

**Testimony of Arthurine DeSola, Secretary
Professional Staff Congress/CUNY
Before the Higher Education Committee of the NYC Council**

**Concerning Funding Cuts to CUNY Community Colleges
Included in the Mayor's Preliminary Executive Budget**

March 18, 2011

On behalf of the 22,000 CUNY faculty and staff, I wish to begin by thanking Chairman Ydanis Rodriguez and the members of the Council Higher Education Committee for the opportunity to address the Mayor's Preliminary Executive Budget for the City University of New York.

The Mayor's Preliminary Executive Budget is approximately \$25 million less than last year's FY 2011 adopted budget and falls short of the support level mandated by State Maintenance of Effort legislation. The Executive Budget provides \$230 million in total expenditures for CUNY community colleges this year; this amount does not contain funding to cover inflation-related and expanded programmatic expenditures of approximately \$20 million. The impact of the reduced funding level is compounded by inflationary costs and expanding capacity beyond current commitments and increased enrollments. These reductions total \$45 million and we call on the Council to restore these cuts.

We also note that the Mayor has cut all funds for Vallone Scholarships and vital programs including for example the Black Male Initiative, Murphy Institute for Worker Education, Institute for Dominican Studies Institute, Center for Puerto Rican Studies and Creative Arts Team. For this reason, the PSC appeals to the Council to provide \$20 million for these programs.

Finally we bring to your attention that the State FY 2012 Executive Budget proposes to cut community college base aid (which is provided on a per FTE student basis) for CUNY community colleges by \$17.5 million. This would mean a 25% drop in state aid over the last three years. CUNY's community colleges cannot sustain continuous reductions in state FTE base aid. The City cannot turn its back on the need created by these cuts and, for this reason the PSC recommends the city provide \$17.5 million more if the state cuts go through.

If proposed city and state funding cuts go through, the impact will be nothing short of devastating. Enrollments have increased 33% over the last eight years and increased by a more modest 2.9% this fall only because the university was forced to close admissions early. Our community colleges are bursting at the seams, but the funding we have to provide each student with a quality education continues to drop.

This year, more than ever, we need courageous leadership from our elected officials to increase city and state revenue. It is unrealistic and ultimately cruel for the Governor to close a \$10 billion state budget gap with cuts alone. It is also unrealistic and cruel for Mayor Bloomberg to propose massive city cuts and threaten lay-offs when city tax revenues now are running \$3 billion ahead of projections.

We call on the City Council to reverse cuts the Mayor has proposed in the Preliminary Executive Budget, and in the coming weeks before the state budget is concluded, to strongly protest the

Governor and Senate Republican's failure to extend the Personal Income Tax surcharge on wealthy New Yorkers.

If nothing is done, the wealthy will receive a huge windfall in federal and state tax cuts while middle and low-income and poor New Yorkers, who are still suffering from the impact of the “great recession,” will bear the brunt of drastic cuts to government services.

Community college students are already paying higher tuition – 5% more beginning this semester. Financial aid including TAP and Pell grants cover some of the increase, but not all students receive these grants nor does financial aid cover the full cost of going to school. This means more students will need to work more, work longer hours or take time out from their education to earn enough to complete their degree. Some may never return.

CUNY campuses have already reduced spending on supplies, laboratory equipment and library resources to a bare minimum. If these cuts are imposed, class size—already at unacceptable levels on many campuses—would increase further. Students crammed into overcrowded classes would have less of their professors’ attention and time. Course offerings are likely to be reduced or overcrowded forcing students to wait longer to fill requirements necessary to advance and graduate.

The only solution is to look on the revenue side and to ask wealthy New Yorkers to pay their fair share so that all will benefit from a revitalized city and state economy.

We ask the City Council to push for passage of legislation to increase revenues.

Please push the Governor and Legislature to extend the state Personal Income Tax surcharge (the “millionaires’ tax”) which would raise \$1 billion this year and \$5-6 billion next.

Please urge the City Council to urge the state Legislature to close corporate loopholes, including the treatment of hedge fund managers’ income and retaining a portion of the stock transfer tax rebate.

We support proposals from the Progressive Caucus of the City Council to impose an additional Temporary New York Surcharge on the windfall provided the wealthiest New York households by extending the federal Bush-Era Tax Cut.

Ultimately, stimulating the New York City’s economy so it will attract business and create new wealth depends on providing decent public services including access to public higher education.

CUNY graduates infuse every part of the city’s economy with energy and productivity – from business to government to healthcare to fashion and the arts. Please don’t harm our ability to provide CUNY students with the education they need to succeed.

Thank you.