

Testimony of Justyna Jagielnicka, Licensed Mental Health Counselor
New York City Council's Preliminary Budget Hearing - Higher Education

MARCH 22, 2022 CITY COUNCIL

HIGHER ED COMMITTEE

Good afternoon Chairman Dinowitz and esteemed members of the Committee on Higher Education,

My name is Justyna Jagielnicka, I am a CUNY Alumna and I currently work at the Borough of Manhattan Community College as a College Discovery Program Counselor. I am a licensed mental health professional and it is because of my CUNY education I, an immigrant woman who decades ago did not speak English, has reached a middle class status. I am very proud to work in CUNY where, I get to support students on their educational journeys. So as a former CUNY student, former Academic Advisor and a current counselor in an opportunity program I know first-hand how investing in CUNY means investing in our students.

Today I am asking the committee to ensure we provide CUNY student access to well-funded academic programs and services they need to graduate!

I do not have to convince the committee how in the post-pandemic world mental health services in CUNY are absolutely critical. It is impossible for students to have academic health without mental health. It can be very challenging to excel in school while dealing with: depression, anxiety, and/or relationships problems.

Today I'd like to focus on academic advisement services. For example, every BMCC student has to have access to get advisement in order to register for classes. But academic advisors do so much more than advising students on the selection of courses to complete their degree. They are a hub of all essential information: how to enroll in classes, apply for financial aid and to generally navigate the CUNY system which is especially important for individuals who are a first-generation college students. Academic advisors play a crucial role: they de-mistify the higher ed experience so students can take advantage of all the resources CUNY has to offer.

For example, academic advisors help re-admit students file paperwork, complete financial aid appeals, provide pre-law and transfer advisement. Academic advisors help students understand institutional policies and procedures, teach students to create academic schedules that allow them to balance academic and personal responsibilities.

Academic advisors are the students' greatest allies and supporters. Those professional relationships are extremely important and, in my experience, they can last a lifetime.

Access to academic advisors means CUNY students can register for classes in a timely fashion, it reduces probability of taking the wrong courses. Academic advisors provide services to students who are on

academic probation; those services reduce the likelihood of getting dismissed from college. Cutting funding for those crucial academic services can be very detrimental to students' experience in CUNY and delay a student's graduation.

If "it takes a village to raise a child" then it takes a 'CUNY village' to help a student graduate. For poor New Yorkers the decision to go to college can both stressful and exciting. Many CUNY first year students are committed to their academic career but need remedial services offered by CUNY Start and CLIP programs to succeed. Without well-funded programs to provide these services, student cannot advance to credit bearing courses needed for their majors. Without accessible academic advisement services students are less likely to graduate and transfer to a senior college. Our communities, and local economy, need students to graduate on time.

I urge you to recognize the need to fund academic support services in CUNY. THANK YOU!