

**Testimony of 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 2027 Preliminary Budget
March 20, 2026**

Good morning, Chair Joseph and members of the City Council Higher Education Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. My name is Alicia Alvero, and I serve as the Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost for CUNY, The City University of New York.

I am joined today by CUNY's Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer Hector Batista, and Senior Vice Chancellor and Chief Financial Officer, Kenneth Godiner.

Before I begin, I want to welcome those of you who are new to this committee. We look forward to partnering with you to address the challenges of higher ed and to support our students.

The power of CUNY as an engine of economic mobility is widely known and is something I identify with as a first-generation college student.

When I first came to CUNY's Queens College as an assistant professor in 2003, I was relieved to learn the college offered affordable childcare for faculty and student parents. This center allowed me to pursue my career knowing my daughter, then 3 ½, was close by and in good hands.

Without this support, I would not be sitting here today.

And without our partners in government, we could not continue our critical work.

The City Council's support is essential to helping the University expand access for students and increase its role as an engine of upward mobility and economic development.

Your investments in our programs have fueled three straight years of enrollment gains at CUNY and propelled our colleges to the top of national rankings year after year.

Our work is not finished. To meet workforce demands and to strengthen outcomes for our students, we are expanding our programs and facilities to ensure our students have the best chance of success.

Creating a pipeline of qualified workers to the city's workforce remains an urgent priority at CUNY. We created innovative programs and partnerships to further align the University to workforce needs and ultimately to get our students jobs.

In my role as the chief academic officer, I oversee many of these key initiatives that partner with the City and The Council – like CUNY Beyond, which was launched in October. CUNY Beyond is a systemwide initiative that bakes career readiness into every aspect of an undergraduate's college experience.

The initiative aims to triple the number of students in paid internships and increase employer recruitment from CUNY by 20%, ensuring a smooth transition from the classroom to the workforce.

Through career-connected learning, academic and career advising, paid internships and apprenticeships and employer engagement, we will enable students to launch fulfilling careers after they graduate.

We started in July with four campuses and we are looking to the Council for support in expanding to two more community colleges and 70,000 students in the next phase. Successful implementation of all our undergraduate campuses is projected to drive an estimated \$3.3 billion in future wage growth and provide a \$700 million return on public investment through earnings and economic mobility.

CUNY has worked hard to strengthen its partnership with NYCPS, knowing that the key to unlocking in-demand careers for students is to equip them with postsecondary credentials and connections to employees before they graduate high school. Programs like *College Now* and *FutureReadyNYC* ensure our students see themselves as college students with professional career paths and a head start on life after college.

College Now served nearly 16,000 high school seniors from the 2025 class, while *FutureReadyNYC* 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.

CUNY also plays a critical role in addressing the statewide teacher shortage. I'm proud to say that CUNY prepares more than one-third of all incoming New York City public school teachers and more than 40% of teachers of color in New York State.

This stems from innovative programs like the NYC Teaching Fellows, which placed 526 recent college graduates into New York City classrooms and master's degree programs across the University in 2025, more than tripling the numbers enrolled in the program at CUNY the previous year.

CUNY is also working to expand its already robust early childhood education program to help advance Governor Hochul and Mayor Mamdani's shared goal of delivering free childcare for two-year-olds across New York City.

With 17 campus-based child care centers, 13 early childhood degree programs, and work of the New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute – CUNY is uniquely positioned to support student parents while also recruiting, training, credentialing, and retaining the educators needed to make the Governor and Mayor's efforts successful. Through bilingual credit-bearing programs, we are ensuring these opportunities reach as many students and families as possible.

The same goes for CUNY's landmark accessibility management system, CUNY Accommodate, which has streamlined requests for disability services and helped connect more students than ever to a broader network of resources. Since launching last January, enrollment of students requesting services has shot up by approximately 25 percent, reaching a record-breaking 13,800 students, and the academic year is not yet complete.

CUNY Accommodate also continues to be an important lever for incoming NYCPS graduates who want to connect with their respective campus disability offices early. We have revamped our communications process and are committed to having a more seamless data-sharing infrastructure in place by June of this year to benefit the high school class of 2026. We are on track to meet our goal.

In Fall 2022, with support from the New York City Council, we launched CUNY Reconnect to address a pressing workforce need and another underserved group: reengaging hundreds of thousands of working-age adults who earned college credits but stopped short of completing a degree.

Thanks to nearly \$7.6 million in direct financial support to date, CUNY Reconnect has graduated almost 6,000 associate degree students and over 7,000 bachelor's degree students, strengthening not only individual families, but New York City's economy as a whole.

CUNY's groundbreaking ASAP program of financial, educational, and career advisement services for associate-degree students continues to more than double three-year completion rates at the University when compared to non-ASAP students. The program, which also provides personalized advisement, tuition and fee gap awards, textbook assistance and OMNY cards, has supported nearly 70 institutions across nine states to replicate CUNY's innovative model of student success and access.

ACE, a related program that supports bachelor's degree completion, achieved a four-year graduation rate 12.4% higher than qualifying students who did not participate. However, uncertainty surrounds the program because it is not yet baselined.

Another new initiative to help support students, CUNY CARES, started in fall 2023 to help Bronx students find the campus and essential services they need for health care, mental health, food, and housing. By helping students meet these needs, CUNY CARES hopes to improve academic success and overall well-being of students who need it most.

So far preliminary results are encouraging. By Fall 2025, more than 1,000 additional Bronx students were enrolled in SNAP compared to 2022. With an average monthly SNAP benefit of \$233, these students collectively brought an estimated \$2.96 million into their household budgets in that year alone.

Lastly, I want to highlight achievements among CUNY researchers and how they've impacted New York City by improving public health, climate resilience, and workforce readiness. From the NYC Urban Heat Portal at Hunter College, to FloodNet's real-time flood monitoring, to informing the City's COVID-19 and Mpox response, CUNY researchers continue to help the city address emergencies, while supporting workforce development through programs that train students for climate, public health, and technology careers.

As I conclude my remarks, I want to thank the City Council for your unwavering commitment to CUNY and its students, faculty and staff. Our success is intertwined in the city's economic, social and cultural vitality. We look forward to continuing to partner with you.

Now, I'd like to turn it over to CUNY COO and Executive Vice Chancellor Hector Batista to further address the importance of our collaboration with the City Council to reach our shared goals of equity and access for all New Yorkers. Thank you.

**Testimony of Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer Héctor Batista
The City University of New York
New York City Council Higher Education Committee Hearing
Preliminary Budget
March 20, 2026**

Thank you, Alicia.

Thank you, Speaker Menin, Chair Joseph, members of the 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 2027 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 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 enrollment declines and unfunded mandatory costs that the University has had to absorb over several years. 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 focused 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.

Originally, 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. Through our disciplined approach and close partnership with these campuses, we have brought that number down to six (6) colleges and one of those is getting closer to coming off the list. We continue to work closely with the colleges still on the list to improve their financial condition, focused on a balanced approach to expense reduction and opportunities for revenue generation.

University-wide, we have realized significant reductions in the structural deficit. Among the factors underlying the decrease are expense reductions across the University, additional State aid and an uptick in enrollment. The combination of these factors has led to reduction

of nearly 68% in the overall University structural deficit – from \$234 million in Fiscal Year 2022 to an estimated \$76 million projected at the end of Fiscal Year 2026, according to mid-year estimates. This year, enrollment growth was over 3.5%, for a two-year increase of 5.5%, or almost 13,000 students. As it is estimated that every 1% increase in enrollment generates approximately \$14.3 million, this translates to additional revenue.

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

With that in mind, we continue to advance our efficiency strategies. This work includes system-wide service-sharing initiatives such as the centralization of certain IT functions and procurement contracts to leverage economies of scale, and moving facilities to a shared services model to more effectively deploy maintenance and repair teams. This also allows us to consolidate service contracts to negotiate better pricing for better service.

We are also streamlining tuition and fee collections. Planning for these initiatives, including up-front investments required to build the operational infrastructure, is well underway and we are beginning to see some initial savings. We are hopeful that further implementation will achieve meaningful efficiencies in Fiscal Year 2027.

Now, I will turn to the preliminary budget and its impact on our operating budget.

We thank the administration for fully funding the labor contracts and rising health insurance costs.

Our priority going forward is to ensure continued funding for our increased costs, especially for collective bargaining and fringe benefits on the expense side. In this budget cycle, our top priority is funding for vital capital projects at the community colleges, which I'll address in a moment.

We thank you for your strong advocacy for so many CUNY programs. We look forward to working closely with you and your colleagues to ensure funding for many of these important programs in the adopted budget. To highlight a few: We are asking for your partnership in securing additional funding for our early childhood workforce development programs to strengthen the early childhood education pipeline, which is so important as the City expands 3-K and 2-K. We also seek to baseline funding for CUNY Reconnect, which has helped more than 70,000 New Yorkers resume their college journey since it was implemented. We also seek additional funds for support for students with disabilities to meet demand. And we seek funding for a free OMNY card pilot program which is a priority for our student senate. This is in addition to ASAP, and ACE, and funding for food insecurity, childcare and other programs.

Lastly, let me turn to our facilities.

As you know, CUNY set an ambitious goal of bringing 55% of our vital building systems into a state of good repair by 2030. We are proud of what we have accomplished thus far, with approximately 33% of our vital building systems in a state of good repair, up from 27% last year and 24% the year before.

Our strategy for meeting this goal includes assessing the health of our many building components to enable us to better prioritize our capital needs. By using data and metrics, we can more efficiently expend capital dollars and improve facilities for our students, faculty and staff. Our decisions are also informed 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 our needs and prioritize the order in which we address them, we cannot make progress without continued funding. To bring our community colleges into a state of good repair, we need to spend an estimated \$200 million each year and we look forward to working with you to secure funding of \$100 million from the City to be matched by the State in this budget cycle.

CUNY's Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Capital Budget includes \$1.51 billion in city funding and \$4.3 million in non-city grants over the 10-year plan (FY2026 through FY2036). As in previous plan cycles, CUNY is realigning its capital funded-project schedules to more closely match the year that projects will go into contract, and we are in regular communication with OMB about the status of our capital commitments.

We want to thank the administration for recognizing the timing of CUNY capital projects that are already in the plan and for more closely aligning the plan to when the projects commence.

In conclusion, I would once again like to express my gratitude to the City Council for supporting CUNY priorities. In this plan, it is critical that CUNY's capital request is funded, including the money that will allow us to reach our goals for state of good repair, as well as specific projects at our campuses. CUNY's success is the State's and City's success, and we look forward to working with you to deliver much-needed resources for this invaluable institution.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Testimony of
Gloria Middleton, President
CWA Local 1180
Chair, Labor Advisory Board
CUNY School of Labor & Urban Studies



FY 27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
NY City Council Committee on Higher Education
March 20, 2026

My name is Gloria Middleton. I am the President of CWA Local 1180 and 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 unit of CUNY, and it is the only one specifically dedicated to public service and social justice.

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 '27, we ask the Council to:

- **Support restoration of the Worker Education Program that currently enrolls more than 1,100 students a year from across the City, for a total of \$1.4 million.**

The Worker Education Program is a central workforce development and college-access initiative designed primarily for adult learners, union members, and working New Yorkers seeking to advance their education and careers.

Housed within the School's Murphy Institute, the program matches students with appropriate programs across the CUNY system, and provides transition support such as counseling, tutoring and test preparation.

SLU's Worker Education program serves working adult students in all five boroughs. This allocation includes \$200,000 to support a special initiative to provide higher educational services in Far Rockaway.

At its core, the program integrates academic preparation, career-oriented training, and support services tailored to nontraditional students, particularly those balancing work, family, and school.

- **Support restoration of \$2.4 million to create the next cohort of students participating in the Public Service Training Corps, an FY '26 City Council initiative created by the School of Labor and Urban Studies.**

CUNY SLU approached the Council last year with a proposal to develop the Public Service Training Corps, a program for high school seniors that encourages civic values and community leadership while providing pathways to college and successful careers in public service and social justice advocacy.

With the belief that the military should not be the only way up and out for high school students from low-income households, this program was conceived by CUNY SLU as an alternative to the Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) programs that are currently offered in 3,500 high schools across the country. Advocating for one's community, equality and democracy is just as powerful an expression of patriotism.

The Council allocated funding in FY 26 to provide a cohort of 110 students (22 students per high school, one in each of the five boroughs) with tuition, paid internships, book allowances and transit cards. Seniors completing their high school requirements go on to SLU for their college studies. Five high schools are currently being chosen for the fall '26 semester, as per plan.

We are asking for restoration of \$2.4 million to continue the program and create the next cohort of students.

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. The City Council has played a key role in helping us fulfill our mission to develop 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.

I respectfully urge you to continue your support for the School of Labor Studies and for CUNY systemwide. Thank you very much.

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

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Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget: Higher Education

March 20, 2026

To the Committee on Higher Education:

My name is Molly Senack, and I am testifying today on behalf of the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY) as their Education and Employment Community Organizer. This testimony is supported by Sharon McLennon Wier, Ph.D., MEd., CRC, LMHC, Executive Director of CIDNY.

Although there is no data specifically tracking the correlation between disability and post-secondary education dropout rates, in 2021 the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that students with disabilities were twice as likely to drop out of high school as their nondisabled peers (10.7% vs 4.7%). This is consistent with 2022 data from the American Community Survey (ACS), which shows that people without disabilities are almost twice as likely to have a bachelor's degree or higher than people with disabilities (38% vs 21%). Both statistics indicate there is a significant gap between meeting the needs of disabled students and meeting the needs of nondisabled students.

The impact of this inequity in higher education then transitions into an inequity in the workforce: in 2024, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), only 37.4% of disabled people between the ages of 16 and 64 were employed in the United States. According to the same report, employees with a disability were almost twice as likely to only work part-time as people without a disability (31% vs 17%), and less likely to work in traditionally higher paid managerial or professional positions than people without disabilities (37.9% compared to 44.1% respectively). Meanwhile, the American Community Survey (ACS) reported that even when people with disabilities did work fulltime, their median salary was more than \$9,000 lower than the median salary for people without disabilities (\$48,937 vs \$58,113); and among working-age people between the ages of 16 and 64, poverty was more than twice as prevalent in the disabled community as in the non-disabled community (24.2% vs 9.9%). For people with disabilities seeking gainful employment, there exists a gap in hiring, a gap in advancement, and a gap in wage parity. For many people with disabilities, the gap begins in school, especially in higher education settings.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), students with disabilities are entitled to an accessible college campus, and it is important to acknowledge how broad the definition of "accessible" is. Accessibility must exist in all forms (accommodations can be physical, technological, sensory, etc.), in all spaces, and at all stages of the college experience, from application through graduation.

However, many City University of New York (CUNY) campuses continue to fall short of what the ADA stipulates: classrooms, libraries, students housing, dining facilities, and offices are not always physically accessible. Elevators remain out of service for weeks at a time. Signs, including those in

bathrooms and classrooms are not always available in large print or Braille. There are shortages in assistive technology (e.g. screen readers), as well as lags in updating it that can render certain software-based technologies obsolete and unusable. Students with learning, mental, or developmental disabilities who are entitled to accommodations within the classroom must often depend on professors who do not know how to offer aid. This issue is not limited to NYC; it reflects a national problem: a 2022 NCES report found that of the 37% of students with disabilities who reported their disability to their school, almost 40% did not receive accommodations when they asked for them.

This lack of accessibility promotes an unfortunate cycle, where the majority of students with disabilities on college campuses choose not to report. According to the 2022 ACS, 21% of undergraduate students and 11% of graduate students reported having a disability during the 2019-2020 school year. Yet only 8% of students, or about a quarter of students who privately reported having a disability, registered as having a disability with their institutions. This discrepancy is consistent with the same NCES 2022 report mentioned above, which found that only 37% of students who acknowledged having a disability registered as such with their institution.

If students are discouraged from seeking accommodations, and are not guaranteed those accommodations if they do seek them, then those students are not receiving the supports and resources that they need to graduate and receive the degrees that will aid them in finding gainful employment. And beyond that, they are learning to not advocate for themselves even when they are legally entitled to accommodations, which will make maintaining employment that much more difficult.

Ensuring the accessibility of higher education helps enable students with disabilities to graduate with the necessary degrees while also setting a critical precedent regarding self-advocacy that will carry through future job opportunities. **CIDNY therefore asks that the following be included in the FY27 budget:**

- **Allocated funding for in-depth training on disability and accommodations for campus staff and faculty** that uses more comprehensive definitions of both "accessibility" and "disability" with a focus on mental health and chronic medical disabilities.
- **Increased funding to ensure campuses' assistive technology is up to date**, especially when it comes to software compatibility.
- **Increased funding allocated specifically for staffing and operations**, since accessibility on college campuses will only improve if there is funding to ensure the offices responsible for administering support and services are sufficiently staffed.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Molly Senack (She/Her)
Education and Employment Community Organizer
Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York
Email: msenack@cidny.org Phone: (917)415-3154



CCSD

CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities

**Testimony of
Heriberto "Junior" Flores
Vice Chair for Recruitment, CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities (CCSD)
before the
The New York City Council Committee on Higher Education and Committee on Finance
March 20, 2026**

Chairs Joseph and Lee, members of the City Council, my name is Heriberto "Junior" Flores, and I serve as vice chair for recruitment for the CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities (CCSD), an advocacy group representing about 14,000 self-identified students with disabilities at CUNY.

I am currently a student at Bronx Community College. Go Broncos!

Today, I am testifying in support of CCSD's top legislative priority for 2026.

CCSD urges you and your colleagues in the City Council to support **CUNY's FY27 City operating budget request for a \$2.6 million increase for services for students with disabilities.**

Ideally, CCSD would like **\$770,000 of that amount to be earmarked for an Assistive Technology (AT) services line**, so that all seven CUNY community colleges could hire a full-time AT specialist at their respective campuses.

Our goal is to have a full-time assistive technology expert at almost every CUNY campus, who not only works directly with our students, but who can ensure that campus digital services for students with disabilities are in compliance with Federal and State law, as well as University policies.

An investment by the City of just \$770k would be a game changer in this area for our community college. Moreover, it could inspire your colleagues in the State legislature to make a similar investment for our students at CUNY's senior colleges.

Historically, the City of New York has failed to adequately invest in programs that provide services for our students with disabilities.

CUNY has mostly relied on support from the State of New York for our campus disability services offices. Therefore, CCSD urges the City Council to do something that it has never done before, and make a significant investment in services for CUNY students with disabilities.

We know that we have more champions than ever currently serving as members of the City Council, and we look forward to working with you during the current budget process and beyond.

Thank you.



BRAVEN

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

To the New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027, The Preliminary Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2027-2030 and The Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report

March 20th, 2026

Good morning Chair Joseph and members of the Committee on Higher Education of the New York City Council.

My name is Kilsys Payamps-Roure, and I am the Executive Director of Braven New York. As the proud daughter of Dominican immigrants and a lifelong New Yorker, I believe deeply that every New Yorker deserves a fair shot at economic mobility.

That's why I'm so proud of the work that we do at Braven. Braven is a nonprofit organization that partners with colleges and universities to support low-income and first-generation students in not only graduating, but securing strong first jobs or admission to graduate school. We define a strong first job as one that requires a bachelor's degree, is full-time and paid, and offers a competitive salary, benefits, and pathways for promotion.

Braven began its work in New York City in 2020 through an inaugural partnership with Lehman College and expanded to the City College of New York in 2023. To date, we have served more than 2,900 students across the city. Beginning in Fall 2026, we will expand to the University of Mount Saint Vincent, reaching nearly 1,500 additional students over the next five years.

Our results show what's possible when students receive the right support. Nationally, of the 980 Braven Fellows who graduated last year, 84 percent are employed or enrolled in graduate school. Seventy percent completed a career-accelerating internship—22 percentage points higher than their peers—and 92 percent graduated on time, a 20-point increase.

But this progress is happening in an increasingly challenging environment. According to the Center for an Urban Future, entry-level jobs in New York City declined by 37 percent

between 2022 and 2024, and paid internships dropped from 11,000 in 2019 to fewer than 7,000 in 2024. For today's students, a college degree alone is no longer enough—they need clear structured pathways into the workforce.

We are grateful for the Council's continued investment in CUNY. We were thrilled to see \$7.8 million for CUNY Reconnect, \$10 million for CUNY ACE, and \$2.4 million for the CUNY Public Service Training Corps included in the FY26 budget. We urge the Council to increase funding for these proven programs in the FY27 budget to ensure more students persist, graduate, and succeed.

We also encourage the Council to invest in nonprofit partners like Braven that directly connect higher education to the workforce, so that all students—not just those with existing networks—have access to opportunity.

At Braven, we sit right at the intersection of higher education and the workforce—and that's where students need the most support.

We embed career preparation directly into the college experience through a three-credit course students take in their sophomore or junior year. They work in small cohorts, led by professionals from the employer community, and build the skills, confidence, experiences and networks they need to succeed.

And the support doesn't stop there.

After the course, students continue working with a career coach, a professional mentor, and a broader network of employers. They attend job skills sessions, networking events, and employer treks—all designed to help them land strong internships and, ultimately, strong first jobs or admittance to graduate school.

This is what it takes to turn a college degree into real economic opportunity.

New York City has made a powerful commitment to expanding access to higher education. Now, we must ensure that access leads to outcomes.

I urge the Council to continue investing in programs and partnerships that align higher education with workforce opportunity—so that every New Yorker, regardless of background, has a real pathway to the American Dream.

Thank you Chair Joseph and members of the Committee on Higher Education for your leadership and your continued support of CUNY students.

Kofago Institute, Committee on Higher Education - Testimony

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee on Higher Education,

My name is Kevin McEwen, and I am the Executive Director of the Kofago Institute. I write to respectfully request your support for the Kofago Institute's 2027 funding priorities as we continue our work in higher education through culturally rooted arts programming, dance education, and international learning opportunities that support students across New York City.

The Kofago Institute is deeply committed to strengthening dance and dance education programs that create access, opportunity, and cultural relevance for students in higher education. Our work has supported dance and educational programming at **Queensborough Community College, New York University, and Lehman College**, where students benefit from engagement with African Diasporic dance practices, performance opportunities, cultural research, and mentorship that connects academic study with lived experience.

Through these partnerships, we help students expand their artistic training, deepen their cultural understanding, and engage dance not only as performance, but as scholarship, preservation, and a pathway toward leadership. Our support of collegiate dance programs contributes to student growth, faculty collaboration, and broader institutional efforts to build inclusive and impactful arts education experiences.

In addition to our local work, we are also helping to support the development of an annual study abroad programming to Senegal for the City University of New York. This initiative represents an important investment in global learning, cultural exchange, and immersive education for CUNY students. Study abroad experiences such as this allow students to engage directly with the cultural histories, artistic traditions, and international communities that shape the global African Diaspora. These experiences have the power to transform students academically, artistically, and personally.

We believe higher education must continue to make room for innovative, culturally responsive programming that prepares students to thrive in a diverse and interconnected world. Support for Kofago Institute's 2027 request will help sustain and expand our ability to serve college students through arts education, cultural engagement, and international opportunity.

We respectfully ask the Committee on Higher Education to recognize the value of this work and support our continued efforts to strengthen dance education and global learning for students across New York City.

Thank you for your time, leadership, and consideration.

Sincerely,



Kevin McEwen
Executive Director
The Kofago Institute Incorporated



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

**Testimony of
Sakeena Trice, Senior Staff Attorney
on behalf of the Disability Justice Program
at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
before the Council of the City of New York
Committee on Higher Education
March 20, 2026**

My name is Sakeena Trice, and I am a Senior Staff Attorney in the Disability Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI). I submit this testimony to address the ongoing and systemic barriers faced by students with disabilities in higher education in New York City, with a particular focus on the City University of New York (CUNY).

CUNY was established as a pathway to opportunity for all New Yorkers. However, for many students with disabilities, that promise remains unfulfilled. Despite existing legal protections and the institution's public mission, students with disabilities continue to encounter significant and often insurmountable barriers to accessing higher education on equal terms.

Individuals with disabilities are already underrepresented in higher education due to longstanding structural inequities. This underrepresentation contributes to broader patterns of financial instability and a lack of representation in leadership and decision making spaces. In turn, this perpetuates discriminatory policies, stigma, and exclusion. When students with disabilities do pursue higher education, they are frequently met with inaccessible campus environments, discriminatory accommodation practices, and a lack of institutional support.

In response to these challenges, NYLPI launched a higher education accessibility campaign in 2024 to advocate for and represent students with disabilities navigating these barriers. Through this work, NYLPI has observed a consistent and troubling pattern across CUNY campuses.

Over the past two years, NYLPI has received numerous complaints from students with disabilities who report that their campuses have failed to provide and implement reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the New York State Human Rights Law, and the New York City Human Rights Law. These failures are not isolated incidents, but rather indicative of systemic issues across the CUNY system.

Students report that even when accommodations are formally approved by Disability Services Offices, professors often refuse to implement them. In many cases, students are forced to

repeatedly justify their needs, are dismissed outright, or are subjected to hostile and, at times, harassing behavior when attempting to advocate for themselves. This not only undermines students' legal rights but also creates an environment that is emotionally and academically harmful.

At the same time, students encounter significant barriers when attempting to access accommodations in the first instance. One of the most significant obstacles is the cost of required documentation. Neuropsychological evaluations and other forms of disability documentation can cost thousands of dollars, placing them out of reach for many low income students. As a result, students are effectively denied access to accommodations not because of a lack of need, but because of financial barriers.

Students have also reported dismissive and hostile interactions with Disability Services Offices. Rather than serving as supportive resources, these offices are often perceived as gatekeepers, with insufficient staffing, inadequate training, and a lack of accountability. Students with disabilities should feel empowered to exercise their rights, yet too often they are met with skepticism and resistance.

These barriers exist within a broader context of insufficient investment and oversight. Despite a proposed Fiscal 2027 budget exceeding 1.5 billion dollars, critical accessibility needs remain unmet. Disability Services Offices require significantly more funding to ensure adequate staffing, comprehensive training, and consistent enforcement of accommodations. Additionally, many campus facilities remain physically inaccessible or only partially compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, further limiting students' ability to fully participate in academic life.

Local Law 18 was enacted to promote greater transparency and accountability in tracking accessibility and compliance across city agencies and institutions. However, without robust implementation, enforcement, and meaningful oversight, these reporting requirements alone are insufficient to drive the systemic change that students with disabilities urgently need.

The consequences of these failures are profound. Students with disabilities are denied equal access to education, face unnecessary academic and emotional hardship, and are often forced to abandon their educational goals altogether. This not only harms individual students but also deprives our communities of the perspectives and leadership of people with disabilities.

Importantly, we know that better outcomes are possible. When students with disabilities receive timely, appropriate, and well supported accommodations, they are able to succeed academically and contribute meaningfully to their fields and communities. The issue is not a lack of ability or potential, but rather a system that is not designed with accessibility at its core.

To address these systemic issues, the City Council must take decisive action.

First, the Council should allocate and fully fund Disability Services Offices across CUNY campuses to ensure adequate staffing, comprehensive training, and effective enforcement of approved accommodations. These offices must be equipped to support students, not hinder them.

Second, the Council should fund free or low cost disability evaluations so that students can access necessary documentation without experiencing financial hardship. Additionally, for students who previously received accommodations in secondary school, post secondary institutions should be required to rely on disability determinations already established in Individualized Education Programs or 504 Plans, consistent with the intent of Assembly Bill A3494. Students should not be forced to undergo redundant and costly evaluations to access the same supports.

Third, the Council should strengthen accountability mechanisms to ensure that post secondary institutions are complying with applicable disability laws and effectively addressing discrimination. This includes ensuring meaningful implementation and enforcement of Local Law 18, with clear consequences for noncompliance.

Finally, the Council should invest in making CUNY campuses fully accessible in every respect, physically, academically, and culturally. Accessibility must be treated as a fundamental component of educational equity, not as an afterthought.

Accessibility is not optional. It is both a legal requirement and a moral imperative. If CUNY is to fulfill its mission of serving all New Yorkers, it must be a system that works for all students, including those with disabilities, in practice as well as in principle.

I am happy to discuss any of these issues and would particularly welcome the opportunity to collaborate with you to find solutions for students with disabilities. I can be reached at Strice@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.



**TESTIMONY OF THE
NEW YORK PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP
BEFORE THE
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION
PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING
March 20, 2026
New York, NY**

Good afternoon, my name is Jana Bergere, and I am Program Coordinator for NYPIRG, the New York Public Interest Research Group. NYPIRG is a statewide, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization founded by college students in 1973 to engage their peers in civic life. NYPIRG's broad programmatic work provides students with a range of opportunities to participate in public affairs and advance responses to social problems that matter most to them.

In collaboration with and guided by professional staff—researchers, organizers, advocates, and attorneys—students tackle pressing issues while learning and developing professional-level skills that will boost their prospects for success in college, the job market, and throughout their lives. Our Board of Directors consists of public and independent college and university students elected from campuses with NYPIRG chapters across the state. We advocate for a free and quality public higher education to make one of the most important institutions in New York State accessible to all and to boost racial and economic equity. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the City's budget for CUNY.

NYPIRG calls on the New York City Council to advocate for a strong City budget that funds services and programs that attract and retain students, such as ASAP and ACE, CUNY Reconnect, student OMNY cards, and expanding capital funding. We also urge your continued advocacy to your state counterparts for a final state budget that improves upon the Governor's Executive Budget.

Support Opportunity Programs

The NYC budget should add funding for CUNY's nationally renowned Accelerated Studies in Associate Programs (ASAP) and its 4-year counterpart, Accelerate, Complete, and Engage program (ACE), to protect and expand funding for these successful programs. ASAP and ACE take a comprehensive approach to college access and affordability by covering tuition costs, building in academic counseling, mentoring, and covering related costs such as free OMNY

cards and textbooks. This approach works – increasing retention and graduation rates – and ASAP and ACE deserve support. CUNY Reconnect has brought 47,000 students back to school to complete their degree since its inception. This program also includes increased advisement resources and mentoring, and financial aid assistance to support degree completion. CUNY Reconnect should be expanded to benefit students who have already completed a post-secondary degree and students aged 18-55.

We urge the City Council to fight for a final budget that funds CUNY Reconnect at \$11.7 million, expands ASAP at \$86 million, and expands ACE at \$9.1 million.

Free OMNY cards for CUNY students

Mass transit defines where you live, where you play, and where you go to school. It is the great equalizer of opportunity, and why accessible, affordable, and safe transportation is so important. For New York City’s college students, affording an OMNY tap can be the difference between earning a degree and dropping out altogether. The cost of getting to class has been cited as a top financial strain for college students. New York City’s K-12 students receive free OMNY cards, yet as soon as students graduate high school, the financial burden of affording transit is no longer recognized, as that resource doesn’t exist for higher education. The need to address transit affordability to support educational attainment could not be more pressing. **NYPIRG urges the City Council to fully fund the \$700,000 Student Commuter Grant Pilot Program (\$1.4 million total for the program, \$700,000 from the city and \$700,000 from the state).**

Invest in CUNY Infrastructure

At CUNY, the average building age is 50 years, with some buildings exceeding 100 years. Lack of funding for maintenance, repairs, and heavy use over time has led to a ballooning backlog of deferred maintenance and the deterioration of CUNY buildings’ physical conditions. On top of this, the recent cold snaps and winter storms have laid bare the reality that CUNY institutions are in a dire state of disrepair. In 2024, CUNY testified that a mere “25% of CUNY’s infrastructure is considered in a state of good repair,”¹ meaning that 75% of CUNY buildings require maintenance. **We urge the City Council to allocate more capital funds to community colleges to ensure that students and faculty have safe and productive learning environments.**

Support Council-Funded Initiatives

The NYC budget should fully fund City Council-funded initiatives that support CUNY students’ success, including campus childcare centers and Citizenship Now!, which weren’t included in the Mayor’s Preliminary Budget. The city must fund CUNY childcare so that the programs can maintain affordable rates for student parents. Without reliable childcare, student-parents are twice as likely to drop out. In the past year, CUNY’s Citizenship Now! Program has expanded to

¹Cody Lendle , “CUNY’s 2026 Budget and How It Impacts Us,” The Knight News, March 12, 2025, <https://www.theknightnews.com/2025/03/12/cunys-2026-budget-and-how-it-impacts-us/>.

include rapid response legal team assistance for those affected by the recent immigration policy change; it is crucial that its funding is continued at a time when CUNY students and their families, who are not citizens, need it most. **We also call for the City Council to expand the CUNY Cares program to help students who qualify to enroll in vital governmental assistance for housing, food resources, mental health counseling, healthcare access, and more.**

Advocate for CUNY Funding at the State Level

At the state level, the Executive Budget does provide small increases to CUNY's budget; however, it still falls short of students' needs. The budget cuts opportunity programs and Bundy Aid and provides no expansion to financial aid programs. **We urge the City Council to advocate to your counterparts in the State Legislature to adequately fund CUNY in the final State budget, including: passing the New Deal for CUNY, expanding the Tuition Assistance Program, and including \$2.2 billion in Capital funding for CUNY.**

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.



**TESTIMONY OF DR. JAMES DAVIS
PRESIDENT, PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY
New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 20, 2026**

Good afternoon Chairwoman Joseph and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. We are honored to be here for the first budget hearing of the council's new term and pleased for the opportunity to testify before the committee's new Chair Rita Joseph. I am James Davis, President of the Professional Staff Congress, the union representing 30,000 faculty and professional staff at CUNY.

This is a critical committee for a critical time for public higher education. It has been the City council that helped preserve CUNY's budget after the pandemic. This body fought for restorations during the nearly \$100 million in total PEG cuts during the Adams administration. This term marks a new start for advocacy for CUNY funding. Community college enrollment is up nearly 12% since Fiscal Year 2022. This post-pandemic rebound is being driven by new programs like CUNY Reconnect, developed by former Speaker Adrienne Adams, and by Governor Hochul's Opportunity Promise Scholarship , which provides free tuition, fee waivers and books to students ages 25-55 studying in a growing list of high-demand fields.

The Mayor's preliminary budget increases CUNY's overall budget by nearly \$25 million dollars but holds funding for staffing levels flat from last year . We recognize the importance of that investment, particularly at a time of fiscal strain for the city. But enrollment growth at the current scale requires pedagogical investments to ensure students have the faculty and staff to guide them to timely graduation.

Our FY27 City budget request includes:

Fill Vacancies / Bring Back Full-Time Faculty and Staff - Hire 2,876 new full-time community college faculty to achieve a ratio of 65 full-time faculty for every 1,000 students (\$264 million).

Between Academic Years 2019 and 2024, CUNY lost 703 civilian and pedagogical positions, nearly 500 at community colleges, which are funded 75% by the city. These losses were a direct result of former Mayor Adams' PEG cuts. Mayor Adams restored CUNY's funding in his last term, but more than 350 positions remain vacant. This while community college enrollment has gone up nearly 8% since Academic Year 2023. It is not enough to bring more students through our classroom doors; they need to be supported as learners and future members of the workforce, all the way to graduation.

We urge the council to work with Mayor Mamdani to invest in new full-time faculty to bring CUNY staffing ratios in line with national recommendations. CUNY students deserve to be taught primarily by full-time professors who have job security and a competitive salary. Hire 30% of new faculty as lecturers and 70% as professorial appointments. Create paths to full-time employment for long-serving adjunct faculty to move beyond an austerity approach to staffing our colleges and better serve our students.

Fund Student Services that Increase Graduation Rates

- ***Hire 352 culturally competent advisors (\$74 million)*** Speaker Adams' CUNY Reconnect brought back over 47,000 students since its inception in 2022. There is no question that student advisors improve graduation rates. But more students mean larger case loads and increased demand for community college advising. Resources are needed to improve the ratio of advisors to one advisor per every one hundred students, ensuring student success.
- ***Expand ACE - Accelerate, Complete, and Engage - program (\$9.1 million)*** CUNY's successful ACE program, the senior college version of ASAP, is an essential tool for moving students to graduate in four years. John Jay's freshmen cohort's graduation rate was 60% vs. 41% compared to non-ACE students. Lehman's two-year graduation rate was 61% vs. 30%.
- ***Double the size of the current ASAP annual cohort (\$86 million if all services are covered by ASAP)*** As more students enroll in community colleges, the nationally

renowned CUNY ASAP program needs additional support. In addition to improving advising ratios and providing free transit, the ASAP program should expand to include more students. In 2024 CUNY reported, “the ASAP three-year graduation rate [was] 53%, more than double the 25% rate observed in a historically matched statistical comparison group... The most recent average three-year graduation rate across ten ASAP cohorts (fall 2009-fall 2020) [was] 49.1%.” CUNY reports that an ASAP student costs, on average, an additional \$3,440 to educate (lower if the cost of OMNY cards and advisors is covered by other initiatives).

- *Support student mental health by funding an additional 119 counselor hires (\$22 million)* New Yorkers deserve better access to mental health services and too many New Yorkers need but cannot access mental health counselors. CUNY students deserve this access but too often face more challenges than their peers at private colleges. Today, the demand for services vastly exceeds the access to services. Investing in mental health will improve the ratio of counselors to students to one counselor for every 500 students and improve student retention rates.

CUNY Students Deserve a Bold Free Transit Plan (\$24 million for all students at the same rate paid by the Department of Education for K-12 student OMNY cards; \$14 million full-time students only.)

A key demand of students is free access to public transportation. As this committee is aware, any increase in subway and bus fares hinders student success. No PSC member should hear that their student missed a class or appointment because they did not have fare for transit. The vast majority of CUNY students take public transportation to campus, often coming from work or handling child care or elder care. CUNY students deserve to benefit from the same program that already provides this service to K-12 students.

Protect CUNY and Its Research Programs From Trump’s Cuts (\$26 million in bridge funding for lost grants.)

Higher education has been one of President Trump’s consistent targets, so our members have felt under siege, particularly our active researchers. Federal grants have been cancelled, halting years of research - including lifesaving medical research - by our members and opportunities for our students. Litigation by the AFT and other national advocates has helped, but tremendous damage has been done. The current

estimate of loss for NIH and NSF grants alone is \$83 million in New York State. Research is of course at the heart of what we do, much of it in mentorship with our students.¹

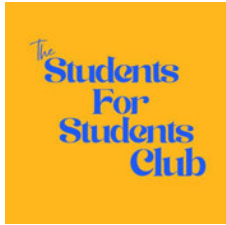
Capital budget

The capital and building maintenance budget needs at CUNY are well known. Our colleges include traditional campuses with outdoor space and vertical campuses in New York City's competitive real estate market, and they have diverse and urgent needs. We support CUNY's efforts to upgrade its facilities, not just to achieve a state of good repair but to be resilient and sustainable for generations.

PSC's Health and Safety committee worked tirelessly to ensure CUNY Campuses were safe for a return to campus during the pandemic. They continue advocating for safe working and learning conditions. You will learn more from our Health and Safety leaders today, but I would emphasize that our campuses are facing crises: sections of libraries have been closed because of excessive mold; mold remediation needed for classrooms where classes are still being conducted; ceiling tiles falling on students; elevators regularly malfunction. CUNY's capital request of over ~~\$500~~^{2.00} million must be funded.

Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions.

¹ Grant-witness.us



**Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
Hearing on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027, Preliminary Capital Plan for
Fiscal Years 2027–2030, and the Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Mayor’s Management Report**

Submitted by: Lo Anderson, B.S. Human Services & Community Justice ‘25

Title: Community Organizer, [Students for Students](#). Student Engagement Coordinator [CUNY CARES](#)

Contact: Lauren.anderson@sph.cuny.edu

To: Chair Joseph and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lo Anderson, and I am a Community Organizer with Students for Students and the Student Engagement Coordinator for CUNY CARES. In my role, I have served as a student Navigator meeting with students on the 3 Bronx CUNY campuses directly to assess their eligibility for public benefits. That work looks different for me every single day of this demonstration project, but I am proud of the incredible work we have been able to accomplish.

I am writing to speak on the Mayor’s Preliminary Budget and to emphasize that, in its current form, it does not fully meet the reality of what CUNY students are facing.

Student retention at CUNY is not solely an academic issue; it is directly tied to housing stability and economic security. However, the current budget framework does not go far enough in addressing these conditions.

According to the CUNY CARES 2025 Student Survey, 51.5 percent of students experienced housing insecurity in the past year, and 5.9 percent experienced homelessness. In the Bronx, nearly 60 percent of students reported at least one housing problem, and over 9 percent experienced homelessness during the academic year.

Despite this, we do not see proportional investment in the systems that are already proven to keep students enrolled.

Through CUNY CARES, we are implementing real, measurable interventions. We have supported students who transitioned into shelter to remain enrolled, helped single parents retain their rental subsidies by navigating administrative barriers, and secured \$159,183.64 in One Shot Deal and emergency grant assistance through the Human Resources Administration. These are direct, outcomes-driven strategies that stabilize students and support persistence.



CUNY CARES is also working with an advisory committee of housing experts to identify how the University can play a more active role in promoting housing stability and affordability. This includes advancing strategies such as eviction prevention, rapid rehousing for students experiencing homelessness, and new housing development.

In addition, we are leveraging Career and Technical Education policy, along with technology and AI, to close enrollment and persistence gaps by connecting students to public benefits and resources earlier. I am also conducting a comprehensive legal analysis on the underutilization of the Career and Technical Education Act, with the goal of expanding access to support for over 70,000 students enrolled in two-year programs and unmatriculated students in pre-college programs across CUNY.

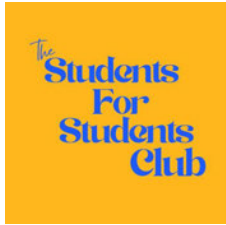
In the Bronx, we are not only identifying challenges, we are advancing solutions. This is a community with the knowledge, networks, and capacity to lead. What is needed now is sustained investment and partnership to scale what is already working.

If the City is serious about improving higher education outcomes, the budget must explicitly invest in basic needs infrastructure. This includes expanding CUNY CARES and aligning with University Senate priorities such as free OMNY Cards for all CUNY students, as transportation and basic needs support are critical to retention.

These are not supplemental services; they are essential components of student success.

Funding Requests / Budget Actions:

- **Baseline and Expand Funding for CUNY CARES:**
Allocate and baseline funding to expand CUNY CARES across all campuses, with a focus on housing stability services, benefits access, and case management support for students experiencing housing insecurity.
- **Invest in Student Housing Stability Interventions:**
Direct funding, in coordination with relevant city agencies, to support eviction prevention, rapid rehousing pathways for students experiencing homelessness, and exploration of student-centered housing development models.
- **Support Benefits Access and Emergency Assistance Infrastructure:**
Increase resources for programs that connect students to public benefits, including emergency grants such as One Shot Deals, to ensure timely stabilization and prevent disruption to enrollment.



- **Advance Transportation Equity for CUNY Students:**
Fund and implement free OMNY Cards for CUNY students in alignment with University Senate priorities, recognizing transportation as a core component of student retention.
 - **Leverage Career and Technical Education (CTE) Policy for Student Supports:**
Invest in strategies that utilize CTE eligibility to connect students, particularly those in two-year and non-matriculated programs, to public benefits and workforce-aligned supports, including the use of technology and AI to scale outreach and enrollment.
-

CUNY CARES must remain in the budget conversation.

Students are watching how this budget reflects their reality, and the City will be measured by whether it chooses to meet this moment.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Lo Anderson, B.S. Human Services & Community Justice '25
Community Organizer, Students for Students.

Student Engagement Coordinator CUNY CARES

Lauren.anderson@sph.cuny.edu

Testimony by Dr. Marsha Jean-Charles of The Brotherhood Sister Sol

For over 30 years, The Brotherhood Sister Sol (BroSis) has been at the forefront of social justice; educating, organizing and training to challenge inequity and champion opportunity for all. With a focus on Black and Latinx youth, BroSis is where young people claim the power of their history, identity and community to build the future they want to see. BroSis provides around-the-clock support and wraparound programming, making space for Black and Latinx young people to examine their roots, define their stories and awaken their agency.

All youth deserve safe, high-quality, holistic, and positively transformative educational experiences. If we believe in equity and want to create the futures all New Yorkers deserve, we must build within our schools systems of accountability, restorative justice, and behavioral management that do not include the NYPD *and* holistically support student success. Our vision for education in New York public schools includes safe, restorative, and healing environments where all students have the opportunity to learn and grow. To meet this goal, we must equitably resource New York State public schools and defund the tactics that push out marginalized students.

Faced with mental health, loneliness, and homelessness polycrises, now more than ever, our youth need city officials to do *more*. The current budget is a step in the right direction. That said, our communities are contending with federal threats to our education system and our LGBTQIA+ and non-citizen family members. Our city budget, therefore, needs to fully fund meaningful Restorative Justice, mental health, and immigrant protections in schools. City Council members should redirect the funding currently going to school police and policing infrastructure to the healing-centered programs and staff our schools, without which our schools cannot thrive. Moreover, we ask that you divest from school policing, including ceasing all NYPD recruitment, hiring and training of school police, and funding for surveillance technology.

Thereafter, the City Council should prioritize the following in budget negotiations:

1. Endowing access to childcare, 2K-12, and CUNY public education systems *and* ensuring any funding lost by due to historic or impending funding cuts is restored
2. Funding meaningful support for *all* marginalized New Yorkers – including legal, mental health, medical, and other essential services.
3. Allocating money to efforts that directly benefit NYC youth – YWI, SYEP, etc.
4. Investing in Crisis to Care and Wellness continuua that transform, not end, lives
5. Staking money on housing efforts prioritized in City for All efforts of 2025

To advance and protect our city and this next generation, we must provide them with the academic, social, and life skills necessary to be engaged and innovative world citizens. We need elected officials to invest in our students, our communities, and our success – now more than ever.

For more information, contact the Senior Organizing Strategist, Dr. Marsha Jean-Charles at mjc@brotherhood-sistersol.org.



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New York City Council Committee of Higher Education Hearing

Testimony of Fatima Zahara Kamil, Vice-Chairperson of the CUNY University Student Senate

March 20, 2026

Good afternoon, Chairs and members of the Committee on Higher Education.

My name is Fatima Zahara Kamil, and I serve as the Vice Chair for International Student Affairs in the CUNY University Student Senate, representing students across the five boroughs. I am also a student at Kingsborough Community College.

Today is also Eid al Fitr for many Muslim students, including myself. It is a day centered on community, gratitude, and opportunity. I am honored to be here on this day, speaking on behalf of students across CUNY.

CUNY is the most diverse public university system in the United States. Our students include first generation college students, immigrants, international students, and working students, each navigating different challenges in pursuit of their education.

Through my work with the University Student Senate, I regularly hear from students across campuses about the barriers they face. I also experience many of these challenges myself. As an international student, balancing academics, leadership, and commuting across the city requires constant financial and personal tradeoffs. For many students, this is not the exception. It is the norm.

Today, I am here to support the CUNY Student Legislative Priorities for 2026.

First, free OMNY cards for CUNY students. Transportation remains a significant burden. Many students travel across boroughs to attend classes, internships, research opportunities, and leadership commitments. We are requesting \$700,000 in the city budget to fund a free OMNY card pilot. This would reduce a daily financial strain and ensure that students can consistently access both their education and the opportunities that support their long term success.

Second, continued investment in campus and technology infrastructure. Students should be able to learn in environments with reliable Wi Fi, functional facilities, and updated classroom technology that reflect the standards of a modern university.

Finally, equitable access through modern assistive technology must remain a priority so that students with disabilities can fully participate in academic and campus life.

These investments are especially important for international, immigrant, and undocumented students, who often face additional financial and structural barriers while pursuing higher education.

CUNY's diversity is one of New York City's greatest strengths. Supporting its students means strengthening the communities and workforce that sustain this city.

CUNY students are not asking for more than what is necessary. We are asking for the conditions that allow us to learn, to contribute, and to complete what we started.

Thank you for your time and for your continued support.



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

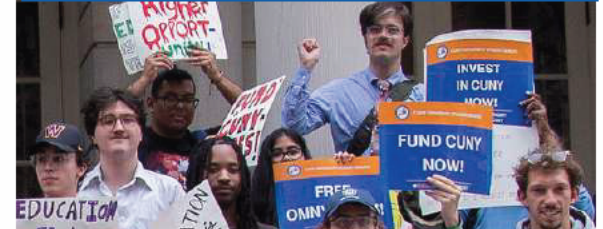
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FREE OMNY CARD CAMPAIGN

(formerly #FREEMETROCARDS)

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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.

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New York City Council Committee of Higher Education Hearing

Testimony of Akkeem Polack, Chairperson of the CUNY University Student Senate & CUNY Trustee

March 20, 2026

Good afternoon, Chairs and members of the Committee on Higher Education.

My name is Akkeem Polack. I serve as Chairperson of the CUNY University Student Senate and as a CUNY Trustee, representing more than two hundred forty thousand students across twenty six campuses.

CUNY has long been New York's ladder of opportunity. For generations, it has opened doors for working class families, immigrants, and first generation college students to build stable lives and contribute to the economic future of this city. Today, that ladder remains, but the climb has become harder.

For most CUNY students, tuition is not the primary barrier. Through Pell and TAP, many are able to attend tuition free. Yet more than half of CUNY undergraduates live below the poverty line. What stands between them and a degree are the everyday costs of getting to campus, getting to internships, and getting to opportunity.

Transportation is one of the most significant of those barriers.

That is why the University Student Senate strongly urges the Council to support CUNY's seven hundred thousand dollar request to launch the OMNY transit pilot for students. This is a modest investment within the scale of the city's budget, but its impact would be transformative. Transportation support increases persistence, improves graduation rates, and expands access to internships and career pathways that students would otherwise be unable to reach.

We already know this approach works. Programs within CUNY that pair transit support with advising have significantly improved graduation outcomes. When students are given the means to show up consistently, they succeed. Transportation is not peripheral to higher education. It is foundational to access.

If a student cannot afford the train or bus, they cannot access the education the city has already invested in. If they cannot reach an internship, they cannot build the experience employers expect. A OMNY card may appear small in the context of public policy, but for a student it determines whether opportunity is within reach or just beyond it.

This challenge has been underscored by the Center for an Urban Future, which identified transportation costs as one of the most common barriers preventing students and trainees from completing programs that lead to economic mobility. Opportunity should not end at the subway turnstile.

We must also strengthen support for students with disabilities. These students deserve the resources, staffing, and services necessary to fully access their education and campus life. At the same time, we must continue investing in the physical infrastructure of CUNY campuses. Many facilities require modernization

and repair so that students can learn in environments that reflect the value of their education. Finally, mental health support must remain a priority. Students today face academic pressure, financial strain, and personal challenges that require accessible counseling and strong wellness systems across campuses.

CUNY students are resilient, ambitious, and ready to contribute to the future of this city. When we remove barriers to access, support student wellbeing, and invest in the spaces where learning takes place, we strengthen not only our universities but the future workforce of New York.

Thank you.



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.

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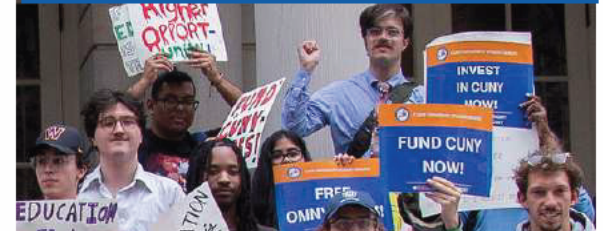
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New York City Council Committee of Higher Education Hearing

Testimony of Damir Shavkatov, Vice-Chairperson of the CUNY University Student Senate

March 20, 2026

Good afternoon, Chairs and members of the Committee on Higher Education.

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 more than 160,000 students across CUNY's 11 senior colleges.

Independent data confirms what CUNY students have long understood. A CUNY degree is one of the strongest values in American higher education. Forbes recently ranked Brooklyn College number one in the nation for student return on investment, placing it ahead of many elite private institutions that charge several times our tuition. In that same analysis, eight CUNY senior colleges were recognized among the 25 highest payoff institutions, with seven in the top ten, more than any other university system.

For New York residents, annual tuition at these colleges is under ten thousand dollars before financial aid. Graduates are often able to recoup their educational costs within a year and move into strong long term earnings with relatively low student debt. This is what effective public investment looks like.

But those outcomes depend on whether students can remain enrolled long enough to reach them.

I want to share one example that reflects what many of the students I represent are experiencing.

Maria is a full time CUNY student who also works part time while helping to support her family. Her commute is more than an hour each way, and she relies entirely on the subway to get to class, work, and campus resources. When her work hours were reduced, she began structuring her education around what she could afford on her OMNY card. On days when she had only one class, she chose not to attend. Instead, she came to campus only on days when she had multiple classes scheduled, so that each trip felt financially justified.

What seemed like a practical adjustment had real consequences. She missed the same course repeatedly, fell behind, and put her semester at risk. Not because she lacked commitment, but because she was trying to manage the cost of getting to class.

That is why the CUNY University Student Senate is requesting \$700,000 from the City to fund a free OMNY card pilot for CUNY students. This is a targeted, practical investment that ensures the cost of transportation is not the reason a student must choose between attending class and staying home. It directly supports retention, improves graduation outcomes, and advances the city's goals around equity.

CUNY's senior colleges have already demonstrated that modest public investment can translate into strong earnings and low debt for graduates. With a free OMNY card pilot and continued support for students' basic needs, we can ensure those outcomes are within reach for students like Maria across all of our campuses.

On behalf of the CUNY University Student Senate and the senior college students I represent, thank you for your time and for your continued commitment to CUNY. I urge you to support the \$700,000 free OMNY card pilot and to continue investing in the programs that keep our students enrolled and on track to graduation.

Thank you.



University Student Senate – OMNY Pilot Program for Eligible Students

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New York City Council Committee of Higher Education Hearing

Testimony of Jullian Vera, Vice-Chairperson of the CUNY University Student Senate

March 20, 2026

Good afternoon, Chairs and members of the Committee on Higher Education.

My name is Jullian Vera, and I serve as the Vice Chair for Students with Disabilities for the CUNY University Student Senate, representing students across CUNY, including my home institution, The City College of New York.

I am a proud student with an invisible disability. I am on the autism spectrum and a product of special education. My experience reflects that of many students across CUNY who navigate their education with disabilities that are not always visible, but still require consistent support.

CUNY is one of the most diverse university systems in the country, including a large and growing population of students with disabilities. More than 9,000 students with disabilities are enrolled across CUNY, each with different needs, challenges, and goals.

Through my work with the University Student Senate, I regularly hear from students across campuses about the barriers they face. Transportation is one of the most common. I experience this myself. Even with reduced fare programs, students are still required to pay out of pocket, often making difficult choices between transportation and other basic needs such as food, academic supplies, and daily expenses.

These are not isolated challenges. They are shared realities for many students across the system. That is why I am here in support of the CUNY University Student Senate Legislative Priorities for 2026.

First, the launch of a free OMNY card pilot program for CUNY students, with a request of \$700,000. This initiative would remove a consistent financial barrier and ensure that students can attend classes, access campus resources, and participate in opportunities without having to weigh the cost of each trip.

Second, increasing funding for disability services. While programs such as CUNY LEADS and CUNY Unlimited have provided important support, overall funding for direct disability services has not kept pace with student need. Students require expanded access to assistive technology, as well as more trained specialists who can provide consistent and effective support.

Investing in these services is essential to ensuring that students with disabilities are able not just to attend CUNY, but to fully participate and succeed.

Students with disabilities deserve the same access to opportunity as every other student in this system. Strengthening transportation access and disability services brings us closer to that goal.

Thank you for your time.



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.

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New York City Council Committee of Higher Education Hearing
Testimony of Rhoda Wilson, Vice-Chairperson of the CUNY University Student Senate
March 20, 2026

Good afternoon, Chairs and members of the Committee on Higher Education.

My name is Rhoda Wilson, and I serve as the Vice Chair for Legislative Affairs for the CUNY University Student Senate, representing more than 240,000 students across 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 been a place of both affordability and community. It has provided me, and many others, access to a quality education that might not have otherwise been possible. For more than 170 years, CUNY has built a reputation as a pathway to upward mobility, offering students the resources and opportunities to improve their economic futures.

CUNY students are not defined by the classroom alone. Many are parents building stability for their families. Many are working part time or full time, often balancing more than one job. And even with these responsibilities, students continue to show up for their education and for their communities.

I am asking you to support the \$700,000 free OMNY card pilot program. To support students, we must invest in opportunities that prepare them for the future. Expanding access to internships, mentorship, and fellowships is essential. Strengthening partnerships with city employers and integrating work experience into academic programs will better position students to succeed after graduation.

At the same time, we must address the barriers that make it difficult for students to fully participate in these opportunities.

Transportation is one of the most immediate challenges. Many students rely on public transit and travel long distances, sometimes up to two hours, to attend class, work, or internships. As fares continue to rise, these costs have become an increasingly heavy burden.

This is why we are urging support for the University Student Senate's legislative priority of funding free OMNY cards for CUNY students.

Access to transportation is access to education. When students cannot afford the cost of getting to campus, they cannot attend class. When they cannot afford to travel, they are shut out of internships, research opportunities, and civic engagement. Students are forced into difficult choices between attending class, going to work, or meeting basic needs. These are not choices they should have to make.

CUNY has long been an engine of social mobility for New York's working class and immigrant communities. Investing in CUNY is an investment in the future of this city. We urge you to support free OMNY cards for CUNY students and to continue funding policies that remove barriers to higher education.

The return on this investment is clear. When students can access their education consistently, they graduate, contribute to the economy, and strengthen our communities.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to working together to build a stronger future for CUNY students and for New York City.

Thank you.



University Student Senate – OMNY Pilot Program for Eligible Students

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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.

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chairperson@usscuny.org
executivedirector@usscuny.org

LET'S BUILD A STRONGER CUNY

Josiah Ramesar

New York City Council Committee on Higher Education Hearing

Testimony of Akkeem Polack, Chairperson of the CUNY University Student Senate and CUNY Trustee

March 20, 2026

Good afternoon, Council members.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Josiah Ramesar, and I represent approximately 30,000 graduate students across CUNY. I am also a third year law student at CUNY School of Law.

As a graduate student, I want to speak in support of funding free OMNY cards for CUNY students.

I am a product of New York City public schools, where I had access to a free MetroCard, which is now a OMNY Card. When I began my studies at CUNY in 2019 at Borough of Manhattan Community College, that support was no longer available. Since then, transportation costs have only increased.

Graduate students are already managing higher tuition, limited access to financial aid, and the demands of work and family responsibilities. Many rely primarily on loans. Transportation becomes yet another expense added to that burden. Students should not have to take on debt simply to get to class.

I am asking the Council to support funding \$700,000 for the free OMNY card pilot program. This investment would reduce financial strain and improve attendance, retention, and student success across CUNY.

Many of you rely on public transportation and understand its importance. For students, access to transit directly affects access to education.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

I am writing to address an issue of utmost importance for Higher Education in New York City: the Health and Safety of Brooklyn's CUNY campuses. I am a faculty member at City Tech, CUNY where concerns about health & safety have been raised by faculty and students for as long as I can remember.

I am a faculty member in the English department at City Tech who would love nothing more than to focus on planning classes, developing my own scholarship, and contributing to the vibrant creative communities that flourish at City Tech. Unfortunately, I spend too much of my time and energy as a scholar, educator and community member thinking about how to get CUNY to take seriously concerns on our campus about mold, leaks, rat feces, and asbestos.

Since at least 2019, City Tech has experienced multiple crises related to health and safety on our campus due to near constant problems of water intrusion throughout our buildings leading to frequent leaks, floods, falling ceiling tiles, and pervasive mold. More disturbing has been the history of denial and intransigence we have received from CUNY administrators in response to these concerns. The refusal to acknowledge and address the gravity of problems related to water intrusion in the building and the failure to investigate and assess the hazards using accepted protocols has only compounded harm and impedes our collective ability to provide a safe, healthy, and welcoming space to the students who CUNY exists to serve and support.

Despite ample evidence of water damage and mold, we have been consistently told by our administration that "there is no mold" and that "mold is not a health hazard." This despite all available research about the health risks posed by mold and dampness, particularly in a city with one of the highest rates of childhood asthma in the country. In fact, both the World Health Organization and National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health consistently underscore the health dangers of damp or moldy buildings indicating that persistent dampness and water damage in buildings in and of itself causes health problems. Despite this, faculty, staff, and students at City Tech who have reported negative health effects from mold and construction related debris have been ignored and dismissed.

After half a decade of raising these concerns, it is thus galling to find out that the administration is in possession of an environmental assessment performed by a licensed DASNY approved firm that shows over forty classrooms and thousands of square feet of space in our buildings to be mold infested. This same report discovered thousands of square feet of rat feces above the ceiling tiles of the college's day care. Not only is this disgusting but it poses serious health risks. The report recommended immediate mold abatement and remediation of these areas by licensed professionals. When this report was brought to our attention, we asked the administration how they planned to address the issues identified. As of our last labor management meeting, there was no plans to address these issues. All the areas identified in the report including classrooms and the day care center are still occupied and in active use despite the lack of remediation. No one who works or learns in these areas has been notified of the potential risks.

We are grateful for CUNY's support of capital projects that may improve the long-term structural problems of our campuses that lead to these problems. In the meantime, faculty, staff and students continue to work in unsafe spaces where ceiling tiles regularly fall in and leaks are frequent. Our institutional archives have also seen the destructive impact, including a unique science fiction collection that has seen repeated water damage. Meanwhile, the failure to adhere to safe standards to protect employees during construction only compounds the problem. At City Tech, where active

construction is under way in parts of the NAMM and Library buildings, we have faced repeated health risks from construction. In the fall of 2025, a Town Hall was disrupted by a cloud of thick dust presumed to be caused by nearby construction. The dust lingered in the area for a good twenty minutes. Several members in the audience whipped on masks. Many attendees reported symptoms after the incident, including asthma and congestion. When the incident was brought to the administration's attention, we were told that no harm had been done and the college declined to do any testing to find out what City Tech community members had been exposed to. This same area of the building was flooded at least five times in the Fall 2025 semester. Nonetheless, despite frequent requests, no one has been evacuated from offices or lounges in this area even as there continue to be construction-related hazards.

While I have only witnessed the issues at City Tech, in talking to CUNY faculty from other campuses, I have learned of similar issues across Brooklyn CUNY campuses. At Brooklyn College, there are also ongoing rodent/wildlife issues in various buildings, frequent leaks, lack of drinking water, persistent elevator and therefore accessibility issues and a tendency to patch up problems on a surface level rather than address the root problem. At Kingsborough, I hear of significant malfunctions in the HVAC system and at least 82 outstanding violations in elevators. At Medgar Evers, I hear of extreme water intrusion, flooding, and mold, particularly in the Library, destroying archives in addition to learning and working conditions. All of these are situations are familiar to me and they speak to the endemic health and safety problems on our campuses.

CUNY students deserve a safe and healthy environment to learn in without mold, rat feces, and persistent flooding. This should not be a radical argument, but an essential function of CUNY's mission. This requires funds to improve the infrastructure of our learning environments, a commitment to transparency about the state of our campuses, and a willingness to listen to student, faculty and staff concerns and address them rather than deny and delay. We all have an interest in a CUNY that provides a safe and healthy learning and working environment. We can only bring that CUNY into being with a more honest, serious, collaborative approach to facing the health and safety conditions that exist now and transform them.



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New York, NY 10019

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New York City Council Committee of Higher Education Hearing

Testimony of Josiah Ramesar, Vice-Chairperson of the CUNY University Student Senate

March 20, 2026

Good afternoon, Chairs and members of the Committee on Higher Education.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Josiah Ramesar, and I represent approximately 30,000 graduate students across CUNY. I am also a third year law student at CUNY School of Law.

As a graduate student, I want to speak in support of funding free OMNY cards for CUNY students.

I am a product of New York City public schools, where I had access to a free MetroCard, which is now a OMNY Card. When I began my studies at CUNY in 2019 at Borough of Manhattan Community College, that support was no longer available. Since then, transportation costs have only increased.

Graduate students are already managing higher tuition, limited access to financial aid, and the demands of work and family responsibilities. Many rely primarily on loans. Transportation becomes yet another expense added to that burden. Students should not have to take on debt simply to get to class.

I am asking the Council to support funding \$700,000 for the free OMNY card pilot program. This investment would reduce financial strain and improve attendance, retention, and student success across CUNY.

Many of you rely on public transportation and understand its importance. For students, access to transit directly affects access to education.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



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



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.



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STAY CONNECTED



chairperson@usscuny.org
executivedirector@usscuny.org

LET'S BUILD A STRONGER CUNY

**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: Lo Anderson

Address: _____ BX, NY, 10473

I represent: CUNY CARES / Students for Students

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

CUNY

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/20/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Meeta Dhar, Esq., Managing Attorney

Address: _____

I represent: CUNY Citizenship Now!

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: 3/20/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jana Bergere

Address: _____ Brooklyn 11216

I represent: NYPIRG

Address: 9 Murray St. NY, NY 10007

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: Kilsys Payamps-Rouze

Address: 1359 Broadway, Suite 1000

I represent: Braven

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: Matthew Ahrens

Address: _____

I represent: Self

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: Damir Shakato ✓

Address: 555 W 57 Street

I represent: CUNY University Student Senate

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: Josiah Rampar

Address: _____ Bracewood, NY

I represent: CUNY University Student Senate

Address: 555 W 57th street

**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: Fatima-Zahara Kamil

Address: _____ Bronx NY

I represent: CUNY University Student Senate

Address: 555 West 57th Street

**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: 03/20/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rhafa Wilson

Address: _____ in Bronx, NY 10302

I represent: CUNY University Student Senate

Address: 555 west 57st

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: 3/20/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Hector Batista

Address: executive vice chancellor + chief
operating officer

I represent: _____

Address: city university of new york

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

CUNY

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/20/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ken Godner

Address: Vice Chancellor Budget of Finance

I represent: CUNY

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: 3/20/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alicia Alvers

Address: University student

I represent: city university of new york

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: Jullian Verd

Address: [redacted] Lafayette Ave

I represent: CUNY university student senate

Address: _____



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**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: 20 March 2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: James Davis

Address: 25 Broadway 15th floor

I represent: PSC/CUNY

Address: _____



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**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: March 20, 2027

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Akheem Polack

Address: 555 W 57th Street

I represent: Cuny University Student Senate

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: Akheem Polack

Address: 1355 - Chriss

I represent: Cuny Uni

Address: _____

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