

Testimony Before the Joint Hearing On Adjunct Labor Conducted by the New York State Assembly Committees on Higher Education and Labor

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**Delivered by
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I would like to begin by thanking the Higher Education and Labor Committees for holding today's hearing, and especially the chairs of these committees, Assemblyman Sullivan and Assemblywoman Nolan. The issues that you have put before us are important, and I appreciate the opportunity to address them on behalf of the Professional Staff Congress.

My name is Steven London. I'm First Vice President of the Professional Staff Congress, the union that represents 17,000 faculty and staff at the City University of New York (CUNY). Among those 17,000 instructional staff are 6,600 teaching adjuncts, 600 graduate-teaching fellows, 850 continuing-education teachers, and 560 non-teaching adjuncts. This brings the part-time workforce we represent to 8,610 or more than half of the total instructional staff at CUNY.

The question of how part-time workers are treated is important not only for adjunct faculty, but for everyone who is concerned about the shape of work in America today-and in the future. The development of a contingent workforce in CUNY mirrors the global changing nature of work. From UPS drivers to academics, more and more workers have to depend on part-time labor to make ends meet. It is extremely valuable for the Legislature to examine how this developing phenomenon impacts higher education institutions, our students' education, and educational workers.

There are particular issues that affect part-time faculty at CUNY, and New York State government has a particular responsibility to help resolve them. As the numbers I cited above indicate, CUNY's instructional staff has been restructured into a majority contingent workforce. This has been brought about, not by some force of nature, but by funding policies enacted at the state and city levels. We trust the Legislature, in its wisdom, will seek legislative remedies to address the problems it finds and to correct the injustices it discovers.

CUNY has suffered from budget cut after budget cut over the last couple of decades, even as our society's need for higher education has increased. CUNY's public funding has declined by over 30% in the decade of the 1990s alone. A major result of this disinvestment is the decline in full-time faculty from 11,268 in 1975 to 5,594 today.

At the same time as CUNY's funding and full-time faculty have been slashed, the number of students has increased. The number of full-time equivalent students has grown from 136,000 in 1981 to 142,000 in 1990 to 146,000 in 1998. More students, but less money and faculty. How has CUNY managed to close the gap? The answer has been by an increasing reliance on underpaid, undervalued adjunct instructional staff.

In 1990, full-time faculty taught 54% of the courses at CUNY's community colleges, and taught almost two-thirds of the classes in senior institutions. By the end of the decade of the 1990s, these percentages had fallen to 44% and 51% respectively with the balance of courses being taught by part-time faculty.

In other words, CUNY's teaching workforce has been restructured. Today, you will hear eloquent testimony of the horrible working conditions suffered by our part-time faculty and the hardships born by our students because of governmental policies. Our part-time faculty are paid less, are more insecure and have fewer benefits than full-time faculty. Our students suffer because most of their courses are taught by faculty who have to run from course-to-course, are not paid to hold after-class consultation hours with students, and often are not allowed to participate in curricular-planning or professional-development programs. Even though our part-time faculty are highly qualified and volunteer their time to our students, such talent and dedication cannot make up for systematic exploitation.

New York State has helped to bring this about through its steady cuts to CUNY's funding, and it has a responsibility to help the University and the adjuncts themselves to deal with the consequences. These hearings are a sign that that responsibility is recognized. I would like to share with you the PSC's views on what now needs to be done.

1. The PSC's budget for CUNY provides for a three-year plan to rebuild the instructional staff. This will allow the many adjuncts that wish full-time employment to apply for these positions.
2. Those who remain as adjuncts should be paid for holding after-class office hours. Adjuncts are often the bridge for bringing students into the world of higher education. These part-time faculty are responsible for courses, which develop a student's basic academic skills, or introductory courses that provide the first exposure to a subject. It is not uncommon for their students to be those who most need individual assistance. If for no other reason but this, adjuncts should be paid for office hours.
3. Many part-time faculty are graduate students who need the support routinely given at most other quality graduate programs. The PSC budget contains requests for increased support for graduate students and tuition waivers. Our graduate students and new Ph.D.s who are adjuncting are trained in new fields and able to offer new insights about our rapidly changing world. They need to be nurtured, not exploited.
4. The PSC has begun an initiative through the Municipal Labor Committee health and welfare bargaining with the City of New York to include eligible adjuncts in the New York City Health Plan. New York State has a role to play in funding the agreement arising from this initiative. We would appreciate the support of the Committee Chairs for this effort.
5. CUNY adjuncts should be allowed to join any of the Optional Retirement Programs available to the full-time faculty. This is currently done for SUNY part-time employees. We request that the legislature pass legislation mandating that adjuncts be treated the same as full-timers for the purposes of pension benefits.
6. CUNY part-time employees are in great need of disability coverage. We request the Legislature to pass a law allowing our part-time employees to join the state disability program for part-time employees.
7. Unemployment insurance is unjustly denied our part-time faculty between semesters. The PSC requests the New York State Unemployment Insurance Law be changed so that adjuncts will be eligible to collect unemployment insurance when they are unemployed.

8. Finally, but not least, the PSC is pursuing in its collective bargaining with CUNY the principal of "parity pay" for adjunct-teaching faculty. At the appropriate time, we will appreciate your support in the funding of our collective-bargaining agreement. Meanwhile, we seek your continued political support, as exemplified by these hearings, to increase public awareness of the plight of part-time instructional staff.

Students need teachers who have *time* to teach, *time* to prepare, *time* for research and *time* to meet with students and provide individual assistance. To achieve this for every student at CUNY, adjuncts must be given more support—and so must full-time faculty. It will do students no good if some improvements for adjuncts are paid for by making things worse for full-time faculty. That would be a shell game in which everyone ends as losers. The interests of full-timers and part-timers are linked together. Improvement in the conditions of adjuncts must be part of a general improvement in conditions at CUNY, if Professional Staff Congress it is to do students any good. For this reason, the PSC urges you to support our budget and its 12% increase for CUNY.

We want the part-time instructional staff to be given the support that will allow them to do the best teaching that they know how. That's what students at CUNY deserve, and that's what a great public university should deliver.

Thank you.