

CUNY Board of Trustees public hearing – December 5, 2022

Good afternoon, I am James Davis, President of the Professional Staff Congress. It has been a privilege teaching at CUNY since 2003, and a privilege serving now in this role, representing 30,000 talented faculty and staff.

As Trustees, you have a critical opportunity this year. You have a Governor who, in January, expressed a commitment to public higher education at a level not seen in decades. You have a Mayor with two CUNY degrees. You have a legislature and a City Council full of CUNY alumni. Our shirts say “Everybody Loves Somebody at CUNY,” and it’s true: all across the city and state, you can’t turn around without bumping into someone who attended CUNY, whose life was transformed by enrolling in places like LaGuardia Community College. I’m here to ask that you seize the opportunity in the coming budget cycle, to build on this year’s encouraging gains, and impress on elected officials how much more amazing CUNY could become with the proper resources. With those resources, CUNY can improve both access and quality, students will return to our campuses in greater numbers, and we, the faculty and staff, can offer an exceptional academic experience.

I urge you to approve the university’s Fiscal 2024 budget request at your next meeting. It includes \$339 million in additional state funding and \$80 million in additional city funding. It recognizes the necessity of professional development, hiring more academic advisors, supporting mental health on campus, diversifying the full-time faculty, and fostering research and scholarship. It acknowledges that only 8% of our buildings are in a State of Good Repair, and that improvements are badly needed. It is hard to overstate the importance of these factors to enhancing the quality of education. In fact, it is not enough to approve this budget request, I urge you to push for every penny in it, publicly and relentlessly. Encourage the presidents to lobby for it, not only in meetings but in the media too. The university needs a transformative investment.

Finally, in anticipation of upcoming contract negotiations, I urge you to seek funding for real raises, raises above inflation. For the sake of educational quality, CUNY needs to offer salaries to recruit and retain HEOs and CLTs, to pay adjuncts fairly, and to hire new *professors* – not just adjunct faculty or even lecturers, though the infusion of full-time lecturers is welcome – but professors too. Retirement and attrition have removed hundreds of professors during the pandemic. Their loss is not offset by hiring lecturers alone. Research and scholarship are, along with great teaching, the hallmarks of our academic programs, engaging our students and enhancing the public good.

Let this year’s budget cycle reflect your commitment to educational quality and the role of competitive compensation for the workforce in ensuring that high quality.

Thank you.