

Testimony of Scott Cally, Chapter Chair, Professional Staff Congress/CUNY

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

Oversight - Adjunct Faculty Employment at the City University of New York.

November 12, 2020

Good afternoon. My name is Scott Cally, I am a Professor of Theatre Arts and Chair of the Professional Staff Congress Chapter at Kingsborough Community College. This past summer, more than 100 part-time positions were eliminated at Kingsborough and many others have had their hours severely curtailed. Among these positions were advisors, laboratory technicians, library assistants and other student support positions – some of whom had worked at Kingsborough for more than 20 years. No committee or any other form of shared governance were consulted in the decisions to non-reappoint at KCC. Chair Barron, your concerns about transparency and accountability of the college presidents are well founded. There is very little.

Community college students are among the most disadvantaged in New York City and the least prepared for college. They need more individualized attention, not less. CUNY is making up for the lost adjuncts by crowding students into larger classes – lowering the quality of their education. Case in point: The Spring 2021 English Composition 1 at Kingsborough is capped at 29 students while at Baruch, the same English Comp classes are capped at only 15 students. I ask the Council to consider the following question – why is it that CUNY sets course caps at one of its flagship campuses in line with national norms yet has no problem with crowding Kingsborough’s students into classes almost twice the size? CUNY repeatedly publicizes its commitment to equity. I ask the Council Members – does this sound like equity to you? That CUNY is an institution where inequity is allowed to flourish is obvious. The time has come for our elected officials to demand answers from the decision makers as to why they have allowed this to happen. Kingsborough’s students are not less than, and it is time to stop treating them as though they are.

The use of contingent labor is inexorably linked to the deprioritization of community college students at CUNY and this is evidenced by the diversion of funding from the classroom and student support. We all know that the upcoming budget cycle will be among the most difficult in recent memory. Beyond the need for adequate funding, it is imperative for our elected officials to examine the budgetary priorities of the CUNY management and ensure that the funding is spent on students, not on more senior administration and not on increasing contingency. In the five years leading up to the COVID crisis Kingsborough increased spending in real dollars on Executive Compensation Plan Employees by 57.6% while during same period our enrollment declined by 26% when measured by FTEs. As a proportion of FTEs Kingsborough increased ECP spending by an astonishing 112% in five years. Now since the beginning of the

crisis Kingsborough has decreased ECP spending somewhat due to the resignation of two senior administrators but now that the Council will be facing very difficult choices in the coming budget cycle it is more important than ever that the Council take steps to insure that the resources that are allocated to CUNY are spent wisely and that they are devoted to directly serving our students – not feeding the administrative bloat. The disadvantaged students of New York need their elected officials to stand up for them and force CUNY to make the right decisions - decisions that will be contrary to the administrative ethos that has dominated CUNY for years – an ethos that continues to fail our students every day.

Thank you for your time.

Chair Barron, in your opening remarks you asked a question – one that CUNY did not answer. Allow me to. Why are we marginalizing our black and brown faculty? Because that's what we do with our black and brown students. For example: in spring 2021 Kingsborough students taking English Comp 1 will be crowded into course sections capping at 29 students – many to be taught by adjunct faculty. At Baruch, students taking English Comp 1 will enjoy class sizes limited to 15. Why the disparity? Kingsborough students are more likely to have special needs, more likely to be more unprepared for college, more likely to be housing and food insecure, more likely to have connectivity issues and yes, more likely to be black or brown. Why does CUNY allow this disparity, which has existed long before COVID to exist? Does this sound like CUNY's core mission of high quality education? Does this sound like equity?