

Testimony of Kathleen Offenholley

CUNY Board of Trustees Hearing

December 5, 2022

Hello. I am Kathleen Offenholley. I teach mathematics at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, BMCC, and I am also the PSC union chapter chair there. One of the courses I teach is Mathematics for Elementary Education, a course for future elementary school teachers. My students are amazing. They are often the first in their families to go to college. They are smart, kind, dedicated people. And they want to be teachers. But they struggle to balance jobs, classes and family obligations. I have one student – and he is pretty typical – who works full time, and is taking 5 classes, which is way more than he should reasonably be expected to manage. I have another student who works full time, has four kids and is taking 4 classes, again, she is doing way more than anyone could manage. Both are behind in my class and struggling to catch up, and I am doing my best to help them and the other students who are trying to make it through.

We should *all* support these dedicated, hard-working students! We want them to pass their classes and graduate to become teachers. We should support them not just because it's the right thing to do for them, but also given the looming teacher shortage in New York that will only worsen if we do not find more ways to get students to enter teacher education programs. According to the U.S. Department of Education, enrollment in New York State's teacher education programs has declined by 53 percent since 2009.

We could help our students if we hired more mental health counselors and academic advisors to advise about things like how many college classes it is okay to take. We also need to make CUNY free for in-state undergraduates, so that more students can afford to come to CUNY without having to work full time at the same time. We must help more students to be able to make it through the excellent education CUNY can provide.

It is also vital to increase the ratio of full-time faculty to students, so that more of the students get the level of attention that a full-time faculty member can give when they desperately need that help. We also need to increase adjunct wages. We should do this because it is the right thing to do for adjuncts, but also because it will allow our students to be better supported if adjuncts can afford to give more time to students, without having to run from one job to another to make ends meet.

I urge you all in the Board of Trustees to support full funding for CUNY and the New Deal for CUNY. Support for just funding is support for all the students who deserve to be able to graduate from college and lead better lives.