

Testimony of Dr. Penny Lewis, Secretary
Professional Staff Congress/CUNY
Before the New York City's Committee on Higher Education
Oversight - CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs Initiative
April 20, 2023

Good afternoon, I am Penny Lewis, Secretary of the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY and a faculty member at the School of Labor and Urban Studies. We represent 30,000 faculty and professional staff at CUNY.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the importance of the ASAP program.

First, on behalf of our members, I want to thank the council for its strong support of CUNY in its response to the cuts threatened by the mayor's preliminary budget and additional cuts via the Program to Eliminate the Gap announced recently. We have a long way to go before the city's budget is adopted and our union will be fighting every day to see CUNY get the funding it needs.

As you know, ASAP is a nationally recognized program that provides comprehensive student support and advising, career services, tuition assistance, free MetroCards, and free textbooks. It has been widely touted as a model that community colleges seek to emulate across the country. Because it is successful! ASAP's three-year graduation rate is more than double that of non-ASAP associate degree students at CUNY's community colleges; a CUNY analysis found that the program narrows existing graduation gaps for Black and Hispanic males.¹

You will hear more from students and PSC members today about the impact ASAP has on individuals. But I would like to highlight two areas:

ASAP is an investment: As the council continues to advocate for CUNY in the city's FY24 budget, it is important to reiterate that CUNY's return on its investment is immense: \$4.2 billion in state taxes were paid by CUNY graduates in 2019 alone. More than 1 million students have graduated from CUNY and the vast majority of them remain in New York.² While the financial impact can be documented, the social impact

¹ CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) Fast Facts - February 2023
[ASAP-Fast-Facts_Feb-2023_FINAL-Web-Version.pdf \(cuny.edu\)](#)

² [Comptroller Stringer Analysis: CUNY Graduates Earn Combined \\$57 Billion Annually, Highlighting CUNY's Significant Contributions to Local and State Economies : Office of the New York City Comptroller Brad Lander \(nyc.gov\)](#)

of CUNY on New York City neighborhoods is equally validated: CUNY helps to transform the lives of our students, approximately 80% of whom are people of color and 35% foreign-born; half come from households with annual incomes below \$30,000.

The high retention and completion rates of the ASAP programs are due, in large part, to the resources they devote to advisement. The \$35.5 million in the council's budget response will help ASAP and programs like it expand, by hiring 264 full-time advisors. Because so many CUNY students are in the first generation of their families to attend college, advisors are essential in helping students navigate the labyrinth of a large university system.

Cuts to CUNY are irrational: We are grateful that the council is pushing back on cuts to CUNY. Our members and students know the positive impact CUNY has on New Yorkers and New York, and don't understand why an institution whose students return money to the tax rolls, and benefit our city at every level, is being targeted for across the board cuts. The Mayor's PEGs that have already been implemented are having a devastating impact on our members and students. Some students report they were not provided MetroCards or textbooks, for example; advisor workloads have increased. When adjunct faculty lose their classes because of cuts the pain is twofold: our members are denied work and income and sometimes students don't have access to classes needed to graduate.

Additional cuts cannot be tolerated. Students are not receiving the support they deserve and our members cannot take on additional workloads when jobs go unfilled. Instead, expanding ASAP will provide many more students with access to advising and the wrap-around support they need to graduate.