My name is Lorraine Cohen, I am a full professor at LaGuardia Community College, a PSC Vice President of Community Colleges, and a former Department Chair. I teach Sociology in the Social Science Department. I am testifying today to add my voice to the large number of faculty who are concerned about the issue of class size. I join with my colleagues in affirming that class size matters. Under the current conditions brought about by COVID-19, it matters even more. In the fall of 2019, LaGuardia Community College had capped fully online classes at 22. In the fall of 2020 class sizes in some departments have grown to numbers as large as 38 and 39 students. If 22 was the cap then, it should be the cap now.

The scholarly research and our own experiences in the classroom support the belief that class size matters. A large study on the issue of class size was published in 2011 by group of scholars in the Quarterly Review of Distance Education. A major finding was that the single most important factor in whether students learn and stay in school is their personal interaction with their teacher.

There is consensus that the single greatest predictor of positive self-reported student learning is instructor-student interaction. Teacher immediacy (timely and personal responsiveness) is one of the key drivers of student satisfaction (Bonnel, Ludwig, & Smith, 2008; Keeton, 2004; Schutt, Allen, & Laumakis, 2009).

Another important finding around which there was consensus was that preparing and teaching online courses is more labor intensive than classroom-based teaching. “... the workload and intensity of effort for faculty are in general heavier for online education than for classroom-based education.”

These findings are consistent with my own experiences and that of other faculty. As PSC VP of Community Colleges, class size is one of the issues that chapter leaders regularly raise. This is even more true in this time of COVID-19. Our students have been very hard hit. They have gotten sick and had relatives get sick. They have lost jobs. They need faculty who are willing to give them the intellectual help and the emotional support that will allow them to complete the course, and take another step towards graduation. The larger the class size the more overwhelming our job becomes.

We are asking you and the Chancellor to take action to ensure that the educational needs of our students are met; and that our need for a manageable workload is recognized. We want the Chancellor and the Board to give guidance to the Provosts in all the colleges to lower class size to no greater than 25. We also want management to bargain with the union on this issue. We stand in solidarity with part-time faculty who have lost their jobs and ask that they be rehired, as a step towards cutting class sizes.
We are demanding that the Chancellor and Board advocate for us and challenge the austerity budget imposed by the Governor. If the Governor is interested in economic recovery, he must invest in CUNY. I hope the Chancellor and the Board have the courage to stand up for CUNY and the larger NY City community.