

Testimony of Rosa Squillacote, Vice President of Part-Time Personnel
Professional Staff Congress/CUNY

Before the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
jointly with Civil Service and Labor

November 12, 2020

Good morning Council Members and thank you for your time today.

My name is Rosa Squillacote, Vice President of Part-Time Personnel. I've been an adjunct for almost 9 years, and I am also a graduate of Hunter College, where most of my classes were taught by adjuncts.

It is not an exaggeration to say that CUNY runs on adjunct and part-time labor. CUNY relies disproportionately on adjuncts to teach classes, as well as part-time workers like non-teaching adjuncts, continuing education teachers, and college laboratory technicians. All these people (almost half of the CUNY workforce) work tirelessly to provide support and a world-class education for their working-class students and students of color. You don't become an adjunct at CUNY unless you care about your students -- what adjuncts need are better working conditions and protections so that we can provide the educational and emotional support our students need. By helping with difficult coursework, making time to listen to students' concerns, or connecting students with other resources they may need.

Every adjunct knows students who have experienced the death of a family member, or faced job loss, or became sick themselves. We cannot support our students if we ourselves are worried about losing our jobs and health insurance, or if we are juggling 5, 10, 20 or more students a class. (Best practices for online teaching suggest about 12 students a class.)

Part-timers at CUNY deserve to be recognized and respected for the work we do to make CUNY what it is, and yet we are treated as disposable. We are neither paid sufficiently for our work nor given job security.

In fact, CUNY administration made the decision to lay off almost 3,000 part-time workers in the immediate aftermath of the COVID pandemic. Thanks to the union's advocacy, some workers were able to regain their jobs, but many others are left without income and without any insurance during one of the most serious health and economic crises of our time. COBRA is simply not a financial option for adjuncts, as the cheapest option is about \$900/month. On top of this, at Medgar Evers College and Bronx Community College, CUNY fired dozens of adjuncts who had previously been offered a three-year contract, one of the few sources of job security offered to adjuncts. This was an insult both to workers and to the union.

We are demanding that laid off part-time workers get their jobs and health insurance back. The CUNY administration would have us believe they are strapped for cash, but other university administrators have taken meaningful pay cuts - more than a mere 5 day furlough - that have allowed their universities to continue to function. We have seen no such decency from CUNY, who have not even used federal CARES Act money to preserve our jobs.

More generally, part-timers simply need to be paid a decent wage. Currently, if I were to work 'full-time' as an adjunct (and I make on the higher range of what adjuncts make), teaching 6 classes a year, I would make 30,000 a year pre-tax - about \$19 an hour -- despite the fact that I have a law degree, and despite the fact that I have a family to provide for. Adjuncts should be paid at least \$7,000 per class, should have meaningful job security, and should be given the ability to transition to a full-time position. What CUNY really needs -- specifically what the workers and students need -- is a free and fully funded CUNY. It is past time to invest in public institutions like CUNY, through legislation like millionaires' tax and the New Deal for CUNY. Our dignity and safety demand it. New York's recovery demands it.

Thank you for your time.