



TESTIMONY OF DR. JAMES DAVIS  
PRESIDENT, PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY  
New York City Council Preliminary FY26 Budget Hearing - Higher Education  
March 13, 2025

Good afternoon, Chairs Dinowitz and Brannan and Council members. On behalf of the 30,000 faculty and staff represented by PSC/CUNY, thank you for your continued advocacy on behalf of the City University of New York. The Council's consistent support has helped stem the tide.

These investments are helping CUNY to serve its growing student body; since November 2024 enrollment has risen 3%. This includes a 6% increase at the community colleges and 4% in new graduate students.<sup>1</sup> And as I said at last year's Council Preliminary Budget Hearing, CUNY no longer faces an enrollment crisis so much as a crisis of student retention and understaffing. These problems are deeply related. Students stay enrolled when they have the support they need from faculty and staff. To continue supporting our students and the upward mobility of the city workforce, CUNY's community colleges need your continued investment.

**Challenge the national threat to public higher education**

I cannot speak about the Mayor's executive budget without first addressing the assault on federal agencies and services now taking place, including programs on which our members and students rely.

On Wednesday evening, the Trump Administration cut the Department of Education by 1,300 employees, after offering early retirement to an additional 600, and following an attempt to cut

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<sup>1</sup> [CUNY Chancellor Matos Rodríguez Announces Second Consecutive Enrollment Increase at 2024 State of the University – The City University of New York](#)

two teacher preparatory programs, which has been so far prevented by the courts.<sup>2</sup> The Trump Administration is determined to use higher education as the wedge to divide Americans on everything from free speech to diversity and equity to research. Life-saving medical studies are grinding to a halt, and universities are targeted for draconian cuts. The thinnest of pretexts have been used to justify these efforts, which are really attacks on knowledge itself, on the project to create an educated citizenry. Just last night, for example, I learned that one of CUNY's most prominent Public Health experts had an NIH-funded grant to research vaccine hesitancy canceled. This casualty of the Project 2025 approach to medical and health research not only harms the individual faculty and students in the lab, it threatens to set us back decades in the quest for safety and medical progress. Please your position as elected officials to advocate to preserve our research funding.

Our students also have a target on their backs. Nearly one in three CUNY students was born in another country, and some are undocumented. The overtures Mayor Adams has made to Immigration and Customs Enforcement seeking entry to sensitive locations, including our schools, has intensified the anxiety. Faculty have reported students are sometimes failing to show up to class when reports of seeing ICE circulate through their neighborhood. Federal authorities unlawfully detained Mahmoud Khalil last week, a former Columbia student protester, despite his status as a legal permanent resident with a green card, and without charging him with a crime. His attempted deportation demonstrates that members of our campus communities are not safe in their academic and career pursuits. As Higher Education Committee members, you must do everything you can to safeguard civil liberties and constitutional rights in this precarious moment.

### **PSC request for Fiscal Year 2026**

Our members are committed to helping students achieve their full potential. But there are simply not enough faculty and staff on our campuses to ensure students get the attention they deserve and the classes they need. Our request of **\$140 million** is laid out below. We ask you to support this request in addition to the items prioritized by Speaker Adams in her response to the Mayor's preliminary executive budget.

PSC members can't effectively educate and support students in a chronically under-funded system. While Governor Hochul's executive budget continues to increase support for public higher education, and Speaker Adams proposes baselining funds for CUNY Reconnect, Mayor Adams' FY26 budget is, at best, flat after years of cuts.

- Restorations: The Mayor's Preliminary FY26 Budget fails to restore the \$95 million taken away since the beginning of his term. We urge this council to put back what was lost in several rounds of PEGs. We applaud the Council's restoration of \$15 million during the last budget cycle. We must restore more to help bring back faculty and staff lost during COVID and better serve our students. (\$80M)

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/mar/11/trump-administration-teacher-training-blocked>

- We applaud the Council's request to baseline funds for CUNY Reconnect with \$8.8 million to continue the program and another \$2.9 million for its expansion. CUNY Reconnect, successfully brought back over 47,000 CUNY students since its pilot in 2022-2023.<sup>3</sup> (\$11.7 million)
- The Mayor's Preliminary Budget leaves ASAP funding flat. Not fully funding this program is a lost opportunity to improve retention and forces tough choices as enrollment grows. Our proposed \$35.5 million ASAP-for-all model would provide students with academic support in CUNY's most successful and nationally recognized program. ASAP's system of full financial aid, robust wraparound services, and high-contact advising leads to a graduation rate twice that of non-ASAP students. That's what the college experience should be for every CUNY student, and we need more funding to get us closer to that goal. Unfortunately, right now, we are eroding ASAP instead. At Borough of Manhattan Community College, ASAP funding for textbooks has dropped from \$150 per student per semester to \$60 per student per semester. As students continue to return to CUNY we must not force our colleges to spread resources thinner. (\$35.5 million)
- Advisors: We agree with the CUNY administration. We need a more diverse pool of advisors and too many of our campuses are understaffed. We support CUNY's request for \$2.9 million for more academic advisors and \$9.1 million to expand ACE - the senior college version of ASAP. According to CUNY, "The most recent ACE freshmen cohort admitted to John Jay College realized a four-year graduation rate of 60 percent vs. 41 percent for a matched comparison group of non-ACE students, and the first transfer cohort at Lehman College realized a two-year graduation rate of 61 percent vs. 30 percent for a matched comparison group of non-ACE students. These effects are so large that they actually reduce the average cost per graduate by about 13 percent." (\$12 million)
- Metrocards: A key component to ASAP's success is the allocation of a free metrocard to participating students. We regularly hear from students, faculty and staff that too many students do not make it to class or risk punishment when they evade a fare because they do not have the funds available to commute to campus. We support the Administration's \$500,000 pilot program to provide metrocards, but urge it be funded for \$1 million. (\$1 million)
- Supporting public safety with more health professionals: The Governor, Mayor and Progressive Caucus have plans to address the shortage of healthcare and mental health professionals. They'll all need CUNY to succeed.
  - CUNY is essential to building out networks of nurses, social workers, mental health counselors, addiction services and others needed to help stabilize the city's social safety net. CUNY graduates approximately half of the city's nurses each year, there are hundreds of students from the Silberman School of Social Work, CUNY has a

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<sup>3</sup> Speaker Adrienne Adams, State of the City, March 4, 2025

growing medical school, and there are dozens of teaching programs across the University. Governor Hochul has proposed the Opportunity Promise Scholarship Program that would provide 60 free community college credits to older students who can return to CUNY and study in high-demand fields like nursing. And the Progressive Caucus' Crisis to Care proposal would be instrumental to helping the thousands of New Yorkers that are in crisis. But CUNY's community colleges must be fully funded and adequately staffed to receive and graduate more students into the workforce. We support CUNY's FY26 budget request of \$4.2 million to initiate a Nursing Education Fellowship Program, expand the capacity for clinical placements, training and increase enrollment. (\$4.2 million)

- Fund the People's Plan. To ensure our city does not fall back into the cycle of dysfunction, there must be a plan to make the city affordable and invest in long-term public safety solutions that focus on eliminating the obstacles and not criminalization of people in need. The education system has consistently proven to be the best antidote to addressing the crises we face. The People's Plan prioritizes the immediate needs of public safety with investments in mental health and substance abuse programs with the long-term affordability needs of access to education, childcare and housing.

### **Conclusion**

This mayoral administration targeted CUNY for cuts during the pandemic and continued as the pandemic receded. Our community colleges are on the road to recovery, but now face a new threat. It is not an exaggeration to say the new challenges the University faces from Washington are unprecedented in our lifetime. But this council can take action to ensure our great public university not only survives, but thrives. CUNY's enrollment continues to climb toward pre-pandemic figures; this council has worked to turn back years of austerity budgets and we still need you. Students, faculty and staff at CUNY need you to stand with us. Stand with us to defend public higher education from threats from Washington and ensure that CUNY grows, continuing to support the economy, workforce, culture, and civic life of our great city.

**Testimony of**  
**Arthur Cheliotas, President Emeritus**  
**New York Administrative Employees**  
**Local 1180**  
**Communications Workers of America, AFLCIO**



**FY 26 Preliminary Budget Hearing**  
**NY City Council Committee on Higher Education**  
**March 13, 2025**

My name is Arthur Cheliotis, I am the Business Manager and former President of CWA Local 1180 and current Chair of the Labor Advisory Board of the CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies.

SLU's Labor Advisory Board consists of leaders of 22 unions, representing more than half a million workers in New York State.

In 2018, we worked in collaboration with the City Council, State Legislature, the Governor and CUNY officials to create a labor school that builds upon CUNY's long legacy of building economic mobility for New Yorkers and stands side-by-side with its distinguished schools of journalism, law and public health.

The support of the City Council was key to establishing the School of Labor & Urban Studies as the 25th and newest unit of CUNY, and it is the only one specifically dedicated to public service and social justice.

The School provides undergraduate and graduate degree programs that prepare the next generation of labor and community leaders and collaborates with other units of the University to provide a wide range of educational opportunities and career pathways for workers and their families. In these challenging times, no goals could be more worthy.

The members of the Labor Advisory Board are proud of our collective role in establishing the School and helping to ensure its continued success within CUNY, one of the great institutions of higher education.

Given today's tumultuous economic, political and social climate, as well as the increasing interest in and support for unions and working people, the education and opportunities SLU provides have never been more essential.

As you know, this hearing - in fact, this entire budget process – coincides with the planning and implementation of regressive, dangerous policies that threaten to bolster the interests of an ultra-rich few at the expense of workers already frustrated by their inability to achieve the economic security for their families that had been enjoyed by prior generations.

Their frustration is due, in no small part, to the failure to educate workers about the true reasons for their misery and how rich elites manipulate the media, the economy and our political system.

A few sobering statistics:

- In 2021, the top 1% of households had nearly one-third of the country's wealth, while the bottom 50% had only 2.6%.

- This explosion of inequality coincided with an on-going, relentless assault on unions. At their height, unions represented one-third of all U.S. workers. In 2024, that figure has been reduced to 9.9 percent, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- Sadly, this decline has persisted despite the growing popularity of the labor movement. In a 2024 Gallup poll, 71 percent of Americans said they approve of unions, nearly a 60-year high.

It is against this national backdrop of mounting income inequality, declining union membership and increasing union popularity that the Labor Advisory Board urges the Council to continue to support the growth of the CUNY School of Labor & Urban Studies.

The School of Labor and Urban Studies (SLU) traces its roots within CUNY to the Murphy Institute and focuses on expanding higher educational opportunities for workers, developing the next generation of labor and community leaders, and serving the educational needs of the labor movement and the broader community. To accomplish its mission, SLU stands on four foundational pillars:

- 1) **Workforce Development:** Providing educational opportunities for workers while meeting the economic needs of the City and State,
- 2) **Labor Studies:** Offering certificate and degree programs that focus on the study of work, workers, and worker organizations,
- 3) **Urban Studies:** Offering certificate and degree programs that focus on urban problems as well as the policies and practices designed to alleviate those problems,
- 4) **Service to the Community:** Providing public programming; publishing a national journal; developing educational materials; conducting applied research; and offering civic engagement and leadership development programs to the community.

SLU currently enrolls more than 1,700 students, including nearly 600 students in its core academic programs and more than 1,100 students in the workforce development programs it offers, with your support, in collaboration with other CUNY schools.

SLU serves a diverse student population: 61% are women and 81% are persons of color. Enrollments at SLU have grown an average of 10% annually since the School was established in 2018 and 15% annually in the past two years.

The core programs enroll both traditional-age and working-adult students in

undergraduate and graduate programs in Labor Studies and Urban Studies. At the same time, SLU's Worker Education program serves the needs of workers who seek educational programs that will help them advance their careers. SLU prides itself on small classes, a dedicated faculty, pro-active counseling, specialized tutoring, and an array of academic support mechanisms.

**Supplemental funding from the City has been essential to the establishment and growth of the School.**

In FY '26, we ask the Council to support the restoration and enhancement of the Worker Education program that currently enrolls more than 1,100 students from across the City, for a total of \$1.4 million.

We also ask that you help build a CUNY SLU program that, thanks to CM Selvena Brooks-Powers and in partnership with Challenge Charter High School, began in the 2023-2024 academic year and helped bring higher education to Far Rockaway. This innovative collaboration aims to enhance educational opportunities for students, parents, and staff through specialized workshops and certificate programs. The program is currently funded at \$177,000. We are asking to increase that to \$325,000.

Finally, we come to the Council with a proposal to develop a Public Service Training Corps for students in at-risk high schools. This program encourages civic values and community leadership while providing pathways to college and successful careers in public service and social justice advocacy. It is conceived as an alternative to the Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) programs that are currently offered in 3,500 high schools across the country. We believe that the military should not be the only way up and out for high school students from low-income households. Advocating for one's community, equality and democracy is just as powerful an expression of patriotism. We look forward to discussing this proposal with you in the weeks ahead.

The cost of supporting student scholarships and stipends for up to 125 students in five cohorts, one in each borough, is approximately \$2.8 million. Ninety-two percent of the funding for this program will go directly to the students participating in the program.

What we have achieved to date is the fulfillment of a unique and exciting vision that distinguishes the CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies from any other in the nation. Our focus is on the development of the next generation of labor and community leaders, by expanding higher educational opportunities for workers seeking career advancement in the public service as career civil servants, in the non-profit community services sector and in the private sector as advocates in the workplace.

The challenge now is to build on that vision, despite the obstacles that are likely to be placed in our way during the next four years. Thank you for the support you have already provided, and I respectfully urge you to continue your support for the School of Labor Studies and for CUNY systemwide.

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**CUNY SCHOOL OF LABOR & URBAN STUDIES  
LABOR ADVISORY BOARD**

Arthur Cheliotas,  
Chair, SLU Advisory Board, and  
Business Manager, CWA 1180

Mario Cilento, President  
New York State AFL-CIO

Vincent Alvarez, President, New  
York City Central Labor Council,  
AFL-CIO

Kuba Brown, Business Manager/  
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Workers East

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United Auto Workers (UAW)  
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Communications Workers of America  
(CWA) Local 1180

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International Union

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Department Store Union

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Public Employee Federation

Dennis G. Trainor, Vice President  
Communications Workers of America  
(CWA), District 1

Anthony Wells, President  
Social Service Employees Union  
(SSEU), Local 371

## **Testimony of Dainma Martínez**

Student Government Association President, Hostos Community College  
New York City Council Higher Education Budget Hearing  
March 13, 2025

Good afternoon, Council Members. My name is Dainma Martínez, and I am the President of the Student Government Association at Hostos Community College and the University Student Senate Vice Chair for Community Colleges. I am honored to testify today on behalf of my fellow students regarding the devastating impact of the proposed budget cuts to CUNY community colleges.

CUNY is often referred to as the "people's university," and for good reason. It provides countless first-generation, low-income, and minority students, like myself. With access to higher education, economic mobility, and a path to a better future. But Mayor Adams' proposed **\$95.5 million in cuts to CUNY community colleges, including \$10 million from Hostos alone, would threaten that mission.**

These cuts would result in larger class sizes, fewer course offerings, and a reduction in essential student services like academic advising, mental health support, and career counseling. Many of us rely on these resources to navigate college while juggling jobs, family responsibilities, and financial hardships.

I am a first-generation college student, a student leader, and someone who has faced many of the struggles that CUNY students endure daily. I know firsthand how critical programs like **tutoring centers, emergency grants, and food pantries** are to student success. Slashing funding would force students to make impossible choices—choosing between attending school and working extra shifts just to afford basic necessities.

At Hostos, a college that serves a predominantly Black and Latinx student body, these cuts are more than just numbers. **They are a direct attack on the success of historically marginalized communities.** Many of my peers already face systemic barriers to education, and these budget reductions would only widen the gap between opportunity and access.

New York City cannot afford to balance its budget at the expense of its students. Investing in CUNY is an investment in the future of this city. We are not asking for a favor, we are demanding that you uphold CUNY's promise of accessible, high-quality education.

On behalf of the students of Hostos and all of CUNY, I urge this Council to **reject these cuts and fight for full funding for our community colleges.** Our future and the future of New York City depends on it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



New York Lawyers for the Public Interest  
151 West 30th Street, 11th Floor  
New York, NY 10001-4017

**Testimony  
of  
Madison Pinckney, Legal Fellow  
Disability Justice Program  
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest  
to  
The New York City Council Committee on Higher Education  
regarding  
The New York City FY’26 Budget  
March 14, 2025,**

My name is Madison Pinckney, and I am a Legal Fellow in the Disability Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI). Thank you Chair Dinowitz and members of the Council for the opportunity to testify today.

The Trump administration poses an unprecedented threat to the rule of law and to New Yorkers’ freedoms, civil rights, and access to services. New York City legislators must now leverage the substantial power of local government to uphold and protect our laws and rights, and to make the major investments needed to protect and strengthen infrastructure and public institutions.

**New York City’s FY 2026 Budget**

The New York City Independent Budget Office and State Comptroller DiNapoli have both found that New York City’s economic outlook remains strong, and they project significant budget surpluses for FY 2025.

In recent years, the City Council has played a critical role in defending vital city services, investments, and infrastructure from budget cuts and flat-lining.

At the same time a federal administration hostile to people with disabilities, immigrants, LGBTQ individuals, and climate science threatens New York City communities, and has already begun to seize funds allocated to our City. It is more critical than ever that the City’s budget makes bold investments for all its residents, and it is more critical than ever that our Mayor and the City Council stand up for New York City’s communities and for independence.

**Immigrant Health Initiative**

We ask the Council to continue and enhance support for the Immigrant Health Initiative, which continues to save lives and improve health across our city. This program is funded at \$2.43M in

FY25 and supports more than 20 organizations, including NYLPI programs aimed at improving the health and well-being of New Yorkers and their families through direct legal representation, litigation, community education, strategic partnerships with public hospitals, and non-legal advocacy. Through vigorous client and community advocacy and wraparound services, NYLPI improves health outcomes, increases access to healthcare, and provides critical and timely education for communities, healthcare providers, and legal service advocates.

Such access to essential healthcare often results in cost savings for the City, the State, and our safety net health care system when people are able to resume work and productive lives.

As increasing numbers of New Yorkers are detained in immigration jails, we are one of the few organizations focused on medical advocacy and the acute health hazards of immigration detention. In addition, in the face of continued attacks on the asylum process, we have offered culturally competent legal representation, including to those who identify as transgender, gender-expansive, or live with HIV.

### **Nonprofit Rapid Response Network**

The new federal administration is focusing tremendous power on mass deportations, revocation of racial justice initiatives, claw backs of climate and environmental justice funding, and retribution against those who stand up to it. The human cost to New York's disadvantaged communities will be staggering. Nonprofits and CBOs serving or employing immigrants and other marginalized groups will form a critical shield but are also becoming direct targets of federal agencies attempting to conduct raids, chill advocacy, and cut services to people in need.<sup>[1]</sup>

With support from a Speaker's request and Protect NYC Families, the Nonprofit Rapid Response Network will strengthen and protect New York City's nonprofit sector by providing informational resources, relationship-building, practical training, and legal advice and representation to nonprofits and CBOs. It will foster collaboration, build capacity, and distribute essential resources and legal advice to help nonprofits survive attacks by the federal administration.

### **Higher Education for Students with Disabilities**

Individuals with disabilities face enormous barriers to accessing higher education and are thus underrepresented in these settings. This creates financial instability and a dearth of individuals with disabilities in leadership positions with decision-making power, further perpetuating discriminatory policies, inaccurate media portrayals, and lack of access. If students with disabilities partake of higher education services, they are often met with discriminatory accommodation policies, a lack of physically accessible campus spaces, and stigma.

To respond to these issues, NYLPI commenced a higher education accessibility campaign in 2024, representing students with disabilities who experience discrimination in pursuit of higher education. This campaign advocates for students with disabilities when they are denied reasonable accommodations, face disability-based harassment, and experience physical,

communication, and other accessibility barriers on campuses. NYLPI is the only nonprofit in New York City offering these services, and unfortunately, has found that the assistance we provide is desperately needed.

## **NYLPI Findings**

Over the past six months, NYLPI has received numerous complaints from students with disabilities at City University of New York (CUNY) campuses. These students report that their campuses have repeatedly failed to provide and implement reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, New York State's Human Rights Law and New York City's Human Rights Law.

These complaints also noted multiple professors across CUNY campuses who actually refuse to implement accommodations that are approved by CUNY Disability Service Offices. Further, the students shared that these professors harassed them when they attempted to advocate for themselves about the accommodations they were denied.

Moreover, students reported facing dismissive and hostile attitudes when working with CUNY's Disability Service Offices, especially when seeking to obtain their approved accommodations. Students with disabilities already face massive obstacles in higher education and should feel empowered when approaching disability services offices to exercise their rights. This behavior indicates a systemic lack of respect and understanding for the rights of students with disabilities across CUNY campuses.

## **Funding Recommendations**

1. Disability Service Offices on CUNY campuses are intended to benefit students with disabilities and ensure they can achieve their educational goals. However, many offices are currently falling short of legal obligations and ethical standards. **We urge City Council to dedicate its resources to investigating and addressing the disability discrimination occurring on CUNY campuses.**
2. Students with learning disabilities and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) report that they cannot access accommodations because CUNY Disability Service Offices require an evaluation documenting their disability that can cost up to \$10,000. These prohibitively expensive evaluations leave students with learning disabilities and ADHD without accommodations for their disabilities. **NYLPI urges the Council to allocate funding for CUNY campuses to provide these evaluations to students at no or low cost.**
3. In its FY 2026 budget requests to New York City, CUNY requested \$2.1 million to support its disability services.<sup>1</sup> CUNY Disability Service Offices are significantly understaffed and undertrained, which is evident in the complaints NYLPI has received

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/media-assets/FY2026-CUNY-Budget-Request.pdf>.

from students with disabilities. **NYPLI supports CUNY's funding request to the extent that it aims to increase staff and create a professional development program to improve the problems we highlighted above.**

Thank you for hearing my testimony today. I am happy to discuss any of these issues and would particularly welcome the opportunity to collaborate with you to find sustainable solutions for students with disabilities. I can be reached at [Mpinckney@NYLPI.org](mailto:Mpinckney@NYLPI.org).

*For almost 50 years, NYLPI has fought to protect civil rights and achieve lived equality for communities in need. Led by community priorities, we pursue disability, health, immigrant, and environmental justice. NYLPI combines the power of law, organizing, and the private bar to make lasting change where it is needed most.*

*NYLPI's Disability Justice Program works to achieve equality of opportunity, self-determination, and independence for people with disabilities. Our educational rights advocacy focuses on higher education, special education, and professional licensing to ensure students with disabilities receive the support and accommodations necessary to succeed.*

*For more information visit: [www.nylpi.org](http://www.nylpi.org).*

**Testimony of Interim Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost Alicia M. Alvero**

**The City University of New York**

**New York City Council Higher Education Committee Hearing**

**Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget**

**March 13, 2025**

Good morning, Chair Dinowitz, and members of the City Council Higher Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to be here this afternoon. I am Alicia Alvero, Interim Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost for The City University of New York since November 2024. I am joined today by CUNY's Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer Hector Batista, and CUNY's Senior Vice Chancellor for Budget and Finance and Chief Financial Officer Sherif Soliman.

I want to thank the City Council for your steadfast commitment to CUNY, our mission, our programs, and most of all, to transforming the lives of our students. Like many of you, I have my own story of CUNY transformation. I came to New York City in 2003 when I accepted a faculty position at Queens College. My now 24-year-old daughter attended daycare on campus then and graduated from Queens College in 2022. We could not continue our work without the tremendous support from our partners in government. Undoubtably, the Council's support has shaped our success and our ability to meet our city's needs for a highly skilled and adaptable workforce.

You invest in CUNY because you understand the value we bring to each community in the five boroughs. Each year, over 80% of our 50,000 graduates choose to stay in the city, enriching every sector of the workforce and fostering economic and civic growth that benefits the city and state. CUNY alumni in New York generate approximately \$70 billion in annual earnings and contribute nearly 5% to the state's GDP. Moreover, when considering their enhanced future earnings and the tax revenues they generate, each taxpayer dollar invested in CUNY yields a return of at least \$15 for New York State.

Over the past year, CUNY has continued to earn recognition for its unwavering commitment to academic opportunity, affordability and excellence, and its role as the nation's most potent engine of upward economic and social mobility.

**Transfer Initiative**

One of our most important advances is the CUNY Transfer Initiative, which has revolutionized the transition process for students moving from community colleges to four-year programs. We

have developed a tool that allows every student to view their transferred credits immediately upon acceptance into a college, *before* enrolling, allowing them to make more informed decisions about their academic path. Faculty have also aligned six of the most common transfer majors - accounting, computer science, biology, mathematics, psychology, and sociology - ensuring that most transfer students retain credits in their majors. This is just the beginning: We will continue to streamline practices and policies to remove obstacles to credit transfer, decreasing students' time to graduation and saving them an average of \$1,220 in tuition.

### **Workforce and Careers**

CUNY has also continued to strengthen career pathways for students and partnered with employers to address workforce needs for the city and state. We now have more than 31,000 employers of every size in every field actively recruiting in the CUNY system. And with support from public and private partners, we've connected more than 16,000 students directly to paid internships in the last three years, in addition to students who landed internships on their own. Meanwhile, over 100 of our academic departments have begun incorporating career-infused degree maps to help students reach milestones tailored to their majors as part of their course planning.

To give you a few specific examples of our advances in career development, over the past year we expanded the city-funded Health Career Credentials initiative and expanded our healthcare education programs, including a new online certificate in Nuclear Medicine, LPN-to-RN programs and a new Nurse Fellowship Academy. The university secured funding for a Midwifery graduate program and is advancing plans for a Genetic Counseling program at Hunter. Innovation grants for AI in healthcare and mini-residency programs are part of our drive to sharpen our focus on faculty research and innovation.

This spring, we are preparing for the fall launch of CUNY Beyond, our campus roadmap for career success connecting classrooms to careers throughout our students' academic journeys. This wide-ranging strategy makes CUNY the first system in the country that will scale up approaches that we know work at every step of a student's academic journey. These approaches include working with high schools to offer career-connected college courses, introducing career discussions in orientations and first-year seminars, embedding careers in curriculum, expanding paid internships and growing our engagement with employers.

### **CUNY Reconnect**

The CUNY Reconnect initiative, the brainchild of Speaker Adams, has quickly become a transformative force in expanding educational access for adult learners seeking to return to

college to complete a degree or earn a credential. CUNY Reconnect removes barriers to re-enrollment, including forgiveness of prior balances, and provides comprehensive support services including academic advising, career counseling and other critical resources. Now in its third year, CUNY Reconnect has enrolled over 47,000 students across the University, with more than 8,400 graduates now contributing to the city's workforce. But this initiative is not just about degrees — it is about empowering everyday New Yorkers, particularly Black, Hispanic and female students, who make up the majority of enrollees, with opportunities that lift their families and communities.

### **ASAP/ACE**

Also this year, CUNY's pioneering ASAP program recruited its largest new cohort since 2019-2020, welcoming 11,590 new students. The program is now serving 22,450 students across fall and spring. To address the range of student needs and provide tailored wraparound services to even more of our students, CUNY will launch ASAP for part-time students in Fall 2025.

The ASAP model also continues to inspire other public university systems across the country. Most recently, Arnold Ventures invested \$35 million to launch ASAP replications at 15 colleges across the North Carolina Community College System, and SUNY has launched ASAP and ACE system wide.

ACE, the sister program of ASAP, supports nearly 3,000 students across seven CUNY senior colleges and continues to demonstrate strong outcomes. Students in the program achieved a four-year graduation rate 12.4% higher than qualifying students who did not participate, with notable differences observed among students of color. A recent report from Columbia University's Center on Poverty and Social Policy found net benefits of nearly \$43,000 per CUNY ACE participant, primarily driven by greater lifetime earnings. The study also found an average benefit of over \$125,000 for the children of ACE participants, quantifying the intergenerational benefits of postsecondary education.

### **Rankings/Research Success**

These achievements reflect CUNY's success as a national leader in providing educational opportunity and social mobility to people of all backgrounds. This year, CUNY campuses once again dominated national rankings of colleges that deliver the best return on investment. Forbes named nine of our colleges to its list of the "25 Colleges with the Highest Payoff" and CUNY schools accounted for five of the top ten on The Wall Street Journal's list of best-value colleges.

Another facet of our university's core mission is our work to advance inquiry and discovery in the public interest. CUNY's research efforts, many of which directly benefit the communities where we all work and live, have seen remarkable growth. In fiscal year 2024, University expenditures of external grant funds totaled \$622 million, an increase of 68% since 2014. The American Council on Education and Carnegie Foundation maintained the Graduate Center's designation as an R1 institution, the premiere status for very high research activity. Hunter College joined City College as an R2 institution, marking the first time two CUNY colleges have achieved that status. Seven other CUNY senior colleges were named to a new classification, "Research Colleges and Universities," highlighting the university's growing impact in the research community and expansion of research opportunities.

These advances come amid a climate of great uncertainty in federal funding for university-based research. We want our city leaders to know that we remain fully committed to our faculty researchers, their students and the work they do every day to advance discovery and knowledge.

### **Inclusivity for All Students**

We are also committed to adding opportunities for all our students. We're proud to announce the Spring 2025 implementation of CUNY Accommodate, our new student disability management system. This platform will streamline the management of requests for accommodations and services provided by Disability Services Offices on every campus. It offers an accessible, mobile-friendly way for students to initiate accommodation requests, schedule appointments with campus disability offices and access resources across CUNY. Faculty will use CUNY Accommodate to manage students' accommodation requests efficiently, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed.

Building on this commitment, the Black Male Initiative (BMI) has increased the enrollment, retention, and graduation rates of underrepresented students through targeted academic and social assistance. To sustain and expand these positive outcomes, it is essential to maintain such critical support systems, ensuring all students, regardless of background, have the resources and encouragement they need to excel.

Our childcare centers are crucial for student parents across our campuses. These centers provide a safe environment for children, enabling parents to focus on their studies and achieve academic success.

Addressing food insecurity also remains an ongoing and critical concern. Last year, our food-access programs served over 13,000 students and demand continues to grow. This work is

crucial so that no student has to choose between their education and basic necessities. Addressing the mental health needs of our student body is another top priority. Our student veterans benefit from dedicated peer mentorship programs and essential services designed to meet their unique needs. Your continued support will enable us to build on these successes and ensure that all CUNY students have access to the resources they need to thrive.

### **NYCPS Partnership**

CUNY continues to strengthen its partnerships with the New York City Public Schools through initiatives like College & Career Bridge for All, College & Career Advising Fellows, College Now and Future Ready. Last year, these programs helped nearly 55,000 graduating high school seniors with postsecondary planning and financial aid. The programs employ recent CUNY graduates as full-time college advisors and enables more than 28,000 students a year to earn college credits through college-preparatory courses.

Chairperson Dinowitz and members of the committee, on behalf of the entire University community, I deeply appreciate your continued commitment to sustaining the high-quality and affordable CUNY education that so many New Yorkers depend on. I now turn to Chief Operating Officer Batista, who will discuss University operations that are vital to supporting our mission.

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### **Testimony of Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer Héctor Batista**

Thank you, Alicia.

Thank you, Chair Dinowitz, members of the City Council Higher Education Committee, and all members of the City Council for your steadfast support for CUNY. We deeply appreciate your commitment to our students, faculty and staff, and for always recognizing the value that CUNY provides to our City and State.

Before I turn to the Fiscal Year 2026 preliminary budget, let me first offer an update on CUNY's financial position.

We testified before you last year with a clear picture of the difficult financial challenges faced by CUNY and our plan for stabilizing our financial position. Tackling CUNY's structural deficit has been, and continues to be, a top priority.

The structural deficit is primarily driven by steep post-pandemic enrollment declines and unfunded mandatory costs that the University has had to absorb over several years. In addition, reduced City funding for our community colleges in recent years due to the Program to Eliminate the Gap, or PEG, has also affected college budgets. Through a rigorous review of campus financial plans, sound decision-making, and close collaboration with our campus communities, we have made considerable progress, but there is more to do.

The progress we made on the expense side of the ledger has involved hard, but necessary, decisions at the campus level. We developed a framework for assessing college finances, one that is more targeted than the across-the-board savings plans we were compelled to undertake a few years ago. This targeted approach examines key indicators such as the presence of a cash deficit, the size of a college's structural deficit as a percentage of its budget, and the amount of campus reserves.

After evaluating college financial conditions based on these indicators, nine (9) colleges were deemed to be of high financial concern, which meant that they would be subject to a hiring restriction and a deficit reduction target to reduce expenses. We continue to work closely with these colleges to improve their financial condition, focused on a balanced approach to expense reduction and opportunities for revenue generation.

University-wide, significant reductions in the structural deficit have been realized. Among the factors leading to the decline are expense reductions across the University, additional State aid, and an uptick in enrollment. The combination of these factors has led to a nearly 74% reduction in the overall University structural deficit – from \$234 million in Fiscal Year 2022 to an estimated \$62 million projected at the end of Fiscal Year 2025 as of first quarter estimates. This year, enrollment growth was about 2%, for a two-year increase of 5.2% or almost 12,000 students. This translates into additional revenue as it is estimated that every 1% increase in enrollment generates approximately \$13.8 million.

We enter this budget cycle with a goal of sustaining our momentum, but we are clear-eyed about the uncertainties that exist, including actions at the Federal level that can have a direct impact on CUNY and/or an indirect impact on CUNY resulting from increased pressure on State and City budgets.

That is why we are doubling down on our efficiency strategies by implementing various system-wide shared services initiatives including centralizing certain IT functions to benefit from economies of scale, pursuing a more effective deployment of maintenance and repair teams to campuses, consolidating contracts to negotiate better pricing, and streamlining tuition and fee

collections. Planning for these initiatives, including upfront investments required to build the operational infrastructure, is well underway and we are hopeful that the initiatives will begin to achieve efficiencies in Fiscal Year 2026.

Turning now to the preliminary budget and its impact on our operating budget.

At this time last year, we had a ratified collective bargaining agreement with labor unions representing our classified staff. This year, we are pleased that we have a ratified collective bargaining agreement with our faculty union, the Professional Staff Congress. We thank the administration for including \$13.8 million in the November Plan to support the classified staff contract and for including \$11.2 million in the Preliminary Budget for ongoing costs associated with that contract. We thank the administration in advance for funding for the PSC contract and we look forward to its inclusion in the upcoming Executive budget.

We are also grateful for funding in the November plan and prior plans for labor costs associated with new collective bargaining agreements for skilled tradespersons employed by CUNY.

PEG restorations are not included in the Preliminary Budget. The baselined PEG for Fiscal Year 2026 is an estimated \$95.5 million, which represents 15% of the entire City contribution to our operating budget. The PEGs have had, and continue to have, a significant impact on CUNY's community colleges.

As we testified last year, the PEGs have an impact on everything from academic advisement, and financial aid counseling, to library hours, facilities maintenance, and more. An erosion of this critical support network may also pose challenges for the University in attracting and retaining students. We all bore witness last year to the faulty rollout of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, and universities across the country were scrambling to engage students so their enrollment was not impacted. Such a shock to the system demanded more financial aid counselors, not less, to blunt the impact of the void in financial aid information upon which so many students heavily rely. Our top priority for this budget cycle is to restore as much of the PEGs as possible and we are in regular communication with OMB about the need to turn the tide to ensure student success.

We thank you for your advocacy for a myriad of programs at CUNY. We look forward to close engagement with you and your colleagues to include funding in the adopted budget for transforming programs for our students such as CUNY Reconnect, ASAP, and ACE, and funding for food insecurity, childcare, and more that Provost Alvero highlighted in her testimony.

Lastly, let me turn to our facilities.

As you know, CUNY has set an ambitious goal: to bring 55% of our vital building systems into a state of good repair by 2030. Work is underway and there is much more to do, but we are proud of what we have accomplished thus far with approximately 27% of our vital building systems in a state of good repair, up from 24% in the prior year.

During the hearing that this committee held on facilities last year, you heard me discuss our strategy for meeting this goal, including assessing the health of our different building components to enable us to better prioritize our capital program. By prioritizing our work using data and metrics, we can more efficiently expend capital dollars and improve our facilities for our students, faculty and staff. Our priorities are also shaped by close collaboration with our campus communities and through engagement with elected officials who seek to allocate discretionary funding for CUNY projects.

While we can target what needs to be addressed in priority order, we cannot make progress without continued funding. We need to spend an estimated \$200 million each year to bring our community colleges to a state of good repair and we look forward to working with you to secure this funding in this budget cycle.

CUNY's Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Capital Budget includes \$1.56 billion in city funding and \$4.3 million in non-city grants over the ten-year plan (FY2025 through FY2035). As in previous plan cycles, CUNY is realigning its capital-funded project schedules to better match the year that projects will go into contract and we are in regular communication with OMB about the status of our capital commitments.

In conclusion, I would once again like to express my gratitude to the City Council for supporting CUNY priorities. If we can make progress on restoring the PEGs, we know we will be able to invest in the programs that will lead to student success. CUNY's success is the State's and City's success. We look forward to working with you to deliver much-needed resources for this invaluable institution.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and we look forward to your questions.



Office of the University Student Senate  
555 West 57th Street, 1420  
New York, NY 10019  
Tel: (646) 664-8844  
Fax: (646) 664-8863

## **2025 NYC Council Higher Education Budget Hearing**

### ***Testimony of Akkeem Polack***

**University Student Senate (USS CUNY)**

***USS Vice Chair for Legislative Affairs***

**March 13, 2025**

Good Afternoon, Esteemed Members of the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education,

My name is Akkeem Polack, and I proudly serve as the Vice Chair for Legislative Affairs for CUNY University Student Senate, representing over 245,000 CUNY students across 25 colleges. I am a student at York College, majoring in Communication Technology. I'm also a student from Jamaica.

Like many of my peers, I chose CUNY because its reputation for providing working class people with an affordable and quality education precedes the institution. Indeed, the university has a global reputation for being a vehicle of socio-economic class mobility. While CUNY is full of opportunities, many of our students still struggle with financial and structural barriers that threaten our success.

One of the most pressing challenges facing CUNY students today is the sharp rising cost of living. This, of course, is not unique to New York City. We have seen rents, homes, cars, and groceries skyrocket over the post covid pandemic world. One thing that makes NYC different from the rest of the nation is that we have the largest and most reliable system of public transit in the country. And we could use our public transit system as a tool to bring much needed relief to the students of CUNY.

Many of us travel long distances—sometimes up to two hours each day—just to get to class. Public transit is not optional for us; it is a necessity. However, with increasing subway and bus fares, commuting costs have become an unbearable burden for thousands of students.

That is why the USS is calling on the Legislature to fund FREE METROCARDS for CUNY students.



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555 West 57th Street, 1420  
New York, NY 10019  
Tel: (646) 664-8844  
Fax: (646) 664-8863

Access to transportation is access to education. A student who cannot afford a MetroCard cannot attend class. A student who cannot afford to travel cannot take an internship, participate in research, or engage in civic life. Without reliable and affordable transportation, students are forced to make impossible choices—do I go to class today, or do I save that swipe for work so I can afford rent? This is a daily reality for too many CUNY students, and it is one that New York State has the power to change.

While transportation is a critical issue, it is just one piece of a larger puzzle. If we truly want to support student success, we must also:

- Expand the CUNY CARES Project to address food insecurity, housing instability, and access to health and mental health services. A MetroCard is crucial, but so is ensuring that students are not hungry or homeless while pursuing their education.
- Enhance academic and career advice to help students navigate their studies and prepare for the workforce. We need more advisors, mentors, and career resources to ensure that students graduate with the skills and opportunities they deserve.
- Increase support for disability services by funding additional staff, assistive technology, and accessibility improvements across campuses. Every student, regardless of ability, should have the tools they need to succeed.
- Improve IT infrastructure across CUNY, ensuring students have access to modern technology, reliable Wi-Fi, and updated digital resources that enhance learning.

Since Fiscal Year 2021, CUNY has faced \$94.1 million in budget reductions through the Program to Eliminate the Gap (PEG), a 15% decline in city funding, which will grow to \$95.4 million in Fiscal Year 2025. These cuts have led to reductions in instructional and student services staff, directly impacting academic advisement, counseling, library staffing and hours, career services, and financial aid offices. As a result, students struggle to navigate course selections, access support services, and stay on track for graduation, ultimately affecting their earning potential. To ensure student success, it is critical to reverse these cuts and restore funding to essential programs.

CUNY has long been the engine of social mobility for New York’s working-class and immigrant communities. Investing in CUNY is investing in New York’s future.

We urge you to fund Free MetroCards for CUNY students and to continue investing in policies that remove barriers to education. The return on investment is clear—when students can afford to access their education, they graduate, they contribute to the economy, and they strengthen our state.



**Office of the University Student Senate**  
**555 West 57th Street, 1420**  
**New York, NY 10019**  
**Tel: (646) 664-8844**  
**Fax: (646) 664-8863**

Thank you for your time and commitment to higher education. I look forward to working with you to ensure that every CUNY student has the support they need to succeed.



Office of the University Student Senate  
555 West 57th Street, 1420  
New York, NY 10019  
Tel: (646) 664-8844  
Fax: (646) 664-8863

## **2025 NYC Council Higher Education Budget Hearing**

### ***Testimony of Daniel Reden***

***City University of New York (CUNY) Student Trustee,***

***CUNY University Student Senate (USS) Chairperson,***

**March 13, 2025**

Dear Esteemed Members of the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education,

My name is Daniel Reden, and I have the honor of serving as the Chairperson of the University Student Senate (USS) and as a Student Trustee on the City University of New York (CUNY) Board of Trustees. Today, I stand before you, representing over 200,000 CUNY students across our 25 campuses—students who, despite facing numerous challenges, are unwavering in their pursuit of higher education. I implore you to fully fund CUNY, recognizing that this investment is not just in an institution but in the very future of New York City.

### **The USS Commuter Grant Pilot Program: Bridging the Transportation Gap**

Transportation costs present a significant barrier to student success. Many CUNY students struggle to afford commuting expenses, leading to missed classes and lower graduation rates. To address this, the USS has proposed a Student Commuter Grant Pilot Program, included in the CUNY City Budget request for \$500,000. This initiative aims to provide MetroCards to students based on their program affiliations, thereby alleviating financial stress and promoting equitable access to education.

Transportation is a major barrier to student success. The 2025 Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Caucus People's Budget also recommends extending free or reduced-cost Metrocards to the amount of \$75.5 Million Dollars, for all CUNY students, recognizing the critical need for transportation equity. A state-funded partnership between CUNY and the MTA would:

- Reduce fare evasion, which disproportionately impacts low-income students.
- Improve graduation rates by ensuring students can attend class.
- Strengthen the workforce by supporting student retention and success.



Office of the University Student Senate  
555 West 57th Street, 1420  
New York, NY 10019  
Tel: (646) 664-8844  
Fax: (646) 664-8863

## **The Dire State of CUNY Facilities: A Crisis of Health, Safety, and Academic Integrity**

Our campuses are in a state of disrepair that is both alarming and unacceptable. Students, faculty, and staff contend daily with leaking ceilings, pervasive mold, and facilities that are not accessible to all. These hazardous conditions are more than mere inconveniences; they are barriers to learning, threats to health, and stark indicators of neglect. Such environments are antithetical to academic excellence and compromise the safety and well-being of our community.

## **The Ripple Effect: How Facility Neglect Undermines Recruitment, Retention, and Excellence**

The condition of our facilities extends beyond immediate health concerns; it profoundly impacts CUNY's ability to attract and retain both students and esteemed faculty. Prospective students are deterred by dilapidated campuses, leading to decreased enrollment. Current students, disheartened by their surroundings, may disengage or leave, affecting retention rates. Similarly, high-caliber faculty and staff are less likely to join or remain at an institution that does not prioritize its infrastructure, thereby diminishing the quality of education and research.

## **A Call to Action: \$200 Million Annually to Restore and Revitalize CUNY**

To address the extensive deferred maintenance and to elevate our facilities to a state of good repair, CUNY requires a substantial investment of \$200 million in capital funding annually. This funding is not a luxury but a necessity to ensure that our campuses are safe, functional, and inspiring places of learning. It is an investment that will yield immeasurable returns in student success and institutional prestige.

## **The Broader Economic Implications: New York City's Future at Stake**

The neglect of CUNY's infrastructure and the financial burdens on its students have repercussions that resonate beyond the confines of our campuses, threatening the economic vitality of New York City:

- **Diminished Graduation Rates:** Substandard facilities and financial hardships contribute to lower student morale and success, resulting in fewer graduates entering the workforce.
- **Underqualified Workforce:** A decline in CUNY graduates leads to a workforce that lacks essential skills and credentials, making the city less competitive.
- **Reduced Business Attraction:** Companies seeking a skilled labor pool may look elsewhere, bypassing New York City due to a perceived lack of qualified candidates.



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Tel: (646) 664-8844  
Fax: (646) 664-8863

- **Shrinking Tax Base:** Fewer graduates and lower-paying jobs mean diminished personal income and business tax revenues, straining public services.
- **Increased Demand for Social Services:** An undereducated populace is more likely to require city services, burdening already stretched resources.

### **Conclusion: Investing in CUNY is Investing in New York City's Prosperity**

Fully funding CUNY is not merely an educational imperative; it is an economic and moral one. By allocating the necessary capital to repair and modernize our facilities and by supporting initiatives like the USS Commuter Grant Pilot Program, we affirm our commitment to health, safety, and academic excellence. We ensure that CUNY remains a beacon of opportunity, capable of attracting and nurturing talent. In doing so, we safeguard the economic future of New York City, maintaining its status as a global leader.

Thank you for your time and unwavering commitment to supporting our students and faculty. I welcome any questions and look forward to collaborating to achieve these critical goals.



Office of the University Student Senate  
555 West 57th Street, 1420  
New York, NY 10019  
Tel: (646) 664-8844  
Fax: (646) 664-8863

## **2025 NYC Council Higher Education Budget Hearing**

### *Testimony of Davia Willis*

#### **University Student Senate (USS CUNY)**

**March 13, 2025**

Good Afternoon, Esteemed Members of the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education,

My name is Davia Willis, and I am a Criminal Justice major at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, with plans to graduate in Spring of 2027. I chose to attend CUNY because of its cost effectiveness and diverse opportunities. As a First-Generation college student, my career goals are to become a lawyer and a politician erecting my own firm and to be elected to serve those I represent. My experience at CUNY has been a mixture of challenges and opportunities. One significant challenge I have faced is the financial constraints of which one is the logistical difficulties associated with commuting.

Currently, I commute to campus using both the bus and the subway, which costs me \$132 per month. I am an international student and given that I must be responsible for all my living, academic and housing expenses this adds greatly to the monthly expenditure. Not everyone is an international student, but everyone has a variety of expenses and is some way inconvenienced by the added cost of transportation. Many students are forced to skip classes, limit extracurricular involvement, or turn down internships because they cannot afford to travel.

To address these issues, I urge the Legislature to FUND FREE METROCARDS for CUNY students. Ensuring free fares for students would:

- Reduce financial barriers to education, allowing students to focus on their studies instead of worrying about transportation costs.
- Improve access to academic and professional opportunities, ensuring students can fully participate in their education.
- Promote retention and graduation rates, as students with reliable transit options are more likely to complete their degrees on time.

As students, we should not have to choose between quality education and our ability to afford the transportation needed to access it. I strongly encourage the Legislature to invest in equitable transit solutions that support student success.



**Office of the University Student Senate**  
**555 West 57th Street, 1420**  
**New York, NY 10019**  
**Tel: (646) 664-8844**  
**Fax: (646) 664-8863**

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Office of the University Student Senate  
555 West 57th Street, 1420  
New York, NY 10019  
Tel: (646) 664-8844  
Fax: (646) 664-8863

## **2025 NYC Council Higher Education Budget Hearing**

*Testimony of Samantha Ventura*

**University Student Senate (USS CUNY)**

**March 13, 2025**

Good Afternoon, Esteemed Members of the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education,

My name is Samantha Ventura, and I am an Early Childhood Education major at Bronx Community College, set to graduate in May 2025. I chose CUNY because I was born and raised in New York City, and I take immense pride in being part of this shared experience. City life is unpredictable, but CUNY has been my constant. It has been an oasis despite the challenges I have faced.

I write to you because I know our resources are limited, and for many students, the difference between success and failure is access to those resources. Before attending Bronx Community College, I had to withdraw from university due to personal and financial hardships. I live with complex PTSD, ADHD, OCD, severe generalized anxiety disorder, and major depressive episodes. At one point, I struggled with agoraphobia. Students like me rely on increased funding, not just for education, but for survival. Our struggles are increasing, and the resources we need must increase alongside them.

CUNY made it possible for me to continue my journey. Through Bronx Community College, I accessed personal counseling, free psychiatric care, and a support network that allowed me to persist in my education. The Offices of Student Success, Personal Counseling and Student Life nurtured me, ensuring I had the guidance and resources to stay on track.

I fear the day I run out of grants. I fear having to choose between working to survive and continuing my education. I fear facing housing instability again. I do not want to stop my progress, but without sufficient funding, regression is the reality not just for me, but for thousands of students like me. We need free transportation. We need better advisement. We need accessibility. We need CUNY CARES.

Asking students to do more with less is not sustainable. There are more students like me than students who are not like me. We are the future educators, healthcare workers, social workers,



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**New York, NY 10019**  
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and leaders of this city. At USS, we already dedicate our careers to helping those who come after us, with the goal that they in turn help those who come after them. We want you to assist us in ensuring that every CUNY student has the support they need to succeed.

Thank you for your time and commitment to higher education.



Office of the University Student Senate  
555 West 57th Street, 1420  
New York, NY 10019  
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## **2025 NYC Council Higher Education Budget Hearing**

### ***Testimony of Tahisha Fields***

#### **University Student Senate (USS CUNY)**

#### ***USS Vice Chair for Fiscal Affairs***

**March 13, 2025**

Good Afternoon, Members of the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education,

My name is Tahisha Fields. I am a student at Baruch College, majoring in mental health counseling with plans to graduate in May 2025. I chose CUNY because it offers the most affordable and diverse educational opportunities compared to private institutions, making it accessible for students like me.

As a nontraditional, older student, my career goals are to become a fully licensed mental health counselor and pursue my PhD in social work. My time at CUNY has been both rewarding and challenging. While completing my degree, I am also in my final year of a clinical internship, which, due to state regulations, is unpaid. The financial strain is exacerbated by my full-time academic load and the time-consuming commute to both my internship and classes.

I am also deeply involved in student government as the president of the Baruch Graduate Student Assembly and the Vice Chair for Fiscal Affairs for CUNY University Student Senate. However, balancing these responsibilities and my studies leaves me with very little time to work a part-time job, further compounding my financial challenges.

CUNY has always been a beacon of affordable education, but rising costs, particularly in transportation, continue to be a significant barrier to student success. As a commuter, I, along with many others, spend hundreds of dollars monthly just to access my education. This expense limits opportunities, such as participating in internships or extracurricular activities, and forces students to choose between attending class and meeting their basic needs.

To alleviate this burden, I urge the Legislature to fund FREE METROCARDS for CUNY students. Reliable and affordable transportation is essential for students to succeed in their academic and professional endeavors.



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555 West 57th Street, 1420  
New York, NY 10019  
Tel: (646) 664-8844  
Fax: (646) 664-8863

In addition to transportation, the University Student Senate also advocates for:

- Supporting the CUNY CARES Project to address food insecurity, housing instability, and access to health and mental health services.
- Enhancing academic and career advice to better prepare students for successful careers after graduation.
- Expanding support for disability services, including increasing staff and improving access to adaptive sports, assistive technology, and campus accessibility.
- Improving IT infrastructure to ensure all students have the technological resources they need to succeed.

By investing in these areas, New York State can ensure CUNY continues to be a world-class institution that serves all students equitably. We appreciate your ongoing commitment to higher education and look forward to working together to eliminate barriers that hinder student success.

Thank you.

**Testimonial to the New York City Council  
Committee on Higher Education  
Submitted by CRI: The LGBTQIA+ Public History Project  
Date: March 14, 2025**

Honorable Members of the New York City Council,

On behalf of LaGuardia Community College, CUNY, and the LGBTQIA+ Public History Project, we extend our deepest gratitude for your continued support for LGBTQIA+ education, public history, and community-building initiatives across CUNY. Your support has been instrumental in expanding our reach from five campuses in 2017 to all 25 CUNY campuses in 2024. The LGBTQIA+ Public History Project, and its flagship the CUNY LGBTQIA+ Consortium is one of the most important organizations ensuring that LGBTQIA+ students and the public have access to affirming spaces, meaningful programming that explores intersectionality and health, and historical preservation efforts that uplift our community's legacy and future.

During the fiscal year 2024, the CUNY LGBTQIA+ Consortium supported hundreds of programs with over 15,000 attendees, and we are on target to reach the same number this fiscal year. On many campuses, this funding constitutes the main support of LGBTQIA+ programming, and these events are lifelines to our students. This includes the borough-wide LGBTQIA+ student leadership conferences, the Queeribbean Crossings initiative in partnership with the Caribbean Equality Project, and the Queens Borough-Wide Lavender Graduation.

We also support long-term infrastructure for LGBTQIA+ students, faculty, and staff across CUNY. Currently only 14 of the 25 campuses have a dedicated LGBTQIA+ center, and eight of these centers were supported by the CUNY LGBTQIA+ Consortium. We have also expanded access to scholarships, internships, and mental health programming.

Despite these accomplishments, the demand for LGBTQIA+ student services, educational programming, and public history projects continues to grow. At a time when LGBTQIA+ rights face increasing national and local challenges, it is critical that the City Council maintain and increase funding to the LGBTQIA+ Public History Project. Currently this CUNY Research Institute is funded at a quarter of similar research institutes, but we could achieve tremendous change with the support of the Council Committee on Higher Education.

The CUNY LGBTQIA+ Consortium has proven that the City Council **saves lives** through its funding choices. We urge the Council to continue its unwavering support so that we may sustain and expand this essential work. Thank you for recognizing the value of investing in LGBTQIA+ communities and for ensuring that New York City remains a leader in equity, inclusion, and justice.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Allie Brashears  
Director CUNY LGBTQIA+ Consortium

**Committee on Higher Education  
Preliminary Budget Hearing FY 26- Higher Education  
New York City Council**

**Testimony of John Jara, Student of CUNY/LaGuardia Community College  
Thursday, March 13, 2025**

Good afternoon, Chair Eric Dinowitz and members of the City Council Committee of Higher Education. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding funding for CUNY. My name is John Jara, and I'm a Mechanical Engineering student at LaGuardia Community College. I serve as the President of Student Government, and I am also Vice Chair for International Student Affairs at USS.

In my role at the Student Government, I've been privileged to hear the voices of my fellow students. Many of us are struggling with reduced resources that are critical to our success. At LaGuardia alone, we've experienced over \$4 million in funding losses, which has led to fewer academic advisors and mental health counselors, diminished library hours, and cuts to crucial transfer services. Some of our campus facilities have also suffered, affecting public safety and essential maintenance.

Through my conversations with students, I've come to understand the importance of support for those experiencing financial hardships. The CUNY CARES program has been a critical resource for many, providing assistance during emergencies, and it's essential that we boost funding for this program so every student, including those raising families, has access to the help they need. Additionally, many students have shared their concerns about the rising costs of transportation. For some, getting to campus is not just a daily commute; it's a significant barrier to their education. I've heard from students who spend a large portion of their limited budgets on transit fares, which could otherwise go towards essentials like textbooks or groceries. That's why I'm advocating for the USS proposal for free MetroCards.

To address these challenges effectively, I urge the Council to consider restoring CUNY's funding to pre-2021 levels. We need immediate public safety enhancements, increased support for academic services—especially mental health resources—and a robust IT infrastructure. Investing in the CUNY CARES program and ensuring the free MetroCard initiative is included in the budget will go a long way in creating a more equitable educational environment.

Thank you for your time and attention. I truly appreciate your consideration of the challenges we face at CUNY. I believe that, together, we can find solutions that uplift all students, especially those of us balancing school with family and work. Thank you.

# TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NYC CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Re: Expanding Apprenticeship Pathways for CUNY & SUNY Students

Presented by: Kevin Ly, Resident of Forest Hills, NY

Date: March 13, 2025

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## Chairperson Eric Dinowitz, Members of the Committee, and Fellow New Yorkers,

My name is Kevin Ly, and I am a resident of Forest Hills, Queens. I am testifying today to advocate for a **comprehensive, structured, and fully paid apprenticeship model** that integrates **pre-apprenticeships and registered apprenticeships throughout a student's entire higher education journey** at the City University of New York (CUNY) and the State University of New York (SUNY).

The traditional model of higher education often requires students to take on significant debt while juggling unpaid internships, part-time jobs, or low-wage work that is unrelated to their career goals. We need a **paradigm shift**—one that ensures students can **earn while they learn** throughout their entire college experience.

## Proposal: A Seamless Apprenticeship Model for CUNY & SUNY Students

I propose a **structured apprenticeship pathway** that begins before a student even steps onto campus and continues through post-graduation, ensuring that New Yorkers have clear economic mobility while completing their degrees. This model includes:

### 1. Paid Pre-Apprenticeship (Summer Before Freshman Year)

- High school graduates would participate in **paid, structured pre-apprenticeships** aligned with their intended field of study.
- These pre-apprenticeships would introduce students to industry skills, workplace expectations, and career exploration before college begins.

### 2. Year-Round Pre-Apprenticeship (First Two Years of College)

- In the first two years of college (freshman and sophomore years), students would continue their **paid pre-apprenticeship experiences** alongside their coursework.
- These experiences would help students build technical skills, develop professional networks, and gain real-world exposure in their fields.

### 3. Paid Registered Apprenticeship (Junior & Senior Year)

- Starting in their **junior year**, students would transition into **registered apprenticeships**—structured, paid programs with employer partnerships that provide on-the-job training, mentorship, and a direct pipeline to employment.
- This would align students with their industry of choice and provide direct connections to potential full-time employment post-graduation.

### 4. Post-Graduate Apprenticeship or Continuation in Graduate School

- For students requiring additional years of training, or for those who wish to continue their apprenticeships while pursuing graduate education, the program would offer a **post-graduate apprenticeship track**.

- This would ensure that college graduates are not left without direction or financial support as they transition into the workforce.

## Why This Model is Necessary

- **Increases College Affordability & Reduces Student Debt**
  - A structured, paid apprenticeship pathway would **enable students to earn income** while pursuing their degrees, reducing their reliance on loans and alleviating financial stress.
- **Aligns Higher Education with Workforce Needs**
  - Many students graduate without the work experience necessary for competitive job markets. An apprenticeship model ensures that **all students graduate with hands-on industry experience** and professional connections.
- **Expands Access to Economic Mobility**
  - This program would particularly benefit **low-income, first-generation, and underserved students** by providing them with financial stability and career readiness while still in school.
- **Strengthens New York's Economy**
  - Investing in apprenticeship programs fosters **a highly skilled, local workforce** that is prepared to meet industry demands, keeping talent in New York State and supporting economic growth.

## Call to Action

I urge the NYC Council Committee on Higher Education to:

1. **Partner with CUNY & SUNY to Establish a Citywide Apprenticeship Framework**
  - Work with institutions to develop **industry-aligned, scalable apprenticeship programs** that ensure students receive both education and paid work experience.
2. **Secure Funding & Incentives for Employers to Expand Apprenticeship Opportunities**
  - Provide **financial support, tax incentives, and funding** to encourage employer participation in the program.
3. **Ensure Industry Representation in Higher Education Decision-Making**
  - Collaborate with **labor unions, businesses, and workforce development organizations** to ensure that apprenticeship programs align with industry needs.
4. **Expand Access to All Fields & Majors**
  - Ensure that **apprenticeship opportunities exist across all disciplines**, including STEM, healthcare, education, public service, the arts, and business.

This is a bold but necessary step toward ensuring that every CUNY and SUNY student has the opportunity to **graduate with a degree, real-world experience, and a clear path to economic security.**

## **Conclusion**

New York must lead the way in rethinking how college students enter the workforce. A **fully integrated apprenticeship system** will position our students for long-term success, address student debt, and strengthen our local economy.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your leadership in making this vision a reality.

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Kevin Ly**

Resident, Forest Hills, NY

[REDACTED]

Forest Hills, NY 11375

[REDACTED]

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 3/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sascha Owens, Senior Vice Chancellor

Address: CONY

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: John Jara

Address: [Redacted] Jamaica NY

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tanisha Fields

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: CUNY University Student Senate

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 3/13/25

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Name: Madison Pinckney

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NY Lawyers for the Public

Address: Interest

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 13 March '25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: James Davis Pres PSC

Address: 25 Broadway 15th fl.

I represent: PSC CUMY

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 3/13/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sharon Brown

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Jamaica NY 11436

I represent: Rose of Sharon Enterprises

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Billyn NY 11238

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**THE COUNCIL** 3/13/25  
**THE CITY OF NEW YORK** CUNY

Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 3/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alicia M. Rivero

Address: Executive Vice Chancellor and

I represent: University of Puerto Rico CUNY

Address: Alicia.Rivero@UPR.edu

**THE COUNCIL** CUNY  
**THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 3/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Executive Vice Chancellor and CCO

Address: Hector Batista - CUNY

I represent: Hector.Batista@CUNY.edu

Address:

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**THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christopher Leon Johnson

Address: [Redacted]

I represent: Self

Address:

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 3/13/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sherif Soliman

Address: CUNY

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 3/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Hector Batista

Address: CUNY

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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in favor  in opposition

Date: March 13, 2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: AKKeem Polack

Address: York College

I represent: CUNY University Student Senate

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: DAVIA WILLIS

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn, NY, 11203

I represent: CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 3/13/25

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: Samantha Ventura

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: USS / BCT

Address: 2155 University ave Bronx 10463

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: Dante Beden

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: The City University of New York

Address: 555 W 57<sup>th</sup> Street 10017 Suite 1401

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: Dainma Martinez

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Hostos Community College

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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