

**PSC MUST PREPARE FOR STRIKE-READINESS
AS PART OF THE FIGHT TO SAVE LIVES, SAVE JOBS, SAVE CUNY**

Whereas:

The COVID-19 epidemic and the resulting economic collapse have hit CUNY especially hard. By some measures, including the number of deaths, CUNY has been hit harder than any university in the country. CUNY has suffered because of the University's location in an epicenter of the virus and the savage inequality of a system that led to disproportionately high rates of illness and death among the poor and people of color. But CUNY has also suffered because the current crisis has compounded a history of planned poverty for the institution and racist disinvestment in the students we teach. Worse, the current CUNY administration, under Chancellor Matos Rodríguez, has not only failed to take a stand for the investment CUNY needs, but has needlessly damaged labor relations and the University itself by imposing cuts before they were required, failing to spend the CARES Act money to keep adjuncts on payroll, allowing colleges to violate legal agreements with the PSC, stonewalling on simple information requests, and refusing even the basic courtesy of notifying employees when CUNY decided to violate our contract and not pay our raises.

The PSC refuses to normalize the crisis. Deep budget cuts and increased fiscal austerity for CUNY are not inevitable. They represent choices, decisions about whose lives matter. The multi-billion-dollar deficits in the New York State budget, and to a lesser extent the City budget, represent a choice to protect the ultra-rich and their interests by refusing to restore a higher level of taxation and deciding instead to shift costs and pain onto public-sector workers, including PSC members, and onto the middle-class, the working-class, the poor and especially communities of color.

The PSC has been central to a state-wide revenue coalition seeking expanded taxes on the richest New Yorkers, restoring a level of taxation that was in place under previous governors. The PSC has also worked with our allies in CUNY Rising to introduce comprehensive legislation, "A New Deal for CUNY," that would move CUNY toward full funding and free tuition. The legislation, which will be introduced by legislators in December 2020, provides for a five-year plan to reach free undergraduate tuition, an increase of 5,000 new full-time faculty positions, statutory parity for part-time faculty, additional mental health counselors and other staff, and multi-year capital funding.

The PSC started to campaign for the protection of our members and CUNY students even before the virus hit New York. In February, the union demanded that CUNY management prepare for a pandemic, protect the most vulnerable workers, and repair campus bathrooms and labs that lacked even running water. In early March, PSC pressure pushed management to move all classes off campus. The union then increased the pressure and organized mass member action, pushing hard until non-classroom faculty and professional staff received equal treatment and were permitted to work remotely.

Throughout the spring and summer the PSC mobilized thousands of members in car caravans, street demonstrations, online hearings and more in "the summer of struggle." The union also used all lawful tactics available—media campaigns, op-eds, litigation, grievances, impact-bargaining, petitions, legislative support, protest rallies, marches, a 24-hour online rally, mass meetings, coalitional work with other unions and community groups—to pressure CUNY to keep workplaces safe, protect jobs and protect members' rights.

Many of these actions worked. Classes and other work by PSC members remained remote through the spring and fall semesters; legal action prevented several colleges from resuming in-person classes when it was unsafe to do so; a temporary restraining order forced Hunter College to install HEPA filters; union pressure forced CUNY to reinstate hundreds of adjuncts who had been laid off in the spring; negotiations protected annual leave for thousands of professional staff, created an extension of the tenure clock and more.

While many of the union's actions have been successful, they have not yet been enough to address the magnitude of the crisis we face—and, critically, to prevail against the additional pressures we anticipate:

- Governor Cuomo has “withheld” 20% of CUNY’s allocation from New York State every month, starting in June. If the withholding is allowed to become a permanent part of the CUNY budget, it will have a devastating impact on both senior and community college funding.
- The CUNY administration, already an outlier nationally in its reliance on adjunct labor, exploited the adjunct system and treated its most vulnerable workers as disposable at the height of a pandemic. Despite a major union lawsuit, thousands of messages from PSC members and pressure from New York State legislators and members of the U.S. Congress, CUNY management refused to spend CARES Act money to keep employees on payroll and laid off nearly 3,000 adjuncts at the end of the spring term, only 660 of whom have been reinstated.
- The Matos Rodríguez administration has taken the position that the union does not have the right to bring in an independent safety inspector to verify that buildings are safe before reopening.
- Academic departments have been forced by college administrations to increase the size of classes that are already too large, an action that increases faculty workload, in effect decreases pay, and sabotages the education of CUNY students.
- The University administration’s hiring freezes, layoffs and uncompensated transition to remote work have dramatically increased workloads of professional staff, non-classroom faculty, and classroom faculty, both part-time and full-time.
- The Matos Rodríguez administration violated an agreement signed with the PSC to prioritize protection of adjuncts on health insurance and those eligible for three-year appointments when “non-reappointment” decisions were made in the spring. Medgar Evers College was allowed to block the reappointment of every adjunct eligible for a new three-year appointment.
- The Graduate Center has refused to use collectively bargained funds to enable graduate students without health insurance to join the graduate employee health insurance plan.
- The administration’s acceptance of budget cuts has already threatened many of the programs and facilities that most support CUNY’s diversity, including ethnic and gender studies programs and opportunity programs such as SEEK.
- And now the CUNY administration has violated the basic responsibility of an employer to employees by imposing a “delay” of unspecified length on implementation of the 2% across-the-board salary increase due November 15. The delay was imposed without any commitment about when—or if—the money would be paid back and without even the rudimentary respect of a notice to employees.

Although the PSC has contested every one of these actions and has been among the most aggressive union locals nationally in the current crisis, many of the remedies provided by legislative, legal and grievance campaigns are uncertain and slow. Worse, the economic crisis provoked by the pandemic will

not end quickly, even if the pandemic is halted by a vaccine. The impact of the economic crisis on CUNY may reach new levels of emergency this winter and spring.

The PSC needs to be prepared for a new level of emergency in 2021. CUNY has come under greater attack than most other public universities in the pandemic, and the current CUNY administration has shown that they will not defend the faculty and staff. We need to anticipate two primary threats in 2021: a premature demand for a return to on-campus work, especially by professional staff; and massive budget cuts that could lead CUNY to lay off more adjuncts, impose further delays in salary, or, at an extreme, invoke the policies of retrenchment. The array of tactics the PSC has used so far may not be enough to prevail against these CUNY-wide threats. The union cannot wait until these emergencies are upon us to begin preparations in response. We must prepare now.

The PSC needs to be strike-ready. While the union will work to involve more members in the urgent campaigns already under way—against increased class size, for workplace safety, and more—the PSC needs to be in a position to consider using labor’s unique power to disrupt business as usual. We need to be in a position to withhold our work. Given the magnitude of the emergencies of safety and funding we may face, and the CUNY administration’s willingness to accept measures that threaten our safety, our jobs and the education of our students, the PSC needs to be ready to put in place rapidly the many factors serious strike-readiness requires. If necessary, the union needs to be ready to take a strike authorization vote, and, if the members decide to do so, conduct a strike.

A strike authorization vote and, if needed, a strike, could create the political leverage needed to prevail against the challenges PSC members may face this spring and after. At its strongest, such action could create enough public and institutional pressure to force CUNY to provide a safe reopening and force those in elected office to reverse the budget decisions that lead to devastating cuts in CUNY funding.

In 2016, after six years without a contract, the PSC embarked on a months-long campaign to gain support for a strike authorization vote and achieved a 92% “yes” vote to authorize the leadership to call a strike. The leverage created by that vote, together with the pressure the PSC and the strong coalition of students and allies the union built, forced CUNY to get New York State to agree to the demand that was blocking our contract—payment of retroactive raises. Earlier this year, when the Hunter College Campus Schools faculty voted by 85% to authorize the union to call a strike when the CUNY administration refused to allow access to an independent safety inspector to inspect their buildings, the PSC was hours away from a strike at the Hunter Campus Schools when CUNY relented and allowed the inspector in. Now, in 2020, the PSC has already begun assessments of members about their willingness to join union actions, including a possible strike authorization, and 3,000 individual organizing conversations have already been conducted.

A strike by the PSC, if strategically planned and strongly supported by our members, would disrupt business as usual. A strike would aim to make the crisis we are experiencing as faculty, staff and students a crisis for CUNY management, New York City and New York State, pressuring them to act. A strike at the country’s largest urban university, demanding that our students’ education not be destroyed, could send a powerful political message across the city and beyond. In a period of increasing strikes nationally and worldwide, a strike—if strongly supported by PSC members from every college and every position—could be an important galvanizing event. And while a strike would necessarily disrupt our students’ lives, it could also be an unforgettable education in itself—seeing people in struggle for safety, against racist austerity, for public education.

A strike of public-sector workers in New York State would carry significant risks because it is prohibited by law. Even though preparation for strike-readiness is not a strike, being strike-ready means preparing for the risks as well as assessing the potential gains of an actual strike. Preparation would involve listening to members in every job title, at every level of salary and job security, and holding honest conversations, one by one. It would involve careful work with the union's chapter leadership to learn the concerns and capacities of members. It would involve setting benchmarks for measurements of readiness and meeting those benchmarks before moving forward. It would involve creating structures, including commitments for voluntary deduction of dues, to protect the union's financial health in the event that a strike occurred and financial penalties were imposed. It would involve consolidating the strong relationships PSC has created with affiliates and gaining the labor support needed for a job action. It would involve systematically talking to community members in the communities CUNY serves and explaining the urgency of job action. And, critically important, it would involve building on the serious work PSC activists have done over several years with students to discuss and create support for a strike.

Therefore be it resolved:

That the PSC's elected leadership and activists, starting at the chapter level, work together to involve more members in the issue-campaigns currently under way—to make workplaces safe, to reduce class size, to fight back against higher workloads, to demand new revenue from Albany, to fight racism, to fight workplace bullying.

That these efforts actively involve members from all job titles, rank-and-file organizers, part-time liaisons, active committees, coalitions, and affinity groups, recognizing that respect for true diversity across race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, age, disability, nationality, job title, experience, and other factors strengthens our collective analysis and capacity to fight for our demands and to build the solidarity within and beyond our membership.

That the PSC continue to pursue litigation, grievances, collective action, impact-bargaining, health and safety activism, legislative action, chapter campaigns, coalition-building and all other lawful means of combating the austerity conditions and contract violations that have multiplied during the pandemic.

That, in order to develop the power the union needs in the current crisis, the PSC systematically assess and seek to build support among the members for strike readiness, including working toward 100% membership among all titles, and drawing on consultation with chapter chairs and other elected leaders, and facilitating member-led strike-readiness committees to build organizing capacity, assess and solicit member input and demands, and encourage cross-title solidarity between full-time and adjunct faculty, HEOs, CLTs, and CETs on said committees; and that the Executive Council allocate the necessary funding within the parameters of the adopted budget.

That the PSC also accelerate its work to build support for our campaign of strike-readiness and strike support among CUNY students, our labor affiliates at the city, state and national unions, among the unions that represent members at CUNY, and among labor and community allies; and that the Executive Council allocate the necessary funding within the parameters of the adopted budget.

That the Executive Council prioritize the necessary funding within the budget to support the activation of strike-readiness committees on every campus.

That the PSC work with each chapter chair and chapter executive committee to engage 50 or more volunteer member-activists at each college, building on the work that many members have already

begun, with the goal of completing 10,000 organizing conversations before the start of the spring semester.

That the PSC leadership send this resolution to all members, affiliates and coalition partners, and that the union build on our current media campaigns to develop a public campaign on why PSC members are preparing for strike-readiness, urging the public to support us as we take a stand against the destruction of public services and for educational, economic and racial justice.