

May 22, 2014

The Honorable Melissa Mark-Viverito
Speaker, New York City Council
250 Broadway, Suite 1856
New York, NY 10007

RE: The FY 2015 Budget for CUNY and Financial Aid

Dear Speaker Mark-Viverito:

The City Council has been a strong advocate for CUNY students, faculty and staff, often restoring funding that previous administrations had proposed to cut. Now that the City has a mayor who understands CUNY's potential for reducing economic inequality, we are excited to partner with the City Council's progressive leadership and Mayor de Blasio to end the pattern of cuts and partial restorations. We would like to see the Council and Mayor more fully embrace CUNY as a valued resource to advance economic and cultural opportunities for all New Yorkers. For a modest investment, the Council and the administration can build on CUNY's strengths as an engine of workforce development, lift the financial burden on many of CUNY's students, enhance our students' job opportunities and creative potential, and promote the democratic values inherent in public higher education.

The City Council's budget plan proposes a merit-based financial aid program and Mayor de Blasio's Executive Budget would invest nearly \$20 million in CUNY's celebrated Accelerated Study In Associate Programs (ASAP) initiative and in Science Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs at CUNY. These are essential steps to provide students with the means to succeed. The ASAP program demonstrates how additional resources for smaller classes, mentoring, academic tutoring and "aggressive" individualized counseling, hands-on research opportunities for students, tuition assistance, and paid internships help students to succeed and graduate on time. Extending this approach to STEM programs at community colleges makes sense.

Similar system-wide investments are needed so all CUNY students can have faculty mentor relationships and support. After years of disinvestment, the University struggles with larger student-to-full-time faculty ratios, larger classes, and less availability of courses required for graduation because of a profound shortage of full-time faculty. (There are 4,000 fewer full-time faculty today than when enrollments were last near the current level.) CUNY faculty and staff offer very successful applied arts and sciences degrees and internships that link students to the work-world, but they are limited by lack of resources.

The PSC is ready to partner with the City Council, Mayor de Blasio, and the University to make CUNY the lynchpin of the City's attack on inequality. This means giving all CUNY students the ability to imagine new possibilities for their lives, the support they need to graduate on time, and the tools they need to succeed.

We propose the following strategic investments, which together would enable CUNY to meet these goals:

- 1. Provide \$10 million this year for a Council initiative to hire new full-time faculty and staff.** CUNY needs more City funding for new full-time faculty lines, new counselors and student support staff (i.e. instructional staff). The Mayor's STEM initiative would add about 60 net full-time lines, but many more are needed. The PSC has called for 1,000 additional instructional staff positions, and has proposed calling them CUNY's One City Fellows to honor the role they will play in reducing income inequality in our city. Achieving the Mayor's big-picture goal of increasing City support for CUNY by \$150 million

would pay for such an increase in the ranks of CUNY's instructional staff; a \$10 million commitment from the Council now would support 100 new instructional staff lines and would be a down payment on a transformative investment.

A substantial number of these One City Fellows can be recruited from existing part-time faculty who have already demonstrated the ability to succeed with CUNY students, and special effort should be dedicated to recruiting women and people of color to full-time faculty positions.

2. Provide \$5 million this year for need-based financial aid to fill gaps in the current system of State and federal financial aid. The Council initiated the successful "Safety Net" financial aid program a decade ago, but it was ended along with the Vallone Scholarships. Reinstated, this money could be targeted by financial aid offices directly to where the greatest needs exist: undocumented students, part-time students and independent adults who are failed by New York's Tuition Assistance Program and Pell grants to help them pay for books and cover other un-met college costs.

3. Provide \$800,000 to fully fund Council-supported initiatives, such as the Murphy Center for Worker Education, Creative Arts Team, Dominican Studies Institute and Center for Puerto Rican Studies. As in past years, it has been left to the City Council to support these programs with discretionary funds. The Council should restore their funding and press to make them part of the baseline budget for CUNY.

4. Provide \$10.9 million this year to fund the Council's merit-aid program, the Academic Achievement Award. (AAA). The AAA scholarship would assist New York City students with a "B" average or above to attend college and would help many low-income students afford CUNY.

5. Fund CUNY's full Capital Budget request for critical maintenance and construction needs. After years of enrollment growth, CUNY needs more space. And the University's students and faculty should have modern equipment, decent facilities and a safe, healthy learning and working environment.

PSC's City budget platform is explained in more detail on the final page of the enclosed booklet, [New York Has an Inequality Crisis. CUNY is the Solution](#). The booklet documents the rise of income inequality in our city, the demographics of CUNY students and the role CUNY plays in creating opportunity. It also describes CUNY's shameful exploitation of low-wage adjunct faculty, the history of public disinvestment in CUNY and the related rise in CUNY tuition. Even in this year's budget, when many at CUNY believe we are turning a corner, CUNY depends too much on tuition hikes. The largest increase in revenue for CUNY in this year's budget is still coming from the students; tuition will rise by \$300 next year.

The effects of austerity are plain to see at CUNY. But CUNY remains the greatest source of opportunity for low- and middle-income New Yorkers, immigrants and people of color. This is so, in large part, because of the City Council's enduring commitment to the University. Now, we would like to see the Council, along with the Mayor, transform that historic commitment into a sense of ownership and purposeful change. With support from the City Council and the Mayor, CUNY's faculty and professional staff can better serve our students so that they receive the educational opportunity and support they deserve.

Sincerely,



Steven London
First Vice President

CC: Members of the City Council
Enclosure (1)