

Dear Council Member -

Thank you for your advocacy throughout this difficult year for The City University of New York and the faculty and staff represented by the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY. The PSC's 30,000 members are grateful for the restorations you have won in recent budgets.

We know this is a budget year unlike any other. We are aware of the strains on the City budget and the urgency of federal stimulus funds for the City. The PSC, as part of our national union, is campaigning aggressively for federal funds for states and localities. But especially in this challenging year, investment in CUNY is critical. Close to a half-million New Yorkers rely on CUNY for a path to a college degree or further education. Yet CUNY has been undermined by years of City budgets with only modest investment, by a history of underinvestment by the State, and by tuition costs that are among the highest in the country for community colleges.

Black and brown New Yorkers, the poor and the working class have been hit hardest by the pandemic. And these are the New Yorkers for whom CUNY is a lifeline. For the city's working class and communities of color as they seek to rebuild their lives after the economic devastation of the pandemic, CUNY is likely to represent the only chance to earn new credentials or a college degree. New York will not rebound if whole communities are left behind. If we are committed to an inclusive or anti-racist economic recovery, new investment in CUNY is essential.

This is the moment not just to *protect* CUNY from budget cuts, but to think strategically about the future of the city and *invest*. The future of CUNY is the future of New York.

On behalf of the PSC membership, I ask the Council to support a City budget that includes:

1. **\$77.3 million to reverse cuts** in the enacted FY 2021 budget and eliminate proposed cuts through "cost efficiencies" in the Mayor's Preliminary Budget for FY 2022;
2. **\$23.8 million to provide revenue** support to offset the loss in tuition from enrollment declines resulting from the pandemic, as requested by CUNY;
3. **\$20.4 million** to support the first year of the New Deal for CUNY.

**This request represents a total increase of \$121.5 million** over the FY 2022 Preliminary Executive Budget allocation for The City University of New York.

**Restorations and Revenue Support:** The Preliminary Executive Budget proposes cuts to ASAP, information technology, tutoring, and basic OTPS funding. CUNY simply cannot sustain such cuts. The CUNY community colleges are already cut to the bone; they cannot be cut further. CUNY has also been targeted for "cost efficiencies" in the current year and in the FY 2022 Preliminary Executive Budget. There is nothing efficient about undermining the nation's largest urban university in the city that continues to be devastated by COVID exactly when the university is needed most. We call on you to reverse these cuts. And we join the University in asking the CITY to provide \$23.8 million to offset the short-term losses in tuition revenue because of the pandemic. Community college enrollment will rebound; allowing the community colleges to be hamstrung because of a temporary drop in enrollment will leave them unable to

serve New Yorkers for many years to come. The PSC is also joining the University in urging the State to hold the CUNY community colleges harmless against reductions in per-student base aid during the temporary decline in enrollment because of the pandemic.

**The New Deal for CUNY:** In addition to the defensive budget measures above, the PSC calls on the Council to join us—and join your legislative colleagues in Albany—in imagining a new future for CUNY. We ask you to support the initial year of a New Deal for CUNY (S4461). The legislation, introduced this month in Albany, establishes appropriate ratios of mental health counselors, academic advisors, and full-time faculty to students, ensuring a high-quality experience for CUNY students. It also returns CUNY to the tuition-free model that prevailed for more than a century. The new provisions in the legislation would be phased in over five years, but to get started in FY 2022, we request \$20.4 million. The funding would enable CUNY to take the initial steps to ease the tuition burden and move toward these ratios at the community colleges. We have also called on the State to make analogous investments in the four-year CUNY colleges and in base aid to the community colleges.

**Racial Disparities in Higher Education Attainment in New York City:** As the Council seeks to develop a budget that supports racial justice as part of economic recovery, we call attention to the importance of supporting CUNY as a potential force to counter systemic racism. The Center for an Urban Future recently released a report that reveals gaping racial disparities in college attainment in NYC: “Just 20 percent of Hispanic New Yorkers, 27 percent of Black New Yorkers, and 45 percent of Asian New Yorkers hold a bachelor’s degree, compared to 64 percent of white New Yorkers,” the report states. The disparities within neighborhoods are even more shocking. In Jackson Heights, 11 percent of Hispanic residents hold a bachelor's degree, compared to 58 percent of white residents. In Bushwick, 71 percent of white residents have a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to 24.5 percent of Black residents and 14 percent of Hispanic residents. These disparities come at a time when the city’s economy is increasingly bifurcated, with “a large number of low-wage jobs . . . accessible to individuals without a college credential and a smaller number of higher-wage jobs that mainly went to those with at least a bachelor’s degree.” Unless CUNY is adequately funded, it will be unable to address these life-defining inequities.

Finally, we call on the Council for your advocacy on two issues, in addition to the \$121.5 million budget allocation:

- CUNY has recently informed the union of a decision not to implement contractually negotiated “equity increments” negotiated with the PSC. These increments are in addition to the across-the-board increases, which are also being withheld, as they are for public employees who work for state agencies. We ask you to use your voice to demand that CUNY pay the equity increases without further delay. They were negotiated specifically to narrow gaps in salary, particularly among employees in job titles with the highest concentrations of women and people of color.
- CUNY received \$251 million from the CARES Act and is scheduled to receive an additional \$455 million from the CRRSAA. While the University used substantial CARES Act funding in direct aid to students, as required in the legislation, it has failed to spend even its first allocation and continues to hold approximately \$72 million in CARES

Act funds. Meanwhile, CUNY has laid off nearly 2,000 adjunct faculty and staff, closed class sections and cut course offerings. We call on you to demand a public accounting of CUNY's use of the funds and to join us in urging the University to use the federal funds as they were intended—to keep employees on payroll and address the urgent needs created by the pandemic.

Thank you for your time and your work, for your vision and dedication in this terrible time. Please do not hesitate to contact the PSC with any questions.

Sincerely,

Barbara Bowen

President, PSC/CUNY