

Testimony- Mike Fabricant
Finance Committee: CUNY Board of Trustees
December 9, 2019

Members of the Board of Trustees and Chancellor Matos-Rodriquez:

I want to begin my testimony by saying that raising tuition and student fees is an unsustainable way of funding the public higher education students deserve. We must find a better way than increasing the access costs of a CUNY education to students whose family incomes are in general below \$30,000 annually. The continuing reliance on tuition to offset a lack of public investment by NYS and NYC in CUNY must be reversed. Freezing tuition would represent an important first step in demonstrating good faith with students.

Last year there was much political ferment in Albany. The legislature passed historic housing, women's rights, climate change and racial justice legislation. There is a changing culture in Albany which is just beginning to press for greater investment in public agencies, including public higher education. Senator Andrew Gounardes, for example, has proposed a constitutional amendment to assure a free and well-funded public higher education system in NYS. Other senators and assembly-people are working on legislation entitled a New Deal for CUNY. It would reset the bar for investment in faculty, student support staff, free tuition and capitol maintenance, as well as construction. Finally, a number of legislators are exploring dedicated lines of tax revenue to be invested in public higher education. This recent wave of legislators and legislation are new, just and aspirational. CUNY must be engaged in a public discourse about what CUNY needs, not simply accept the constraints of austerity financing.

This still fragile shift in Albany's thinking about CUNY's needs requires the support of the CUNY Chancellor and the Board of Trustees. Only by aligning with legislators prepared to take risks to ask for the investment long denied and deserved by CUNY can the needle regarding NYS and NYC financing be moved.

The present latent power and legacy of CUNY is embedded in every community in NYC and the alumni of CUNY. It needs to be fully awakened, organized and directed at supporting legislators working to produce the CUNY we imagine and deserve through legislation reaching for new levels and kinds of public investment. This is no longer an unreachable horizon, but so near we can touch it through the debate and legislation being discussed in Albany. For such legislation to be passed in the near future and financed however, will require risk taking from CUNY management and the Board of Trustees. Students, neighborhood agencies and the PSC will be pressing for this transformative investment in CUNY. Will you join us in promoting and advancing this legislation, this year and into the future? It is a question that begs to be answered as soon as possible.