

**TESTIMONY OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY
BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
HEARING ON THE MAYOR’S EXECUTIVE BUDGET FISCAL YEAR 2022**

MAY 25, 2021

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Thank you, Chair Dromm and members of the Finance Committee for the opportunity to testify today. We would like to focus on two areas of the Mayor’s Executive Budget: restoring funds to CUNY’s budget and imploring you to recognize this is the moment to invest in New York City’s public higher education system.

Necessary Restorations

We are baffled that the Mayor’s Executive Budget calls for deep cuts to CUNY. Cutting CUNY at this delicate moment in our city’s recovery would be disastrous. There is no lasting economic recovery without a strong and well-funded CUNY system. The Mayor’s budget cuts CUNY during a crisis while close to a half-million New Yorkers, including those hardest hit by the pandemic, rely on CUNY for a college degree or further education.

In 2017, a team of economists at Stanford found that “CUNY propels almost six times as many low-income students into the middle class and beyond as all eight Ivy League campuses, plus Duke, M.I.T., Stanford and Chicago, combined.” Further, Black and brown New Yorkers, the poor, and the working class, those who have been hit hardest by the pandemic, are exactly the communities for whom CUNY is a lifeline. 83% of CUNY students are people of color and 35% are foreign-born. Half of CUNY students come from households with incomes below \$30,000. 64% of CUNY graduates are people of color. Unfortunately, CUNY cannot maximize its benefit to our communities because it suffers from unsustainable, chronic underfunding—and now more cuts are threatened this year.

A crisis is no time to cut an institution that supports the most vulnerable. There are three areas of the CUNY budget that must be restored.

- 1. \$67 Million to eliminate cuts proposed in the Mayor’s Preliminary Budget and maintained in the Mayor’s Executive Budget**
 - a. \$1.2 Million proposed cut to Apple Corps

Apple Corps students explore public service, leadership, and justice and equity issues in policing and community relations. The program provides opportunities for service and internships in NYC communities; students participate in anti-racism, implicit bias, safe zone, and mental health support training.

b. \$5 Million proposed hiring restrictions

c. \$19.6 Million proposed cut - hiring and attrition management

- i. Up to 175 positions eliminated
- ii. Over the past two years, CUNY averaged a loss of 75 staff positions through attrition. Further attrition, and the accompanied hiring freeze, would come at a time when the University will be transitioning back to in-person courses. The reduction would put more pressure on the remaining employees and harm the quality of services, as the University prepares to return in the fall.
- iii. The proposed cut in personnel comes on top of the non-reappointment of 2,000 adjuncts, many at the community colleges. CUNY is already desperately understaffed and over-reliant on part-time employees. Any further reduction will make it nearly impossible to restore course offerings to pre-pandemic levels.

d. \$19 Million proposed cut to IT/ Telecom

e. \$4 Million proposed cut in OTPS

f. \$7.6 Million proposed cut for Fringe Adjustments

g. \$8 Million proposed programmatic savings

- i. Savings by agency documents show that programmatic savings are cuts to 'non-core' programs such as remediation classes. These were already cut in FY21.
- ii. Remediation prepares the most disadvantaged students for college-level course work.

h. \$2.9 Million cut to CUNY Tutor Corps

- i. Employment in occupations related to STEM—science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—is projected to grow steadily and provide high starting salaries. Not all NYC students, however, have equal access to high-quality STEM education. Tutoring has the potential to ameliorate some of the existing inequalities in STEM education and the STEM field.

ii. The CUNY Tutor Corps focuses on Math and Computer Science and brings students from CUNY colleges into middle and high school classrooms, helping them become highly effective tutors and teaching assistants.

iii. Tutor Corps is a partnership between CUNY, the Office of the Mayor, and the New York City Department of Education (DOE).

2. \$3 Million to reinvest in one-time FY21 budget restorations from the Council

a. \$510 Thousand for childcare.

i. As CUNY reopens, we must remember that our students cannot come back to campus without viable childcare options. Research shows that more than one in four college students are parents with dependent children, and over 40 percent are the children of single mothers. Childcare is a national crisis. The City must not worsen the struggle for already disadvantaged young parents, especially young mothers of color, who are most likely to have dependent children.

b. \$1 Million for food insecurity programs

i. Food insecurity has increased since the onset of the pandemic. These funds support food pantry efforts across CUNY's campuses and are still necessary.

c. \$1.7 Million for remediation

i. 80% of freshman in associate degree programs need at least one remediation course, according to the CUNY Office of Research and Evaluation.

ii. This program improves academic outcomes through scaling co-requisite Mathematics and English for approximately 9,000 students.

3. **Other programs \$24.7 Million:** We agree with other CUNY funding priorities that are critical to CUNY students, faculty and staff that include: the Peter F. Vallone Scholarship (\$15.8 million), IOI Citizenship NOW (\$3 million), Technology Incubators, (\$1.2 million) CUNY Diversity Incubator (\$425,000), Veterans Services (\$225,000) and programs at various campuses (\$4.1).

The Time for Investment is Now

We must think strategically about the future of our city and *invest* in CUNY. The future of CUNY is the future of New York. A report by the City Comptroller found that in 2019, CUNY graduates provided more than \$4.2 billion in income taxes to New York State. Funding CUNY is literally an investment in New York's economy.

CUNY students have suffered deeply in the pandemic and now is the time for a radical investment in CUNY that cuts against racist austerity; the kind of action that the Mayor and this council have stood up for. CUNY received federal monies to stabilize its budget, not give the Mayor an excuse to cut it. These funds are an opportunity to reimagine a stronger CUNY where students will help lead the city out of the financial crisis created by the pandemic.

1. \$20.4 Million for new investment in a strong public higher education system in New York City - A New Deal for CUNY

A \$20.4M City investment in a New Deal for CUNY would help establish appropriate ratios of mental health counselors and academic advisors to students and promote a high-quality experience for CUNY students. CUNY must hire full-time mental health counselors to meet the International Accreditation of Counseling Services ratio of 1:1,000 counselors per students. CUNY now averages one mental health counselor to 2,700 students.

Quality advising has a documented impact on improving graduation rates, but [many departments do not have enough advisors to assist students](#). The student-to-advisor ratios are as high as 1,500:1 at some CUNY colleges.

2. Approximately \$40 Million, as requested by the CUNY administration, to provide revenue support to offset the loss in tuition from enrollment declines resulting from the pandemic.

- a. Community college enrollment will rebound; allowing the community colleges to be hamstrung because of a temporary drop in enrollment will leave them unable to serve New Yorkers for many years to come.
- b. The state budget made a commitment to hold CUNY harmless for 98% of pandemic-related enrollment declines. We ask the City to do its part to support CUNY's community colleges as they struggle to help hard-hit students survive the pandemic.

3. Fulfill CUNY's Capital Budget Request of \$21.6 million

Everything from upgrades to HVAC systems at BMCC, bathroom repairs at Hostos, or ADA compliance across all campuses, the full CUNY capital budget request should be fulfilled to begin addressing decades of deferred maintenance.

Thank you for your commitment to public higher education. It has been a challenging time for our 30,000 members, but we assure you that our commitment to our students and public higher education has only strengthened. PSC will fight for our students and CUNY's mission. But without the support for CUNY outlined above in next year's budget, New York City will not truly recover from the inequalities so clearly exposed by COVID.