

CUNY Board of Trustees Public Hearing, May 8, 2023

Penny Lewis

School of Labor and Urban Studies

Secretary, PSC

I'm Penny Lewis, I teach at the School of Labor and Urban Studies, and I'm currently Secretary of the Professional Staff Congress. Our collective bargaining agreement expired on February 28, and CUNY administration has yet to give the PSC any dates to begin negotiations. The union has reached out multiple times since December 2022 to request dates. I am standing here with the electronic signatures of nearly 3000 of the members we represent who have written to the chancellor to say, come to the table!

The delay is highly unprofessional, and, frankly, we find it deeply disrespectful that management has not placed negotiations as its highest priority. The value of our paychecks has shrunk, with cumulative year-over-year inflation in the double digits and rents rising at an even faster pace. Other higher education workers, both regionally and nationally, have won substantial raises, especially for their lowest paid titles, while our salaries remain behind comparable jobs in our sector and in comparable titles in parallel sectors. And, while our salaries have shrunk, central has used millions to grant top administrators hefty pay increases on top of their already high pay.

The 30,000 CUNY employees represented by our union are the largest and foremost group to keep the university running these past 3.5 years since we signed our last contract, through the most challenging period our university has ever seen. I don't feel like I should have to rehearse this for the Board again, but I think it's important to remind you of the work and sacrifices our members have made for our students and our university. On a dime, thousands of professors and professional staff figured out how to lead their classes, support their students and perform their work remotely. College Lab Technicians risked their health and lives reporting to keep labs operational throughout the pandemic. We absorbed the economic costs of working from home without recompense. Our contractually agreed upon raises were delayed for months, with little acknowledgement and no accrued interest. We have returned to increased workloads (as campuses have fewer full-time staff and

faculty than before the pandemic), and to students who are in greater need than they've ever been. This year, we've been asked to make even more cuts and those of us with contingent appointments face even more acute job insecurity. This while the state continues to make healthy investments in the system, thanks largely to OUR UNION's organizing and advocacy.

In short, it should be clear that we deserve a strong and fair and TIMELY contract.

It is the responsibility of the board or trustees to supervise and direct the senior administration of CUNY. You must ensure that the administration does its job, which is to immediately begin to bargain a new contract for the tens of thousands of scholars and professionals who keep this university running, and recognize our just needs for fair and competitive pay, job security, health and safety, and professional respect.