

PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY
TESTIMONY

EXECUTIVE BUDGET: THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF
NEW YORK, FY 2024

JOINT HEARING, NEW YORK STATE:
SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
ASSEMBLY WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

February 27, 2023 Delivered by Dr. James Davis,
President, Professional Staff Congress/CUNY

Good afternoon, Senate Chairpersons Krueger and Stavisky, Assembly Chairpersons Weinstein and Fahy. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your support of public higher education. I am James Davis, President of the Professional Staff Congress. We represent 30,000 faculty and professional staff at the City University of New York.

The PSC is grateful for your support for CUNY in last year's budget: Holding the community colleges harmless; funding to hire full-time faculty; expanding mental health services; supporting childcare centers; expanding TAP to part-time and incarcerated individuals, all helped a University reeling from a terrible pandemic. Your determination to invest more in CUNY is critical to reviving a budget that saw public funding decline long before the pandemic.

CUNY is a wise investment

CUNY is an economic engine for New York State through good times and bad. The university guides roughly 55,000 graduates into the workforce each year¹. PSC members continue to provide quality education and essential services under difficult circumstances to over 200,000 students.

We also know that CUNY is a catalyst for the state economy and should be understood as a sound investment. In 2019 alone, CUNY graduates earned \$57 billion and paid \$4.2 billion in state taxes.² Few questions would be asked of any other industry with this return on an investment about its need for full funding. I can assure you, CUNY is well worth your support.

And supporting CUNY is not just fiscally responsible, it is widely embraced across the political spectrum; 95% of Democratic and 79% of Republican voters favor increasing public higher education funding, according to a recent Hart Research survey.³ Respondents wanted to ensure access to public higher education and funding operational aid, including student services and academic support. Many of these respondents have a direct connection as alumni or parents of CUNY and SUNY students.

The Governor's FY24 Executive Budget puts mental health resources at the top of her priorities. CUNY should be an essential component to fulfilling these important goals. CUNY trains nurses, offers mental health counseling and trains mental health counselors. Chancellor Matos Rodríguez stated that CUNY graduates "make up half of the city's new nurses and a third of

¹ [CUNY Chancellor Matos Rodríguez Outlines Vision for University in NYC's Equitable Post-Pandemic Recovery – CUNY Newswire](#), September 2022

² Office of the New York City Comptroller: CUNY's Contribution to the Economy, March 12, 2021.

³ Hart Research Associates survey conducted January 13-17, 2022. Voters' Attitude About Increasing Funding for New York's Public Colleges, Universities, and Community Colleges.

new teachers.”⁴ But for Governor Hochul’s budget proposal to be a reality, New York needs the additional nurses and counselors that CUNY can train.

New York State has the resources to invest in CUNY. After years of unaccountable economic development programs yielding questionable returns, many advocates are now seeking to freeze subsidy programs that fail to provide jobs or otherwise benefit our economy. We believe that corporate subsidies with little or no yield should not compete with the effort to fully fund CUNY.

PSC’s FY24 funding priorities

Our priorities outlined below are the foundation of the New Deal for CUNY (S2146/A4425). Thank you to those of you that have co-sponsored the bill and to Senator Gounardes, our New Deal for CUNY champion in the Senate. Passing the New Deal for CUNY would accelerate hiring for mental health counselors, academic advisors, and full-time faculty and fund desperately needed capital improvements.

Faculty hires: \$200 million (\$178.8 million for 1,876 faculty at the Senior Colleges, \$21.1 million for 225 faculty at the Community Colleges)

CUNY’s continued dependence on low-wage, part-time faculty should be overcome in this budget. There is a racialized inequity in access to full-time professors, and we must improve CUNY’s ratio of full-time faculty to students. A study by the CUNY University Faculty Senate found that our senior colleges with a majority of Black and Hispanic students have less opportunity than their peers at whiter campuses to study with full-time faculty.⁵

Mandatory cost increases: \$82.7 million

The University needs to fund the basic year-over-year cost increases required to operate CUNY, including negotiated employee salaries and fringe benefits.

Enhanced academic advisement and counseling services, community college ASAP for all. \$112.2 million

Our mental health counselors and academic advisors are on the front lines of student support, and their workloads are overwhelming. Additionally, colleges with the renowned ASAP program need resources to maintain and expand subsidies for the metrocards that allow students to commute to campus.

⁴ *City & State New York*, September 22, 2022, CUNY’s chancellor wants the system to play a pivotal role in New York City’s economic recovery, Donaldson, Sahalie.

⁵ University Faculty Senate, September 2021, The Faculty Gap: Comparison of SUNY and CUNY Senior College Faculty/Student Ratios.

Graduate education support: \$24.5 million

Graduate students need more support by increasing their stipends and fellowships to meet the rising costs of living in New York City. Additionally, doctoral students need improved access to research centers and graduates with career opportunities in industry and the academy. Also, CUNY must expand and diversify the ranks of research-focused faculty who mentor graduate students.

Community College funding floor: \$11.7 million

For many New Yorkers, Community Colleges are the gateway to higher education. The two-year schools have faced stronger enrollment challenges than the four-year colleges. But we must maintain funding for these institutions so they can better support current students and, critically, can recruit and retain new students when the economy and life circumstances encourage them to attend college.

No tuition hikes. Free Community College: \$284 million

CUNY needs help to stem enrollment declines. We urge the legislature to not only reject tuition increases, but strive for a New York where community colleges are free. While we appreciate the Governor's support of CUNY, the PSC opposes any increase in tuition, as we believe it will hinder the efforts to bring students back to our campuses as the pandemic subsidies and enrollment rebounds.

Capital budget: \$983 million

We fully support CUNY's request of \$983 million in capital funding. For any institution to have only 8% of its buildings in a state of good repair is a recipe for disaster, like the one playing out at Bronx Community College in recent weeks. The College was forced to return to fully remote classes last fall when the boiler system broke. And earlier this month on one of the coldest days of the year, a pipe burst leaving Colston Hall without heat. Thankfully, this occurred on a Saturday, but it still impacted classes scheduled that day and created an unnecessary crisis. It should be noted Colston Hall had a pipe burst in 2019.

Bronx Community College may sound like an anomaly, but half of CUNY's 300 buildings are more than 50 years old. This made social distancing challenging during COVID and upgrading ventilation systems a herculean effort. Capital investments should ensure that our members and CUNY students have safe, sustainable spaces and that CUNY campuses are good neighbors. Why are major capital investments being used to repair boilers at Bronx Community College, an area with some of the highest asthma and pollution rates in the country? There are alternatives.

Budget gaps persist

Last year's infusion of state funds - the most seen in decades - helped keep classes running, and stem the decline in full-time faculty. But it will take additional resources in this year's budget to replenish the nearly 800 faculty lost to attrition and retirement since 2017.

A highlight of last year's budget was the closing of the TAP gap, which had been a drain on every college's budget. However, because that gap grew dramatically year over year its impact still reverberates today. Nearly ten years of a TAP gap, combined with the loss of federal pandemic funds this year, means CUNY is at a real precipice. (See Chart A)

A February 3, 2023 CUNY directive to the colleges now demands severe austerity measures through targeted savings of \$100 million in FY24.⁶ This is in addition to the current year's \$75 million in savings.

Savings plans from the campuses are due March 3. After a concerted effort by the legislature and the executive last year to increase funding to CUNY, it is disheartening that the administration will now curb nearly all hiring. The memo states, "Reaching the fiscal year 2024 targets will require courage, creativity, perseverance, and discipline." In fact, this is profoundly *discouraging*. We understand the financial obstacles the campuses are facing. But should plans to cut them 5-7 percent be realized, we fear some colleges will not recover.

PSC contract expiration

This morning, I stood with PSC members at CUNY's central office where we launched our campaign for a new contract. The theme of "Raises, Justice, Community" is one our members are determined to fight for. They have mentored and advocated for students as faculty, advisors, counselors, college lab technicians, teachers, and expect a new contract with significant increases to wages and benefits. Our members deserve nothing less when many of them are lifting heavy burdens of extra work because staff positions are left open, and when adjunct faculty hustle from campus to campus for lower wages than what their colleagues are paid at private universities.

PSC members are educating and nurturing New Yorkers; 80% of CUNY graduates remain in the state. They are teachers, nurses, engineers, artists, state legislators and their staff, an attorney general and a mayor. Approximately a quarter of the public service workforce in New York State

⁶ Correspondence from Hector Batista Executive Vice Chancellor and COO to CUNY Presidents and Deans, February 3, 2023: Fiscal Year 2024 Savings Target, Hiring Freeze, and Vacancy Review Board Reintroduction

will be eligible to retire in the next five years.⁷ We must keep CUNY strong to prepare for the next generation of these professions.

Today's CUNY students, the majority of whom are students of color, and many of whom are immigrants or the first generation in their families to attend college, have endured extraordinary challenges. The pandemic hit their communities harder than most and they deserve every effort to help them succeed.

⁷ Page 126: [Briefing Book \(PDF\) | NYS FY 2024 Executive Budget](#)

Chart A⁸

Fall	Tuition CUNY	Tuition SUNY	Maximum TAP	TAP difference per eligible student (TAP gap) in CUNY
2010	\$4830	\$4970	\$5000	\$170
2011	\$5130	\$5270	\$5000	\$130
2012	\$5430	\$5570	\$5000	\$430
2013	\$5730	\$5870	\$5000	\$730
2014	\$6030	\$6170	\$5000	\$1030
2015	\$6330	\$6470	\$5165	\$1165
2016	\$6330	\$6470	\$5165	\$1165
2017	\$6530	\$6670	\$5165	\$1365
2018	\$6730	\$6870	\$5165	\$1565
2019	\$6930	\$7070	\$5165	\$1,765

⁸ Adapted CUNY figures from: WASTED OPPORTUNITY New York Spends Billions On Risky Economic Development Programs, Yet Fails To Invest In A Proven Winner –Public Higher Education. New Yorkers for Fiscal Fairness and New York Public Research Group, February 2023

