

CUNY Board of Trustees Testimony
Jean Grassman jean.grassman@sph.cuny.edu
October 16, 2023

Good afternoon

My name is Jean Grassman and I'm an Associate Professor at the CUNY Graduate School of Public Health.

I'm going to speak to the desperate need for funding to improve our buildings' physical infrastructure so that the nearly 42,000 instructional and classified CUNY employees (of whom nearly 30,000 are PSC members) along with over 225,000 students have safer and healthier conditions in which to work and learn.

I'm well qualified to address this topic. Professionally, I'm a certified industrial hygienist with 30 years of experience. I've been a Health and Safety Coordinator at the PSC for 15 years and during that time, I've been to virtually every CUNY campus and done dozens of walkthroughs.

From CUNY's website, we know that the university has more than 300 buildings with an average age exceeding 50 years. Fifty of these were built before 1929.

It's not surprising that upkeep is a challenge but what we experience at CUNY is the consequence of decades of deferred maintenance which is not merely unsightly, it is dangerous.

As an example, consider some of the infrastructure related problems at Bronx Community College. BCC is a black and Hispanic serving school where the majority of students receive financial aid and 40% have annual household incomes less than \$15,000.

In 2019, heating pipes in Colstan Hall froze flooding dozens of offices and classrooms raising concerns about mold and forcing relocation for 6 weeks.

You might say, well, that was a long time ago.

Less than a year ago, the heat went out in several buildings including Meister Hall leaving students, staff, and faculty shivering for weeks despite pleas for relief from the cold. It was only after the situation was covered in a national story published in [Inside Higher Education](#), was a mobile boiler brought in to provide heat.

You might say, that was an isolated incident but....

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On January 30 of this year, 2023, a steam pipe broke in a classroom in Colstan Hall soaking several classrooms. Let me repeat that, a steam pipe in a classroom broke. Luckily, no one was present and there were no injuries.

So there's a pattern of failure. Also consider ...

when we were doing a COVID reoccupancy walkthrough at BCC, one of our members was horrified by the dirty ventilation and missing ceiling tiles in the classrooms. I will include a photo with my testimony. The instructor was in tears and pleaded for a better space saying "please do it for the dignity of my students"

BCC is not the only place with infrastructure problems – I could tell you about similar conditions at every other campus but I only have three minutes.

I urge you to fight for funding, as we at the PSC will, to correct these conditions. The focus on improving working conditions comes with many levels of benefits – not only does it reduce the burden of illness and injury for our members but also permits us to better do the work that we love at CUNY.

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Room 804 Meister Hall, Bronx Community College



Photo by Susan Fountain