includes a living wage for adjuncts: \$7,000 per course. Payment of \$7,000 per course would achieve parity with entry-level full-time lecturers at CUNY. In a state and city that believes in wage justice and raised the minimum wage to \$15 per hour, adjunct faculty with advanced degrees who are charged with educating the next generation for good jobs in the City's growing economy deserve the same respect.

## **Fix the TAP Gap**

- Since 2011, the State has required SUNY and CUNY colleges to waive tuition for students receiving state-financed Tuition Assistance Program awards.<sup>1</sup> For each student who receives the maximum TAP award of \$5,000, a CUNY senior college presently loses \$1,730 in revenue that it needs to educate that student. Students with partial TAP awards receive partial tuition waivers. Altogether this revenue gap – the TAP Gap – has created a \$74 million hole in CUNY senior colleges' operating budgets this year. Because the gap grows as tuition increases, CUNY anticipates a loss of \$86 million next year.
- The TAP Gap creates perverse incentives for colleges serving poor, minority and immigrant students, because those serving more low-income students lose more revenue. It is a cruel irony that when undocumented immigrant students finally win the right to receive state financial aid with passage of the NY Dream Act, the CUNY senior colleges, which serve most of these students, will lose operating revenues needed to support their education because they receive TAP.

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<sup>1</sup> The state does not require private or for-profit colleges to provide tuition waivers to students receiving TAP. The TAP Gap does not affect CUNY community colleges, because community college tuition does not exceed the \$5,000 maximum Tap award.

- It is only right that New York City fund \$10 million to cover the TAP Gap for Associate's degree students attending the comprehensive colleges. The City is responsible for investment in students seeking an Associate's degree, regardless of whether they attend a community college, as most do, or a comprehensive college that includes both B.A. and A.A. degree programs.
- We also call on the City Council to make clear to Governor Cuomo and the Legislature that they must fix the TAP Gap this year. It is bad policy to build a structural deficit into a student aid program. All CUNY students would see the benefit of the elimination of the TAP Gap.

**Students need other supports.**

- We urge the Council to increase funding to support students' other needs, including the proposal to fund MetroCards, childcare services and other needs.

Finally, we support CUNY's capital budget request to maintain current buildings, provide facilities with advanced equipment and technology needed to teach effectively, and expand capacity. CUNY has added 40,000 students over the last decade.

The 30,000 members of the PSC chose to work at CUNY and stay at CUNY because we believe in CUNY students and CUNY's mission. But CUNY will not be sustainable if it continues to experience structural deficits, poor facilities and reliance on low-wage workers for most of the teaching. We ask the Council to take the lead in charting a new course for CUNY, one made possible by adequate investment. A progressive city, a city of immigrants, a great city, should do no less.