

Testimony before the  
New York City Council Committees on Higher Education and Workforce Development  
by Lauren Andersen, Vice Chancellor, Career Engagement & Industry Partnerships  
The City University of New York (CUNY)  
FEBRUARY 26, 2026

Good morning, Honorable Chairpersons Joseph and Won and members of the Committees on Higher Education and Workforce Development. Thank you for the invitation to testify today on The City University of New York's commitment to boosting the career success of graduates and delivering the workforce our city's economy needs in order to grow *inclusively*.

My name is Lauren Andersen and I have the honor of serving as the Vice Chancellor for Career Engagement and Industry Partnerships at CUNY. In this capacity, I report to the Chancellor *and* the University Provost (our chief academic officer), and shepherd CUNY's work to: 1) boost career outcomes of all students, 2) integrate career connections – including paid internships - into degree paths, 3) expand effective non-degree workforce training focused on in-demand occupations, and 4) help fuel the growth of public and private organizations across the city through connections to CUNY talent, expertise, and assets.

This role is a relatively new one for CUNY. It reflects Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez and the CUNY Board of Trustees' deep commitment to elevating and prioritizing career success and workforce development at the highest levels of leadership.

However, CUNY's mission to serve as an engine of economic mobility goes all the way back to our founding. In 1849, The Free Academy of New York (later known as City College) opened its doors with the purpose of providing a first-rate education to all – regardless of means or background. At its opening, founders noted that future students would come to CUNY seeking an education **“for the purpose of applying it to some useful vocation, and not as a mere matter of curious information or process of intellectual discipline”**<sup>i</sup>. In short, the commitment to propelling our students into rewarding professions that they - and the City – seek is in our DNA.

Last year, CUNY campuses secured seven of the top ten spots on the Wall Street Journal's “best value colleges” which takes into account alumni outcomes and student Return on Investment. Similarly, Forbes released their list of the 25 Colleges with the Highest Payoff, where Brooklyn College took the top spot for the first time and CUNY had eight colleges total – more than any other university system. Yet, despite our successes, we recognize that CUNY is not yet living up to its FULL potential as an engine of inclusive economic mobility. More can be done to ensure our degree and non-degree programs are seamless pathways to the jobs that NYC employers are looking to fill.

To address this, the 2023 *CUNY Lifting New York* strategic plan set out bold goals to boost the employability of CUNY undergraduates: by 2030 75% of our Associate of Applied Science (AAS) and Bachelors recipients will have a job offer at graduation, with 80% consistently employed after one year. It also charges CUNY with tripling paid internship rates (to 30%).

Meeting this goal will require exponential acceleration, not just tinkering around the edges. Fortunately, though many universities across the nation struggle to find ways to ensure students transition into the workforce, we at CUNY are lucky – we’ve seen what works. For instance, we know that:

- Students who participate in paid internships are 3x more likely to have a job offer
- Students who meet with an integrated advisor are 2x more likely to have a job offer
- Students who enroll in courses developed with industry are 2x more likely to have an offer
- In academic departments that utilize career-infused degree maps, we see an up to 144% bump in grad jobs
- In academic departments with an industry specialist, 94% of reported jobs are aligned with major (vs 30% average across departments that don’t have them)

Yet, these interventions only exist in pockets across CUNY. We must scale evidence-based solutions to reach all students *where they are*. Only 25% of CUNY students go to career services, but 100% go to class. Campuses must integrate workforce connections *into* academic pathways.

That’s why this past October, in his State of the University address the Chancellor announced *CUNY Beyond* – a new transformational effort to scale and integrate career connections into EVERY undergraduate degree path. *CUNY Beyond* will invest in each of our 18 undergraduate campus by 2030 to elevate, connect, and grow what works. We began in July with four initial campuses – Borough of Manhattan and LaGuardia Community Colleges and Hunter and Lehman Colleges, which together serve 55,000 students. The Governor’s FY27 executive budget provides CUNY with \$6.8M to expand to three additional campuses this coming July, and we’re hoping to work with the Council and the City to expand to additional community colleges in this wave.

We are grateful to the Center for an Urban Future (CUF) which has included scaling *CUNY Beyond* in their recent recommendations to Mayor Mamdani<sup>ii</sup>, as well as to Robin Hood Foundation, who also called on the City to help us grow this ambitious initiative in their December Mayoral Transition Playbook.<sup>iii</sup>

The City's Office of Talent & Workforce Development has been an essential partner in meeting these goals. Its support and collaborative policy development provided the foundational building blocks for *CUNY Beyond* and many of our K-16 initiatives, which my colleague Senior University Dean, Andrea Soonachan, will discuss in just a moment. Just a few highlights include:

- **CUNY Career Launch:** In coordination with NYC Talent, CUNY and DYCD launched CUNY Career Launch, an SYEP-funded program that provides paid internships for 2,000 students each summer, with a focus on freshmen and sophomores.
- **CUNY Inclusive Economy (CIE):** In 2022, CUNY and the City of New York created the CIE initiative, which builds on our successful CUNY 2x Tech collaboration, to embed integrated advisors and industry specialists in departments. This initiative includes a focus on in-demand sectors including healthcare, green economy, business/finance, and tech. Today, 5,350 students have been served by CIE, and 2,100 businesses have been engaged by the CIE industry specialist network since spring 2023.
- **CUNY Industry Support Hub:** Complementing the CIE campus network of industry specialists, the new CUNY Industry Support Hub acts as a first stop for industry partners looking to navigate to any CUNY resource. 75% of inquiries focus on talent recruitment, 25% seek help with employee education benefits, access to faculty expertise, etc.
- **Practitioners in Residence (PiRC):** Originally incubated by the City's Tech Talent Pipeline Industry Partnership, PiRC recruits and trains industry professionals from across the city to teach rapidly emerging in-demand skills. Adopted and expanded by CUNY to tech, business, and healthcare in 2023, PiRC has recruited more than 75 companies including: LinkedIn, Etsy, Barclays, BNY, Google, Oscar Health, and Peloton.

Building on this success will not be easy. Tripling paid internships requires 32,000 more paid internships. Last year in NYC only 11,000-12,000 were posted. Employers are a critical partner in this work. 31,000 businesses recruit from CUNY, and many of them – including members of the New York Jobs CEO Council – have made meaningful commitments to hire CUNY students. Just last fall, we celebrated 10,000 CUNY students hired by the Council's 29 corporate partners.

We need more employer partners to turn to CUNY, and – in turn – we must make it easier for them to navigate to the talent they seek. This partnership will be necessary to continue to further align higher education with workforce needs. Thank you again to the Chairs for the invitation to be here today and to Speaker Menin for her support for the new Workforce Development Committee. I welcome your questions and an ongoing conversation on this important topic.

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<sup>i</sup> Kelly, Robert, Esq. President of the Board of Education, *Addresses Delivered upon the Occasion of the Opening of the Free Academy*, January 27, 1849.

<sup>ii</sup> Center for an Urban Future, *5 Ideas for How Mayor Mamdani Can Bolster Workforce Development*, February 2026 (<https://nycfuture.org/research/5-ideas-for-how-the-mamdani-administration-can-strengthen-workforce-dev>)

<sup>iii</sup> Robin Hood Foundation, *Robin Hood Partnership Against Poverty: An Agenda for Collaboration With the Mamdani Administration*", December 2025. ([https://robinhood.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Robin-Hood-Mayoral-Transition-Playbook\\_final\\_12.18.pdf](https://robinhood.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Robin-Hood-Mayoral-Transition-Playbook_final_12.18.pdf))

**Testimony of Andrea Soonachan  
CUNY Senior University Dean for K16 Initiatives and Adult Pathways  
New York City Council Joint Public Hearing  
Committee on Higher Education Jointly with the Committee on Workforce Development**

**February 23, 2023**

**Introduction**

Good morning, Chairs Joseph and Won, and members of the NYC Council Committees on Workforce Development and on Higher Education. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today about CUNY's programs to advance access to higher education for all New Yorkers. It is an honor to be here, representing the City University of New York as Senior University Dean for K16 Initiatives and Adult Pathways. In this role, I manage a portfolio of programs that create strong on-ramps to college and careers for young people and adult learners alike, helping New Yorkers save time and money on their path to a college degree and a career that pays a living wage. This includes College Now, one of the nation's largest urban dual enrollment programs; College and Career Bridge for All, a college transition program serving every graduating student from New York City Public Schools; and NYS and NYC Reconnect, systemwide efforts to support adult learners in accessing higher education through financial aid and campus resources.

These programs reflect CUNY's deep investment in and commitment to our future students, and our understanding that we must work in partnership with NYCPS, City agencies, and community-based partners to reach our shared goals for equity and access. Today's K-12 students are tomorrow's CUNY students—an average of 65 to 67% of incoming first-time freshmen at CUNY are recent graduates from NYC public high schools.

**College and Career Readiness Starts in the Classroom: College Now and Future Ready**

According to Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce, 72% of jobs nationwide will require postsecondary education or training by 2031—and the vast majority of jobs that pay a living wage will be held by workers with education beyond high school. The pathway to economic security for New York City students runs through postsecondary credentials that lead to in-demand careers. Preparing students to earn those credentials early—before they graduate high school—is one of the most powerful levers we have to accelerate workforce entry and long-term wage growth. Our aim is to create a seamless pathway for NYC students from high school to postsecondary training and credentials that launch them to careers that sustain families and strengthen our city's economy.

Our strategy begins with an opportunity to gain a meaningful head start, providing students with college credits that transfer to all CUNY campuses and the confidence to succeed in college classrooms. Each credit earned in high school reduces time to degree completion, lowers total tuition costs, and accelerates entry into the workforce. Our dual enrollment and early college high school programs are rooted in decades of research demonstrating the effectiveness of early exposure to college-level work to

increase college success, especially for students traditionally underrepresented in higher education. In 2025 alone, nearly 16,000 seniors graduated having earned an average of 5.5 college credits—saving New York City families millions of dollars in tuition collectively and giving students a head start toward completing a degree or credential aligned with living-wage careers.

College Now is the foundation of this work. Nineteen CUNY campuses partner with 592 New York City public and charter high schools to offer college-credit courses each year. In the 2024-2025 academic year, almost 31,000 public school students completed over 44,000 credit-bearing courses. 86% were eligible for free or reduced lunch or HRA benefits. 60% of participants identified as female. 34% were Hispanic, 25% were Black, and 22% were Asian. 13% had an Individualized Education Plan to receive special education services. 17% were English Language Learners.

Research consistently shows that completing even one College Now course strengthens students' academic momentum in college. Participants transition to postsecondary education at higher rates and demonstrate stronger persistence and success than peers who did not participate in the program. Nearly 90 percent of College Now students successfully transfer all earned credits to college.

This early academic momentum translates into stronger completion outcomes, with College Now alumni demonstrating a 13 percentage point higher three-year associate degree completion rate (33% vs 20%) and a 7 percentage point higher six-year bachelor's degree completion rate (69% vs 62%) at CUNY compared to those who did not participate in the program. Because degree attainment remains one of the strongest predictors of lifetime earnings and employment stability, these completion gains translate directly into stronger workforce outcomes for participating students.

Building on the strong evidence that early college credit improves degree completion—and therefore long-term earnings—we have intentionally aligned dual enrollment with structured career pathways through expanded workforce partnerships with NYC's Department of Youth and Community Development and NYCPS, launching career pathways partnerships through "FutureReadyNYC," "Work, Learn, Grow" and Summer Youth Employment Programs (SYEP).

"FutureReadyNYC" is a partnership between NYCPS, CUNY campuses, and employer partners that reimagines high school learning by integrating early college credit, industry credentials, and work-based learning in high-growth sectors, including healthcare, technology, business, and education. This year, 157 high schools have partnered with CUNY campuses to offer 197 career pathways, each featuring a two- to three-course sequence aligned to in-demand jobs. The program has shown steady growth, with enrollment rising from an estimated 7,500 students in fiscal year 2025 to a projected 10,000 students in fiscal year 2026.

### **Year-Round Earning and Learning: Work, Learn, Grow, and CUNY Reach**

DYCD's Work, Learn, Grow (WLG) employment program connects the power of early college courses to paid, career-connected experiences that help older students translate aspiration into concrete academic

and workforce pathways. WLG provides NYC high school students ages 16-20 who previously participated in SYEP with a comprehensive 22-week paid opportunity to develop work-readiness skills, explore postsecondary pathways, and earn college credit. Initially created by the New York City Council as a year-round SYEP extension, WLG has evolved over the past decade into a true model of interagency partnership through collaboration between NYC Talent and DYCD. The program offers a structured career readiness experience that builds upon participants' SYEP foundation by incorporating postsecondary planning, school-year paid work experiences, college-level courses through CUNY partnerships, and career and academic counseling to connect career aspirations with concrete next steps.

Running from October through March, WLG begins with an early-college credit opportunity that introduces students to higher education and career planning, then transitions to paid work experience, where students can earn more than \$3,000 in wages. The program has continued to expand as NYCPS, DYCD, and CUNY have contributed new program elements. In 2024-2025, WLG served 6,400 students, with a projected enrollment of 6,650 students for this academic year.

CUNY Reach expands on the possibilities for linking paid work and college coursework through collaboration with SYEP. Piloted in summer 2025, CUNY Reach was created to ensure that New York City youth—particularly those from underrepresented and economically disadvantaged communities—are not forced to choose between earning income and advancing their education. By integrating credit-bearing CUNY College Now courses with paid SYEP internships and school-based advising through CareerReady SYEP high schools, the program aligns academic learning, workforce development, and college planning into one coordinated, student-centered model. Students earn free college credits that accelerate progress and reduce the cost of a degree, while also gaining meaningful, career-connected work experience and professional networks. In its initial summer pilot, three CUNY campuses partnered with four community-based organizations—United Activities Unlimited, BEAM Center, Commonpoint Queens, and the Chinese American Planning Council—to serve 53 students, demonstrating a strong proof of concept for this integrated approach.

## **Reconnect**

CUNY recognizes that the doors to higher education must remain open to New Yorkers at every stage of life—not only at high school graduation. Students' needs evolve over time, particularly for working adults balancing jobs, families, and financial responsibilities. In Fall 2022, with support from the New York City Council, we launched CUNY Reconnect to address a pressing workforce challenge: hundreds of thousands of working-age adults have already earned college credits and demonstrated persistence, yet stopped short of completing a degree.

At the core of the CUNY Reconnect model is direct financial support—nearly \$7.5 million distributed to date to help students resolve prior balances, cover tuition gaps, stay enrolled, and remove application fees that stand in the way of enrollment, and successfully complete their academic programs. Research shows that these small grants have a significant impact: A meta-analysis of 43 studies found that grant aid increases the probability of student persistence and degree completion between 2 and 3 percentage

points, with an additional \$1,000 in grant aid improving persistence and attainment by 1.5 to 2 percentage points.

Since its launch, CUNY Reconnect has served more than 71,000 adult learners across CUNY. The return on investment for each degree earned is significant. 52% of these students are majoring in Health Professions or STEM fields, and another 20% are in Business, putting these students on the path to high-demand, high-wage careers. Many of these students, beginning in fall 2025, are now eligible for New York State Reconnect, which covers tuition, fees, books, and supplies at our community colleges.

We estimate CUNY associate graduates to have a lifetime earnings of \$2,497,443 and CUNY baccalaureate graduates to have a lifetime earnings of \$2,929,825, compared to \$1.5M for high school graduates. CUNY Reconnect has graduated almost 6,000 associate degree students and over 7,000 bachelor's degree students, contributing to an overall increase of nearly \$16 billion compared to the collective lifetime earnings of the same number of high school graduates—strengthening not only individual families, but New York City's workforce and economy as a whole.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you for your interest in this important topic and commitment to expanding opportunities for New Yorkers at every stage of life. From middle school students stepping onto a college campus for the first time, to high school students earning both credits and wages, to working adults returning to complete degrees, CUNY is building an integrated, citywide workforce pipeline. Dual enrollment accelerates credit accumulation and strengthens degree completion. Paid, career-connected learning builds professional networks and experience. Adult re-enrollment converts previously earned credits into workforce-ready credentials. Together, these initiatives reduce time to degree, lower financial barriers, and align academic pathways with New York City's labor market needs. Your support of CUNY's efforts to scale and sustain these programs not only transforms individual lives but also ensures that the life changing economic mobility higher education provides is within reach for all New Yorkers.

**Testimony of Eli Dvorkin**  
**Editorial & Policy Director, Center for an Urban Future**  
**Before the New York City Council Committees on Higher Education and Workforce Development**  
**Oversight Hearing on Aligning Higher Education with Workforce Demand**

**February 27, 2026**

Good morning Chair Joseph, Chair Won, and members of the Committees.

My name is Eli Dvorkin, and I'm the editorial and policy director at the Center for an Urban Future. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Let me start with some good news: CUNY remains the single largest and most effective engine of economic mobility in New York City.

Today, CUNY is doing more than ever to align education with workforce demand—from expanding work-based learning and employer partnerships to launching initiatives like CUNY 2X Tech, the Inclusive Economy Initiative, and now the broader CUNY Beyond effort.

But the labor market is changing faster than ever—and the scale of the challenge has grown.

Far too many students still struggle to translate academic achievement into strong career outcomes.

Just two-thirds of CUNY graduates are employed within a year. Many earn less than a living wage in New York City. One in ten alumni end up in retail or food service five years after graduation—rising to 13 percent for community college graduates. Even graduates who enter high-wage fields sometimes earn only half the median wage of peers in the same industry.

And they are graduating into the toughest entry-level job market in years. Since 2022, our research shows that entry-level postings requiring little or no experience have plunged 37.4 percent, and internships are down 37.1 percent compared to before the pandemic.

At the same time, only 12 percent of CUNY undergraduates complete a paid internship—far below the national average of 57 percent.

In this environment, career success should be embedded across the institution—or this economic mobility engine could stall.

To CUNY's credit, momentum is building.

Under Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez, career success has become a central priority. Last October, the university launched CUNY Beyond—a systemwide effort to make career-connected learning a core part of every student's experience. CUNY has embedded industry specialists in select departments, expanded paid internships, strengthened employer partnerships, and grown initiatives like 2X Tech and the Inclusive Economy Initiative.

Early results are promising. Participating departments report higher internship participation, stronger job placement, and higher starting wages.

But these efforts still reach only a fraction of students. The Inclusive Economy Initiative currently touches just 9 percent of CUNY's 450 academic departments.

If CUNY is to remain the city's most powerful engine of upward mobility, city policymakers should help scale what's working—and help the university adapt more quickly to a changing economy.

The Council can play a decisive role.

First, make a major public commitment—backed by funding—to scale career success efforts across CUNY.

That means:

- Expanding the Inclusive Economy Initiative to reach at least half of all departments.
- Building campus-level capacity by hiring more hybrid academic-career advisors and embedded industry specialists.
- Renewing and expanding proven efforts like CUNY 2X Tech—and replicating that model in additional sectors.
- Growing the Practitioners-in-Residence Corps into healthcare, business, and professional services.
- And setting a clear goal: ensuring at least 30 percent of students complete a paid internship or work-based learning experience before graduation.

Without a measurable target—and the resources to meet it—tens of thousands of graduates will continue leaving CUNY each year with degrees but limited work experience.

Second, invest in the infrastructure needed to manage employer partnerships at scale.

CUNY has begun piloting a systemwide CRM platform, but philanthropic dollars alone cannot bring it to full implementation. Today, separate campus systems lead to duplicative outreach and missed opportunities. A fully scaled CRM would allow undergraduate campuses to coordinate engagement, track outcomes, and present a seamless face to employers.

Third, expand paid internship capacity directly.

A Pay It Forward revolving internship fund—seeded with city dollars and repaid when employers hire interns full-time—could dramatically expand subsidized placements. Today, CUNY can fund only about 20 percent of campus requests. Demand far exceeds supply.

Fourth, lead by example.

City government is one of New York's largest employers, yet remains an underutilized launchpad for CUNY talent. Agencies should significantly expand CUNY internships and create clearer internship-to-employment pathways.

These are tangible steps the Council can advance through the budget and oversight.

But action should go beyond scaling career success efforts at CUNY alone.

To better align higher education with workforce demand, workforce development should be elevated as a core affordability strategy.

That includes:

- Making a bold new investment in workforce development—through a NYC Talent Development Fund, a Career Impact Bond, a Workforce AI Readiness Fund, or by tapping funds from rezonings—to scale what works.
- Establishing an Economic Mobility Cabinet and Workforce Czar to coordinate policy across agencies and hold the system accountable for measurable economic mobility gains.
- Recruiting the next 100 major employers into structured partnerships with CUNY and other providers—expanding skills-based hiring, paid internships, and clear pipelines into good jobs.

The stakes could not be higher.

City leaders have rightly made affordability the top priority. Strengthening career success for CUNY students should be central to that strategy—because boosting incomes is just as important as lowering costs.

CUNY is generating momentum. But without sustained city investment, infrastructure, and accountability, it will be difficult to meet the demands of this moment.

With bold action from the Council, CUNY can transform career outcomes for tens of thousands more New Yorkers each year—and remain the city's most powerful engine of economic mobility.

Thank you.



## BRAVEN

### **Testimony of Kilsys Payamps-Roure, Executive Director of Braven New York**

#### **To the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education and Committee on Workforce Development Legislative Hearing on Friday, February 27th, 2026**

As the Founding Executive Director of Braven New York, I know how challenging it can be to align higher education and workforce to ensure that all students are able to land strong, first opportunities after college. Braven is a nonprofit organization that partners with institutions of higher education to help their students (particularly those who are low-income or first-generation) graduate college and land in high-quality jobs or graduate degree programs. Braven defines a strong first job as one that: 1) requires a bachelor's degree, 2) is full-time and paid, 3) and has a combination of benefits, promotion pathways, and a competitive salary.

Braven launched in New York City in 2020 through an inaugural partnership with Lehman College. In the spring of 2023, we expanded our footprint in the city to the City College of New York. In total, Braven New York has served over 2,500 students in New York City. Beginning in Fall 2026, we will expand to the University of Mount Saint Vincent, serving 1,475 students over the next five years. Of the 980 Braven fellows who graduated nationally last year, 84 percent are employed or enrolled in graduate school, 70 percent had at least one career-accelerating internship in college (a 22 percentage point uplift over their peer group), and 92 percent graduated on time (a 20 percentage point uplift over their peer group).

We are thrilled to see the committees prioritize the alignment of higher education and workforce, which is crucial to strengthening the local economy and narrowing stubborn income inequality. In order to do this, we offer three suggestions:

1. Fund and incentivize high-quality, career-aligned internships
2. Support nonprofit organizations and intermediaries that bridge higher education and workforce
3. Collect and publish better data on post-college outcomes

#### **Recommendation 1: Fund and incentivize high-quality, career-aligned internships**

The influence of internships on later career success is underscored by our data: Braven Fellows who complete at least one strong internship in college are 18 percentage points more likely to secure a high-quality job than those who do not (67% vs 49%).<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, non-traditional students are much less likely to complete an internship due to competing demands on time and differing access to opportunities. Strengthening investments in programs like the NYC Public Service Corps, CUNY Career Launch, and creating new incentives for local employees to offer paid internships to city students are important mechanisms to align higher education and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://impactreport.braven.org/>

workforce, particularly as local employers tailor internship experiences to in-demand jobs at their companies.

Recommendation 2: Support nonprofit organizations and intermediaries that bridge higher education and workforce

Nonprofit organizations like Braven are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between higher education offerings and workforce demands. Braven provides a three-credit, semester-long course called the Braven Accelerator Course that is open to all students at our partner institutions. The course integrates career readiness into an institution's academic curriculum, embedding career preparation into a student's coursework in their sophomore or junior year. The course is conducted in small cohorts of 5-8 students facilitated by volunteers from the local employer community. Once students complete the Braven Accelerator course, they have access to our post-course offerings and programs that support them in landing a strong first job, or admittance to graduate school, within six months of graduation. This includes access to a career coach on Braven's team, 1:1 professional mentor from the local employer community in their field of interest, networking events, job skills sessions, treks to local employers, and industry specific support called Career Communities. All of this builds students' networks to local employers, increases the likelihood of landing strong internships in college, and puts students on a pathway to strong jobs. The city should invest in nonprofits like Braven that have proven models to align higher education and workforce development.

Recommendation 3: Collect and publish better data on post-college outcomes

The city collects a good amount of data on local workforce trends, but too often this data is not connected to higher education records. Braven believes that consumers and policymakers need access to student-level data by institution and by program, disaggregated by important demographic factors and available in a clearly digestible format accessible for students and workers in the city. We recommend that employment status, job location, and earnings are gathered within 1 year and 5 years and then every 10 years after degree completion. This data should be collected across all institution types for both completers and non completers, and for both full- and part-time students. Student access to real-time data would allow them to make smart decisions that prepare them for in-demand fields showing the highest return-on-investment and the greatest local workforce need.

We look forward to working with city leaders to support our city's students and workers. Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,

*Kilsys Payamps-Roure*

Executive Director of Braven New York

**NYC Council Oversight Hearing: Aligning Higher Education with Workforce Demand**

**Doug Lipari, NYC Talent - Testimony**

February 27, 2026

The Office of Talent and Workforce Development

**Introduction**

Good morning, my name is Doug Lipari, and I am the Executive Director of the New York City Office of Talent and Workforce Development, or NYC Talent. I'm joined today by Leah Hebert, Chief Policy & Programs Officer, and Thwiba Eltom, Director of Apprenticeship & Accelerated Training from our Tech Industry Partnership team. Thank you to the members of the New York City Council Committees on Workforce Development and Higher Education, Workforce Development Chair Julie Won, and Higher Education Chair Rita Joseph, for inviting us to testify today. And thank you to the Council and Speaker Julie Menin for establishing the new Committee on Workforce Development. We think workforce development is more important than ever, and we are thrilled that Council has provided this avenue for collaboration.

I want to start off by introducing myself and the work of our office, as my team and I may be new to many of you. I joined NYC Talent in 2023, but I've been a public servant in the City for over ten years. Over this time, I have seen that City government is at its best when it works collaboratively, creatively, and in partnership with New Yorkers and the organizations that serve them. So that's the lens I bring to my work here at NYC Talent, and I look forward to working with you all to move our workforce strategy, and our city, forward.

**About NYC Talent**

The public workforce ecosystem in New York City is made up of more than 150 programs administered by more than 30 different City agencies and their many contracted providers. This includes the City's core workforce agencies like the Department of Small Business Services (SBS), the Human Resources Administration (HRA), the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), and the City University of New York (CUNY). While each

of these agencies focuses on its own core mission and service delivery, NYC Talent's mission is to work with all partners to ensure the City's workforce development strategy aligns with jobseeker needs, employer demand, and the changing economy.

To effectively support New Yorkers, our workforce development system must not only be coordinated with higher education partners like CUNY, but with numerous other public and private partners. With NYC Public Schools (NYCPS), DYCD, and CUNY, NYC Talent empowers young people with skills and knowledge to access careers in their adulthood. We collaborate with employers, so that workforce programs offered by the City are preparing people for in-demand jobs. And we work with partners like the City's Economic Development Corporation and Department of City Planning, so public economic development investments lead to quality job opportunities for residents. We also work with human services agencies and providers, so that jobseekers who face obstacles to completing a training or retaining a job have the support they need to succeed.

Because of this complicated landscape, coordination and collaboration are core to the work we do through several specialized teams and strategic initiatives. NYC Talent has **Industry Partnerships** in healthcare, tech, and resilient infrastructure that work to support equitable sector growth and align workforce programming with employer demand. We have an **Apprenticeship Accelerator** that expands opportunities for New Yorkers to learn-while-they-earn. We launched **Community Hiring**, which works to make sure the city's contract spending expands access to career pathways for low-income communities. We also have dedicated expertise to make sure that New Yorkers who face particular barriers - including young people, people with disabilities, and older adults - are better served by the workforce system.

## Systems Approach

A clear example of our evidence-based, systems-level approach to workforce development is in our ongoing work on the *Action Plan for Young Adult Career Success*. This strategic plan, developed with CUNY, Public Schools, and DYCD in 2023, is built on two truths. First, we know there is considerable overlap across the young people that participate in City services among New York City's 900,000 Public Schools students, 400,000 CUNY students, and the 100,000 young people enrolled in the Summer Youth Employment Program each year. It is only practical that we coordinate to maximize our public investments in young people across organizational boundaries. This is done in recognition of a second important truth: just like many of us here relied on a series of education, training, work, and social experiences to get where we are today, the workforce system needs to provide New Yorkers with a series of interrelated experiences to find career success.

To build these opportunities for success, the Youth Action Plan prioritized strategies that include career-connected learning, career exploration opportunities, and paid work experiences. In plainer language, we want to make sure young people have opportunities, both in- and out- of the classroom, to learn about career possibilities, acquire relevant skills, and experience what it's like to work - preferably while getting paid. In even plainer words, you can't be what you can't see, so we work to maximize exposure to these new opportunities. These strategies not only achieve more equitable outcomes when preparing young people for work, but also help them build the sort of social capital and networks that support any of us through our careers and lives.

The Youth Action Plan has delivered initiatives like **Exploring Futures**, which in Fiscal Year 2025 provided 37,000 middle school students in over 470 DYCD after-school programs with opportunities for career exposure, CUNY college visits, and support with high school applications. The Youth Action Plan also informed many of the initiatives CUNY highlighted in their testimony, like **CareerReady Work-Learn-Grow** and **FutureReady NYC**, and we are proud to partner with CUNY to better serve New York City's young people. While these initiatives are administered by our agency partners, we at NYC Talent help innovate, coordinate, identify funding opportunities, and advocate to ensure ongoing progress toward our shared goals.

#### **Alignment and Collaboration with CUNY**

Beyond these specific areas of collaboration, NYC Talent and CUNY are long-standing partners in building a workforce system that advances economic justice. NYC Talent supports CUNY's efforts to help students access opportunities to develop in-demand skills, acquire relevant work experience, and access supportive networks to maximize the value of their time at CUNY.

One particularly important area of collaboration is the City's **CUNY 2x Tech** program, which was launched in 2017 by our office in partnership with CUNY and SBS. CUNY 2x Tech increases the number of CUNY students who graduate with tech degrees and better positions them to attain jobs in the city's competitive and dynamic tech sector. It does this by hiring new computer science faculty, scaling curriculum innovations informed by industry and led by faculty experts, hiring new academic tech advisors for classroom-to-career advising, and by enhancing opportunities for experiential, paid work-based learning. Since its launch, CUNY 2x Tech has reached over 15,000 students and has scaled to 11 CUNY campuses, including an

expansion to community colleges for the first time in 2024, at Borough of Manhattan, LaGuardia, and Guttman.

CUNY 2x Tech's success helped the City realize the positive impacts that more career advising, internships, and industry-experienced faculty had on the outcomes of CUNY students. This success informed how NYC Talent supported the subsequent launch of the **CUNY Inclusive Economy (CIE)** initiative in 2022. CIE expands internship and job opportunities for students, builds stronger relationships between industry professionals and CUNY campuses, and enhances CUNY's career development capacities in key sectors like healthcare, infrastructure, and business. In Fiscal Year 2024, CIE programming scaled across 15 departments and 8 CUNY campuses, serving 1,400 students. Students who attended just one career advising session made possible by the initiative were twice as likely to secure a job opportunity, compared to their non-participant counterparts, with full-time jobs secured after graduation paying an average of more than \$65,000 per year.

We are proud of CIE's success, and more so that the launch of **CUNY Beyond** in October 2025 continues to build on its strategic vision. Where CIE is department-based, CUNY Beyond expands these workforce best practices into a campus-wide model, which will embed these proven tools across all of a college's academic programs. These efforts are emblematic of how the City is effectively aligning, piloting, evaluating, and scaling impactful workforce and higher education strategies to better support New Yorkers.

In addition to the work I've outlined, NYC Talent collaborates with CUNY on programs for New Yorkers who are not seeking a degree. This includes the **CUNY Nurse Fellowship Academy** launched in 2025 with SBS—which prepares the workers needed to teach the next

generation of nurses— and an **early childhood educator apprenticeship program** at CUNY's Professional Development Institute, that supports advancement opportunities for these critical caregivers.

We also work with CUNY to increase pathways to public sector careers. Through a partnership with our office, CUNY, and the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS), the City launched the **Civil Service Pathways Fellowship**. This program recruits CUNY graduates into two-year fellowships with City agencies, leading to a permanent civil service title. We are currently working with our partners to expand and unlock new public sector pathways to support Public Schools and CUNY students.

### **Conclusion**

As you can see, NYC Talent works to coordinate and scale change across the City's workforce system, including in partnership with CUNY. Therefore, many of the themes from the Center for an Urban Future's recent workforce report are aligned with our work. Perhaps most importantly, NYC Talent and CUF are in complete alignment that workforce development is an important part of the affordability agenda and a key strategy for achieving economic mobility.

To that end, our office, in partnership with the **New York City Workforce Development Board**, which oversees the City's federal workforce funding, has been engaged in strategic planning since mid-2025. This effort has incorporated labor market data, insights directly from jobseekers, and feedback from over 200 public and private stakeholders, including training providers, community-based organizations, educational institutions, labor unions, businesses, philanthropy, and government. We aim to use the diverse perspectives of this expansive

coalition to recommend enhancements to our workforce ecosystem, so it is more effective, connected, and resilient.

There is no denying that our economy and job market have undergone significant changes in the last several years. Too many New Yorkers are facing a high cost of living in a labor market where access to quality employment is increasingly competitive. But New Yorkers do not have to face this challenge alone. NYC Talent, CUNY, and many partners across the City—including our Deputy Mayor for Economic Justice Julie Su—are working together to deliver a workforce development strategy that is agile, industry-informed, and inclusive, so all New Yorkers can access quality jobs and have dignity in the workplace. Thank you for your time and we look forward to your partnership and questions.



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**New York City Council Committee on Higher Education and Committee on Workforce  
Development Joint Hearing**

*Testimony of Rhoda Wilson, Vice Chair for Legislative Affairs of the CUNY University  
Student Senate*

*February 23, 2026*

Good Morning, Chairs and members of the Committees on Higher Education and Workforce Development,

My name is Rhoda Wilson, and I currently serve as the Vice Chair for Legislative Affairs at the CUNY University Student Senate representing over 240,000 students across the 26 campuses. I am also a student at The College of Staten Island, majoring in Communication with a concentration in Digital Media and Design.

As an immigrant student, CUNY has served as a beacon of affordability and community that has provided me and many others quality education that I don't believe I would have had the opportunity to experience outside of the university and my home college. For over 170 years the CUNY system has built up a worldwide reputation for being the stepping stone for students in climbing up the socio-economic class structure through the many resources and opportunities available.

As we know CUNY students aren't just students, a lot of us are parents either just starting out their families or searching for a means of security to help protect their families. Some are part time and full-time workers; a lot of them work more than one job to make ends meet. And on top of all that, our students still find a way to fit in advocacy and showing up for their community into their busy lives and schedules.

To our students, CUNY serves as a pathway into affordability, we further our education in order to gain. The experience needed to move forward in life and join the workforce. Most of our students tend to give back through means of joining the city workforce; however, it has become increasingly harder for students after graduation to obtain the security of a city job.

The current feeling within campuses is the struggle and fear for finding permanent, steady employment after graduation. A lot of students have struggled through their college career with finding internships especially those pertaining to their majors, therefore missing out on core hands-on experience within working spaces and their fields affecting their overall college experience and desirable skills for employers.

We must invest in making sure our students are well prepared to give back to our city through





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raising barriers that allow access to internships, mentorships and fellowships. Imbedding work experience into curriculum and strengthening CUNY's relationships with city-based employers are a must in working towards a better future for all.

Investing in the preparation for the workforce is important but so is investing in easing the access to transportation that will help ensure students access to work opportunities throughout the five boroughs. Access to affordable transportation should not be a wall that deters students from spreading all around our city sharing their skills for the betterment of society.

Many of us that do rely on the MTA travel long distances that sometimes can go up to a two-hour long commute just to get to class and internship/work opportunities. Using public transportation is a necessity for us; however, with the ever-increasing fares for the buses and trains, commuter costs have become an extremely unbearable burden for our students.

I believe that the pressing issue of transportation affordability can be addressed by CUNY through your support of the University Student Senate's Free OMNY Card Student Commuter Grant Pilot Program to fund free OMNY Cards for CUNY students.

Access to transportation is access to education. A student who cannot afford an OMNY Card cannot attend class. A student who cannot afford to travel cannot take an internship, participate in research, or engage in civic life and personal 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 City and State have the power to change.

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; it is essential. We urge you to fund Free OMNY cards for CUNY students and to continue investing in policies that remove barriers to education for the sake and betterment of our city and country.

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.

Thank you so much for giving me your time and I look forward to working together so that we can ensure that every CUNY student gets the support they need to succeed.



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**New York City Council Committee of Higher Education and Committee of  
Workforce Development Joint Hearing**  
*Testimony of Akkeem Polack, Chairperson of the CUNY University Student Senate & CUNY  
Trustee*

*February 27, 2026*

Good afternoon, Chairs and Members of the Committees on Higher Education and Workforce Development, My name is Akkeem Polack, Chairperson of University Student Senate and CUNY Trustee, representing more than 240,000 students across 26 campuses.

CUNY has always been a ladder of opportunity for working class and immigrant families. But today, a degree alone is not enough. Students are not enrolling just for a diploma. We are enrolling for economic mobility, stability for our families, and the chance to build something better than what we inherited. In 2004, the Center for an Urban Future's CUNY on the Job report highlighted CUNY's growing role in workforce development. Since then, workforce preparation has become central to CUNY's mission. I agree with the Chancellor that CUNY is not only about getting a degree, but about what happens after the degree.

The launch of CUNY Beyond reflects that shift. Integrating career connections into every stage of a student's academic journey is the right direction. But we must be clear about what is truly best for workforce development, both within our campuses and beyond them. Within campuses, workforce development must be structured, not optional. Career advisement must connect majors to real labor market outcomes. Internships must be paid and accessible. Employer engagement cannot be limited to occasional job fairs. It must be embedded into curriculum, into classrooms, and into credit bearing experiences so that every student graduates with practical exposure and real connections.

Beyond campuses, we must strengthen the process of seeking jobs itself. For too many students, navigating applications, interviews, and hiring systems feels disconnected and unclear. We need defined pipelines into high demand industries, coordinated recruitment efforts, and employers who see CUNY as a talent partner. Workforce development should not end at graduation. Employers must also invest in training. Jobs should not simply expect experience. They should help build it.

So we must ask: what is truly best for college students when it comes to work? It is preparation, yes. It is opportunity, yes. But it is also access. You cannot work at an internship that you cannot afford to get to. Transportation is not separate from workforce development. It is foundational to it. If a student cannot afford the train, they cannot attend the internship. That is why I urge you to fund the CUNY University Student Senate Free OMNY Card Student Commuter Grant Pilot Program and fulfill CUNY's \$700,000 request from the City to launch it. This is not simply a transportation initiative. It is a workforce access initiative. It ensures that opportunity is not limited by a OMNY Card balance.

CUNY students are ready to work, lead, and build futures for ourselves and our families. With intentional investment, stronger alignment between campuses and industry, and real support like the University Student Senate Free OMNY Card Student Commuter Grant Pilot Program, CUNY can continue to be the engine of mobility that New York depends on.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to CUNY students.



**University Student Senate – OMNY Pilot Program for Eligible Students**

**Why This Matters?** Transportation remains one of the most immediate and preventable barriers for CUNY students. With many commuting across boroughs to attend classes or work, public transit access is essential. For students already burdened with housing, food, and tuition insecurity, rising transportation costs can mean missed classes, reduced course loads, or even withdrawal. A targeted and sustainable model ensures that those most in need continue to access education without interruption.

Metric	Value
Pilot Budget	\$1,400,000
Cost per Student (Semester)	\$450
Students Covered	3,111
Trips per Student	75
Total Trips Provided	233,325

**Pilot Program: \$1.4 Million Budget:** This pilot model offers an efficient, cost-effective alternative to a full-scale, universal program. Instead of offering unlimited weekly OMNY cards, this plan provides eligible students with a **5-day, 2-ride-per-day card**, 75 trips per student, designed specifically to cover commuting for in-person classes but to be used at their discretion.

Category	Estimated Distribution
Pilot population (based on original plan)	100%
Students with disabilities	20%*
Student Parents	20%*
Students who were in the Foster Care System	20%*
Low-income Community College Students	35%*
International Students	5%*

**\*Under review for finalized percentage by Policy Planning**

The CUNY Student Commuter Grant Pilot Program provides a free OMNY for eligible students each semester, renewed based on academic performance. Eligible students must be enrolled at CUNY, take at least two in-person classes, and cannot already receive ASAP benefits. Cards are non-transferable and valid only on days CUNY campuses are open, for subway, local bus, and Access-A-Ride. Once a student has received from the **OMNY Program**, they cannot apply until all other eligible students receive the program.

**Our goal is to secure equal or increased funding for the OMNY Program in future semesters to support eligible CUNY students.**

# ABOUT USS CUNY

One voice, united for over 240,000 CUNY students.

The University Student Senate (USS) of the City University of New York (CUNY), founded in 1972, advocates for accessible, affordable, and high-quality education. USS protects student rights, supports public higher education, and promotes student welfare across CUNY. Our delegates represent over 240,000 students from 26 campuses.



Advocating for Students Since 1972

Representing 240,000+ CUNY Students  
USS is the voice of over 240,000 students across 26 campuses

Driving Policy and Change  
USS leads advocacy efforts on critical issues like transportation, mental health, and essential student services

More Information

[www.usscuny.org](http://www.usscuny.org)



555 W 57th St, New York, NY 10019



## CUNY University Student Senate



Representing  
**240,000+**  
CUNY students

"The Student Voice of CUNY"

LET'S BUILD  
A STRONGER  
CUNY





## FREE OMNY CARD CAMPAIGN

(formerly #FREEMETROCARDS)

CUNY's inclusion of \$1.4 million in its budget request reflects meaningful progress as a direct response to student advocacy. The funding supports a pilot program that would provide eligible students with a 5 day two rides per day OMNY card totaling 75 trips per student, with \$700,000 from the State and \$700,000 from the City. While this is an important step, it does not meet the full transportation needs of CUNY students. Free OMNYCards remain our priority because reliable transportation is essential for equitable access to education.



SIGN OUR PETITION



## MODERNIZING CUNY CAMPUSES WITH STRONG INFRASTRUCTURE AND ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY

CUNY students deserve campuses that match the scale of their ambition. Modernizing infrastructure and upgrading technology across the university ensures that classrooms, labs, libraries, and student spaces are safe, reliable, and built for twenty-first century learning. This initiative supports better Wi-Fi, updated academic software, improved digital systems, and well-maintained facilities that enhance both in-person and online learning.



26 CAMPUSES, 70+ STUDENT LEADERS, WE ARE THE STUDENT VOICE OF CUNY

## EXPANSION OF CUNY CARES AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT ACROSS ALL FIVE BOROUGHES

Broader coverage across all five boroughs would ensure no student is left without essential assistance due to campus location. Through CUNY CARES (\$4.6M), strengthening mental health and wellness support would provide students with the stability needed to remain enrolled, succeed academically, and balance school, work, and personal responsibilities.

## EQUITABLE ACCESS THROUGH MODERN ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Many students rely on specialized tools for reading, writing, mobility, and digital navigation. When campuses lack adequate funding or updated equipment, students with disabilities face preventable academic barriers. Access, Success, Inclusion through Disability Services (\$7.8M) ensures investment in modern assistive resources so every student can fully engage in their courses and participate confidently in the academic community.

## STAY CONNECTED



chairperson@ussuncy.org  
executivedirector@ussuncy.org

LET'S BUILD A STRONGER CUNY



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**New York City Council Committee of Higher Education and Committee of Workforce  
Development Joint Hearing**  
*Testimony of Benjamin Wade, Member of the CUNY University Student Senate*

*February 23, 2026*

Good morning, and thank you to the committees on Higher Education and Workforce Development for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Benjamin Wade. I am a student at John Jay College, and I represent the University Student Senate.

CUNY is often called the "Engine of Social Mobility," but for that engine to function, the gears between the classroom and the workforce must actually connect. Currently, that connection is slipping. The gap between our education and the careers we seek is widening, and it is the students who are paying the price for that friction.

The city has the data and knows what works. When students are paired with actual industry mentors and startups, they are three times more likely to have a job upon graduation. This isn't just theory; it is a proven return on investment for our city.

Yet, we treat these programs like "boutiques"- exclusive programs that serve only a fraction of our students. We cannot properly address minority unemployment in this city. At the same time, CUNY's most effective career pipelines, such as CUNY 2X Tech, remain gated off from the majority of our campuses. We need a system that is accessible to many, not just exceptional for a few.

We are past the point of handshakes and promises; we are here for investments and commitment:

- **Scale the CUNY 2X Tech Model:** We need this pipeline expanded immediately into specific industries like healthcare, finance, and the green economy. It is time to increase accessibility and treat this program like the city's critical economic infrastructure.
- **Fund the University Student Senate OMNY Card Student Commuter Grant Pilot Program:** Fulfill CUNY's \$700,000 request from the City to launch a free Transit/OMNY card pilot. You cannot work a job that you cannot afford to get to.
- **Expand CUNY CARES to all Five Boroughs:** These workforce pipelines are only effective when built on a stable foundation. We need a university-wide expansion of CUNY CARES to address food and housing insecurity that threatens retention rates before students ever reach the workforce.

If you want a city that works, you have to invest in the students who do the work. Don't just give us a degree and a handshake; give us the gears to move our city forward.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to CUNY students.





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2026 New York City Council Committee on Higher Education

*Testimony of Damir Shavkatov, Vice Chair for Senior College Affairs for the CUNY  
University Student Senate*

*February 23, 2026*

Good morning, and thank you to the Committees on Workforce Development and Higher Education for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Damir Shavkatov. I am a proud Brooklyn College student and the Vice Chair for Senior College Affairs for the CUNY University Student Senate, representing over 160,000 students across CUNY's 11 senior colleges.

For CUNY students, "aligning higher education with workforce demand" is not just a policy phrase, it is a daily reality. Many of us are full-time students and part-time workers, caretakers and commuters, first-generation college students and, in many cases, the primary source of income for our families. We are already in the workforce. The real question is whether our time at CUNY intentionally prepares us for stable, career-track jobs in New York City's growing industries, or if we are left to figure that out on our own.

Right now, too many opportunities function like a lottery. If you are on the right campus, in the right major, and linked to the right program, you may get access to the structured pathways, paid internships, mentorship, industry-aligned coursework.

I want to ground this in the experiences of students I represent, whose identities I will keep anonymous. One student is the first in their family to attend college and lives in a crowded apartment with relatives. They work nights in a service job and attend classes during the day, hoping to enter the healthcare field. Despite strong grades, they have no clear pathway from classroom to career, and unpaid internships are simply not an option when missing a shift means missing rent. Another student spends over two hours each way commuting on multiple trains because they cannot afford to live closer to campus. As a result, they regularly miss classes and key campus events, including recruiting sessions and networking opportunities that are not scheduled with commuter students in mind. A third student, a computer science major at a campus without a flagship tech pipeline, watches their peers at private institutions receive structured mentorship and interview prep while they rely on sporadic club events and mass-application job boards.



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To change this, we need city support that turns isolated opportunities into a consistent, accessible system. We urge you to invest in expanding career service capacity across all CUNY campuses, so every student has access to individualized guidance, employer connections, and career-relevant programming regardless of their major or location. We also ask you to support the University Student Senate's priorities like the funding free OMNY cards pilot program so students can reliably reach classes, jobs, and internships, and strengthening CUNY CARES and related basic-needs supports so that housing and food insecurity do not force students to choose between survival and career development.

These investments would increase accessibility for low-income, working, and commuter students and ensure that CUNY's promise of social mobility is matched by clear, supported pathways into New York City's workforce.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to CUNY students.

**From:** Alexander Brown [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, February 27, 2026 12:17 PM  
**To:** Paulenoff, Alex [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] St. Francis College Testimony - NYCC Committee on Higher Education/Workforce Development - 2/27/26

[REDACTED]

Good afternoon,

Attached is testimony from Tim Cecere, President of St. Francis College, to the hearing of the New York Council Committee on Higher Education, jointly with the Committee on Workforce Development, "Aligning Higher Education with Workforce Development," February 27, 2026.

Thank you,

Alexander Brown

Assistant Communications Specialist

Pitta Bishop & Del Giorno LLC

120 Broadway, 28th Floor

New York, NY 10271

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Ladies and Gentlemen, Esteemed Members of this Council

Good morning. Today, I come before you as the President of St. Francis College, a 160-years young institution rooted in faith, and mission that transcends classrooms, laboratories, and textbooks. In deep consideration of this new era of accelerated technological innovations, you are right to inquire how St. Francis College is preparing students for relevant and sustainable careers. Guided by timeless Franciscan Values through shifting societal norms, coupled with the knock-on effect of economic volatility, we equip students to successfully navigate this journey with Magellien-like determination.

The response to your inquiry lies not in our traditional curriculum or modality trends, but in our unique approach to blending faith, family, community, investment and progressive-common sense. By progressive common sense, I mean the nurturing of the uniquely human aspiration to gather information, form ideas, eliminate impediments, and bring an end to imposed pain and suffering while respecting the integrity of a collective and civilized society in harmony with individual rights. An example of this is our current 12-part LinkedIn series on Accessibility and Accommodation strategies, tools and techniques for students and adults dealing with the challenges of physical disabilities. This series is compiled in collaboration with our recent graduate Jessica who was born with Cerebral Palsy and has spent her entire life in a wheelchair. We share her lived experience and the experiences of others in her network with the general population. Jessica is a great writer and talent is a limited resource so we must create pathways for **all** to participate in forming a more perfect and just society. St. Francis College has no fewer than 15 mental-health counselors addressing the psychological and emotional struggles so many in

our society are facing. Mental healthcare is foundational to managing the daily rigors required for a college degree.

A word on Faith and Technology. Our faith foundation contextualizes human technological advancements as Gifts from God. In a world where the impact of AI dominates headlines, our students are taught that technology is not bad, but people can be bad at technology when they act without ethics and integrity. AI and blockchain infrastructure hold the potential to cure cancer, feed the hungry, house the homeless, foster world peace, democratize education and create the blueprint of a better world. At the same time, it can destroy, corrupt, reduce, isolate and marginalize entire populations. The choice of how we effectuate technology is ours. Through courses integrating our faith and values with business, science, and the arts, we openly contemplate these obvious contradictions: 1) profit vs. compassion 2) morality vs. innovation and 3) philosophy vs. routines of daily living. It is our belief that employers will highly value this combination of soft skills like empathy and compassion with decision-making qualities requiring abstract thinking and cost-benefit analysis. These skills in particular are crucial to advancing from entry level to more senior level positions across the board. By embedding faith and reflection, we cultivate resilience. Our students do not fear change; they help shape it which flips uncertainty over to opportunity.

In 2023 St. Francis College took a closer look at the education we provided to our students, the community, our hospital partners, and our corporate partners. We identified our true role within the context of these systems. We are clearly not outside of these systems, and our outcomes are not separate. Our tuition had to align with the economic realities of our students return on the investment in their education, and our orientation needed to shift

from leading with Liberal Arts to Liberal Arts and Humanities accompanying, assisting, informing and guiding more hard wired college level disciplines across Nursing, Radiology, Accounting, Finance Business, Computer Science, Education, Financial Literacy, STEM programming and more. At first, our professors resisted and this is understandable because for a very long time the world was perfectly suited and in urgent need of their expertise as a leading disciplines. Accordingly, we explored the workforce needs of the local and global communities and worked backwards to develop students that fit those needs, rather than presenting what “we” traditionally taught then saying to the community, “good luck to you and the students”. Soon, it became obvious that our success aligns with this important shift. With intimate class sizes and a student-to-faculty ratio that rivals elite colleges, we offer personalized attention impossible at universities who were not capable, committed, or willing to make these shifts in a reasonable timeframe. St. Francis College professors know the students by their name, their dreams, and individual capabilities. This fosters learning and adaptability vis a vis all I mentioned earlier and is crucial for career sustainability. Our liberal arts core now emphasizes critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills as they relate to career success. Indeed, we teach digital humanities paired with internships as students gain experiential learning in fields like healthcare, technology, accounting, computer science, cyber security, healthcare infomatics, commerce and more.

Lastly, I would like discuss the cost of a college education. It is my hope that very soon, we can move past the “price tag”/discount game plaguing so many graduates who have paid for degrees that are unmarketable. They have loans they cannot repay totaling \$1.8

trillion nationally which, by the way is more than twice the US military budget and growing – (in the end it's the colleges that got the loan money, not the students). Students feel betrayed by universities with glossy marketing materials and contrived mission statements that prioritize romance over return on investment. The out-of-pocket cost of a college education for the average working-class student needs to be commensurate with the expected income level derived by the degree if finances and college choice are a concern for the student and their family. We recently received an Independent Data Recognition by the American Council of Education & The Carnegie Foundation recognizing St. Francis College for exemplary demonstration of alignment with mission, workforce readiness, and accreditation standards translating to higher access, higher earnings and better outcomes. I would ask that the next inquiry investigate why colleges charge the tuition they charge for a 4-year degree and how that is reconciled with the amount of government assistance their students receive. I welcome my colleagues at private universities to join us in this tuition conversation.

Thank you for your time and generosity.

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DOUGLAS LIPARI

Address: 1 LIBERTY PLAZA NEW YORK NY 10007

I represent: NYC OFFICE OF TALENT & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Address: 1 LIBERTY PLAZA NEW YORK NY 10007

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 2/27/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Leah Hebert

Address: 1 Liberty Plaza, 11th Floor

I represent: Office of Talent and Workforce

Address: Development

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

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

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Thwiba Etom

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: NYC Talent Brooklyn NY 11220

Address: 1 Liberty Plaza

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**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: 2/27/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: GREGORY J MORRIS

Address: [REDACTED] NYC 10013

I represent: NEW YORK CITY EMPLOYMENT TRAINING

Address: 244 GARDNER PL, BKLN 11225 COMMISSION

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ELI DVORKIN

Address: 80 8th AVE

I represent: CENTER FOR AN URBAN FUTURE

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

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Timothy Cecere

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

I represent: St. Francis College

Address: 179 Livingston St Brooklyn NY

**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: 02/27/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Damir Shakhmatov

Address: [Redacted] Brooklyn, NY 11229

I represent: University Student Senate CUNY

Address: 555 West 57th New York, NY 10019

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Akheem Polack

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

I represent: USS CUNY

Address: 555 W 57th Street, NY. 10019

**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: 2/27/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Benjamin Wade

Address: 555 West 57 Street - 10019

I represent: University Student Senate CUNY

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

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**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: 2/27/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lauren Anderson - Vice Chancellor

Address: 205 East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street NYC 10017

I represent: CUNY - VC For Career Engagement and

Address: Industry Partnerships

Lauren.Anderson@CUNY.edu

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**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: 2/27/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Andrea Soochani - Senior Dean

Address: 205 East 42<sup>nd</sup> St NY, NY 10017

I represent: CUNY - K16 Initiatives +

Address: Adult Pathways

Andrea.Soochani@CUNY.edu

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ N.Y. 10002

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

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

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ TIM CECERE

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

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_ ST. FRANCIS COLLEGE

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

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms