

# Clarion

NEWSPAPER OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS / CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK



DECEMBER 2023



## VICTORY Rescuing College Now

Union action  
saves a vital  
CUNY program.

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Erik McGregor

## CONFRONTING THE BOSSES

# SHOUTING OUT FOR CUNY

PSC members, CUNY students, elected officials and allies gathered in Manhattan on December 2 to tell the governor and CUNY administration – through both speeches and performances – that CUNY needs full funding and the PSC needs a fair contract. **PAGES 6-8**

### POLITICS

## Electoral work pays off

PSC electoral activists came together to help the progressive City Council finance committee chair keep his seat in a contested election in Brooklyn. **PAGE 2**

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## Union fights city cuts

Mayor Eric Adams is moving forward with drastic and painful cuts to city spending that would hurt CUNY. The PSC and others are fighting back. **PAGE 3**

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The union's college laboratory technicians hold a ceremony to recognize their 'unsung heroes,' members who go above and beyond in their work. **PAGE 4**



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External threats to academic freedom are mounting. The CUNY administration must do more for members, according to the union. **PAGES 10-11**

## VICTORY

# Union saves a vital program

BY MARCI GOODMAN

This is a true story about our union saving the day. Early on a Friday morning in late August, I was awakened by a notification sound from the phone on my night table. I saw that I'd received an email with the subject heading "College Now FY24 Allocation."

Opening it, I quickly scanned the contents and realized that our allocation would be 30% less than what we had budgeted for – what we needed to run the program for the entire year. Charging the colleges for the cost of fringe benefits for College Now employees, something that had never been done in the more than two-decade history of College Now, would amount to a drastic cut. Without intervention, we wouldn't be able to offer any College Now courses whatsoever in the spring semester at Queens College. Every other College Now program across CUNY was in the exact same situation.

## CUNY CENTRAL

Deans, provosts and vice presidents from all the colleges scrambled to figure out how to approach this matter with CUNY Central. Apparently, navigating the chain of com-



Marci Goodman, Queens College HEO

mand at CUNY Central can be tricky even for top-level administrators from the colleges. Many meetings were scheduled. Meanwhile, the CUNY K-16 Initiatives leadership kept insisting to anyone and everyone who

asked that there was no change and nothing to see here. It was difficult to discern whether they were gaslighting us or just really didn't understand what they had wrought.

A week or so after receiving the aforementioned email, I bumped into our former PSC chapter chair on the bus. I told him what was happening with College Now, and he advised me to email the current chapter chair about it, which I did as soon as I got to the office. The chapter chair responded immediately, forwarding my email to all the chapter chairs CUNY-wide.

## CHAIRS MOBILIZE

That same day, we had an in-person chapter meeting featuring one of the PSC's principal officers. After the meeting, I grabbed the opportunity to speak to her, and she assured me that she would look into the matter right away.

Chapter chairs got in touch with College Now directors CUNY-wide to confirm the contents of the email they'd been forwarded. Word was spreading. The principal officers went straight to the top, to the chancellor and two executive vice-chancellors, all of whom insisted that there was no cut to

College Now. They insisted that they knew nothing about this but that it had to be a mistake or misunderstanding, and that they would fix it.

## RESOLVED

And it did get fixed. Without taking responsibility or apologizing, the CUNY K-16 Initiatives leadership announced to College Now directors that our full allocations would be restored. Shortly thereafter, the CUNY Central budget office contacted the budget offices at all the colleges to make it official and, interestingly, to apologize. Let me be clear that it was one budget office apologizing to another budget office; it didn't extend further than that.

There's no high drama to this story. It's even a bit boring. But it illustrates how the union jumped right in and solved the problem while the administrators were all spinning their wheels, which makes this proud union member even prouder.

Marci Goodman is the director of College Now at Queens College. A version of this article originally appeared in the PSC retiree newsletter.

## Members organize to stop a crisis

# Union muscle helps reelect Brannan

By ARI PAUL

South Brooklyn City Council Member Justin Brannan's reelection in November over Republican Ari Kagan is a major victory for the labor movement and the Democratic Party. And Brannan's reelection campaign received quite a bit of blood, sweat and tears from rank-and-file PSC members.

"This is not just the reelection of any council member," said Jen Gaboury, the PSC chapter chair at Hunter College, a PSC legislative activist and a resident of south Brooklyn. "He is the chair of the finance committee, and he has gone above and beyond to be an ally for CUNY in the last round of funding."

## UNION SUPPORT

Gaboury and other PSC activists helped recruit nearly two dozen other PSC members to volunteer for Brannan's campaign. Brannan was a key target for the Republican right. Kagan had the support of the *New York Post* editorial board and losing GOP mayoral candidate and infamous vigilante Curtis Sliwa. Losing Brannan as finance committee chair could have had dire consequences for city funding for CUNY, which, along with city agencies, has been targeted by Mayor Eric Adams's Program to Eliminate the Gap (PEG) cuts.

Brannan was instrumental in helping CUNY avert the worst of

## A CUNY ally in City Council

the PEG cuts, and he helped direct funding for new campus advisors at the PSC's urging, Gaboury said. "It really matters to us that we have an ally who is willing to discuss our needs," she said.

Last year, Brannan sponsored a Council resolution urging the state legislature to pass the New Deal for CUNY, the PSC's landmark bill that would fund new full-time faculty and staff at CUNY as well as make CUNY tuition-free again. Not long after that, he worked with Council Speaker Adrienne Adams to announce the CUNY Reconnect program, which works to reenroll students who left CUNY before achieving a degree (see story, page 5).

Brannan's stewardship of the finance committee will become especially important now that the mayor is seeking deeper cuts

to nearly all city services, including public education. The union focused on protecting Brannan's seat to advance its progressive agenda for the city's public institutions, including CUNY.

In a joint statement with Speaker Adams, Brannan said of the mayor's most recent budget cuts, "The administration's approach of reducing budgets of all agencies broadly through additional cuts and a hiring freeze, along with inflicting cuts on our libraries, CUNY and cultural institutions, is too blunt and not the prudent or sole choice."

## HIGH STAKES

PSC members understood that Brannan's reelection campaign was not only about keeping the southern Brooklyn seat in the Demo-

crat column, but part of a citywide campaign.

"We had people who do not live in Brooklyn come and make phone calls with us, and come and knock on doors," Gaboury said.

## CITYWIDE EFFORT

The union's energetic grassroots reelection effort included Justyna Jagielnicka, a veteran PSC political outreach activist and mental health counselor at Borough of Manhattan Community College. She said, "I came out all the way from Staten Island to support Councilman Brannan's campaign. He is a friend and an ally of CUNY students, staff and faculty. He understands the value of a People's CUNY."

Lynn Schulman, a City Council member in Queens, also won her reelection with PSC support. Schulman has worked closely with the PSC in its campaign to protect retiree health benefits from privatization.



Justin Brannan

For Gaboury, who has worked on competitive city and state races in Brooklyn, Brannan's victory was also personal. "As someone who lives in southern Brooklyn, this was hugely important," she said.

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# PSC blasts Adams's needless cuts

By ARI PAUL

The PSC joined other community activists on December 11 to denounce the mayor's latest proposed midyear 5% cuts that would devastate almost all city services, including education at all levels. While the administration claims that the cuts are in response to emergency spending related to the influx of migrants into the city, elected officials and activists claim the drastic, painful cuts are still avoidable.

Outside City Hall with members of the City Council's progressive caucus, PSC members blasted the mayor's proposed cuts. "Enough with the fearmongering," PSC President James Davis told the crowd. "We need care, not cuts."

## CUNY IMPACT

CUNY's campuses are already suffering from city funding cuts, which heavily impact the community colleges, Davis said. Community colleges have already lost 400 full-time faculty and staff because of mayoral cuts, and the new cuts will only make matters worse. "It harms students," he said.

Kristina Baines, the PSC chapter chair at Guttman Community College, worried that the cuts would acutely impact CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), which offers financial support and advisement for students in two-year programs. Guttman, in fact, was modeled on ASAP. "We saw how great ASAP was, so we created an entire college based on how effective it was," she told *Clarion*. "More people should have access to these supports, not less."

In his testimony to the City Council's finance committee delivered later in the day, Davis said of any cuts to ASAP: "To jeopardize any part of this program is both cruel

## Countering City Hall's austerity agenda



PSC President James Davis says CUNY colleges have already suffered immensely from city funding cuts.

and shortsighted. We do not have an enrollment crisis at CUNY, we have a retention crisis. The mayoral administration should prioritize programs with a demonstrated record of retaining students through to graduation."

The cuts dig deep into library and K-12 school budgets in addition to causing pain for CUNY's community colleges. The proposed cuts to K-12 schools reach nearly \$550 million, as *Chalkbeat* reported: "They will touch a wide range of programs and positions that directly affect students, from the city's massive free preschool program to community schools that support families with out-of-school needs, to the popular pandemic-era Summer Rising program. A big chunk of this year's savings will come

through a hiring slowdown and the elimination of 432 vacant non-classroom positions, which officials said on Thursday will lead to a combined \$157 million in savings."

United Federation of Teachers President Michael Mulgrew said in a statement: "That means 653 schools – 43% of the school system – will now be hit with midyear budget cuts. Class sizes will rise, and school communities will be needlessly damaged."

He added that the cuts were completely unnecessary. "They are driven by City Hall's false political narrative that New York City is about to fall off a fiscal cliff," he said. "Revenues are higher than expected, investment from Albany is up, and reserves are at a near-record high."

The Municipal Labor Committee (MLC) – a coalition of the city's public sector unions, including the PSC – expressed its firm opposition to the cuts.

## BUDGET SURPLUS

"The proposed cuts stand in stark contrast to the existing facts, rather than what are perennially inflated projections of out-year budget gaps that never materialize," said the MLC's chair, Harry Nespoli, in a letter to City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams. "The city ended the most recent fiscal year with a surplus of \$5.5 billion. In addition, the city's reserves are at a near high of \$8.3 billion. Moreover, the city is able to tap into state funding of up to an additional \$1 billion in reimbursements for costs related to asylum seekers, though it appears that

the city has not yet applied for those funds or other outside funds. Instead, the mayor has opted to move ahead with unwarranted budget cuts."

Other unions are also speaking out about City Hall's proposed cuts. Uniformed Firefighters Association President Andrew Ansbro recently told reporters that he predicts staff shortages in fire responses all around the city if the cuts are implemented.

## WIDESPREAD OUTRAGE

The citywide outrage against the cuts is palpable. *The New York Times* reported in December that Mayor Eric Adams has seen "his approval rating plunge to 28 percent, according to a Quinnipiac University poll." Even *New York Post* columnists, usually loyal attack dogs for the city's robber barons against working people, have criticized the mayor's financial plan.

Add to all that the fact that federal investigators are looking into Mayor Adams's campaign finances for possible wrongdoing, and the fact that he is being sued for an alleged sexual assault. Adams's political headaches are compounding, it seems: *New York* magazine wrote that all these issues have "further motivated those interested in unseating Adams in 2025 and given more reason for those considering a run against him to take a closer look."

The City Council has moved to offer an alternative financial plan to the mayor's cuts, which "potentially includes using the city's robust financial reserves to stave off immediate cutbacks and asking Albany for tax increases next year to bolster the budget," *The City* reported.

"It is wrong, it is shameful," City Council Member Lincoln Restler said of the mayor's proposal. "We can reverse the cuts today."

## Taking PSC demands to the college bosses in the Bronx



In November, members at all three Bronx CUNY campuses rallied for a just contract and a fully funded CUNY budget. They brought petitions to their presidents' offices. Left: members demanding to see the president at Hostos Community College. Right: members and students rallying at Bronx Community College.

# CLTs honor chapter's 'unsung heroes'

By ARI PAUL

They work in 150 departments and on every CUNY campus. Some have FDNY certifications; others deal with microorganisms. Some fix computers; others tune musical instruments or take care of film and video equipment. They teach faculty and staff how to use computer systems, and they order and maintain new equipment. They ensure that when students walk into a chemistry or biology lab, the beakers, test tubes, flasks and Bunsen burners are ready for them.

They're the 900 full-time and part-time college laboratory technicians at CUNY. They're critical workers on every campus. And on November 15, the CLT chapter held its Unity Day at the PSC's office to celebrate its "Unsung Heroes," CLTs who are recognized by their peers for going above and beyond the call of duty. The chapter recognized several dozen nominees and handed out awards to seven finalists, who were chosen by members of the CLT chapter. All nominees received a certificate from the chapter, and the winners received a \$50 gift certificate.

## SAYING THANKS

"This is to honor them and say 'thank you' for their hard work," said Jeanette Batiz, the PSC chapter chair for CLTs, who hosted the event. "College laboratory technicians support our students, our faculty and our staff within our communities."

The evening was a celebratory affair to be sure, but it took place within a political context. As Batiz, a chief CLT in the biological sciences department at Bronx Community College, explained, CLTs are among the lowest-paid CUNY professional staff in the PSC bar-

## Giving awards and seeking justice



Migdalia "Maggie" Perez, an adjunct CLT at City Tech, is one of this year's winners.

gaining unit. "We're underpaid," she said. "Then we don't get promoted. We could go 20-25 years and never get promoted from CLT to senior CLT."

## FRONTLINE WORKERS

Of course, some CLTs switch into higher education officer positions because there are more opportunities for advancement in those titles. However, full-time CLTs have statutory tenure, something they would lose if they moved into HEO titles.

Another problem now facing the CLT chapter is that when CLTs leave the job, they often aren't replaced.

In her remarks at the ceremony, Batiz said that in the early days of the COVID pandemic, while many CUNY workers were operating at home using Zoom, CLTs were often still on campuses, keeping vital systems operating and aiding in the physical transition to remote learning, all while taking a big risk during a health crisis that was still unfolding.

"We were the group that came back in [during] the pandemic. I don't want anyone to forget that," she said. "We became essential workers."

Migdalia "Maggie" Perez, who has been an adjunct CLT in the communications and design department at City Tech for 10 years, was one of the nominees and award winners. A designer herself, Perez enjoys helping students, in part because she was once a City Tech student.

"For me, an alum, City Tech is deep in my heart," she said.

But Perez, who spent the early days of the COVID pandemic handing out laptops to students who were transitioning to remote education, is like many of her colleagues who believe CLTs are not fully appreciated. She said events like CLT Unity Day help to fix that problem. "We shouldn't go unnoticed," she said. "We work really hard and pour our soul into it."

The real goal for CLTs, she said, was building a campaign for increasing pay, transitioning part-time positions to full-time positions and creating better promotional opportunities.

## LASTING RECOGNITION

"It feels really good," Perez said of her award, but added that CLTs "need to get the real thing," as in material and contractual gains, not just the "paper and the frame," she said gesturing to the certificates for the nominees.

Tomoko Hagane-Mullins, a senior CLT at Hunter College in the chemistry department, was another finalist this year, and like Perez, she became a CLT shortly after graduating from Hunter. Working on a CUNY campus notorious for its decrepit buildings requires her to often use her imagination to keep the chemistry labs going.

"We had a huge leak where we kept a kiddie pool for water collection. It was during a heavy rainstorm," she recalled. "Dealing with the old infrastructure, it takes a lot of creativity to problem-solve that way and keep running the lab safely."

Like her colleagues, she believes CUNY must invest more – not just in higher CLT salaries but in gener-

Continued on page 11



Senator John Liu, center, announces the legislation. Behind him, from left, are Assembly Members Zohran Mamdani, Emily Gallagher and Ron Kim.

# Getting private colleges to pay up

By CLARION STAFF

Both Columbia University and New York University are exempt from paying more than \$320 million on their private properties each year. The PSC is supporting legislation that would change that, and help move some of the money to fund CUNY.

During a press conference held at Columbia University on December 12, PSC President James Davis stood with Assembly Member Zohran Mamdani and State Senator John Liu to unveil a set of bills that would make it possible to levy fees on these rich institutions and would earmark returned revenue for CUNY. Specifically, the bills would "end property tax exemptions for private universities with property taxes costing over \$100 million yearly," according to a statement from Assembly Member Mamdani's office.

## Bills would help CUNY

That's money the public university desperately needs.

"Barred by state law from making wealthy, private universities like NYU and Columbia pay their fair share of property taxes, the city balances its budget by inflicting austerity on CUNY, the working people's public university," Davis said in a statement. "With multibillion-dollar endowments, tuition rates twice the typical CUNY student's annual family income and vast holdings of the most valuable real estate in the world, NYU and Columbia can easily afford to pay their taxes. And Albany can make it happen by ending the property tax exemption for the wealthiest private colleges."

Both universities "collectively saved \$327 million on property tax-

es this year," *The New York Times* reported, adding, "The amount the schools save annually has soared in recent decades as the two have bought more properties, and the value of their properties has also increased." The paper said that "as Columbia has grown its physical footprint to become the city's largest private landowner, it has enrolled fewer students from New York City," which stands in contrast to the recently reported enrollment growth at CUNY.

Mamdani told *The New York Times*, "This bill seeks to address universities that have so blatantly gone beyond primarily operating as institutions of higher education and are instead acting as landlords and developers."

**CLTs are essential CUNY workers.**

**Wealth redistribution in NYC**

# CUNY Reconnect gets a passing grade

By ARI PAUL

## Funding increases student enrollment

Grace Hamler, who had a few Hunter College credits to her name but was no longer enrolled, saw a CUNY Reconnect message on her phone, urging former students like herself to reenroll. She called the number on the message and spoke to someone who was “beyond helpful and approachable.”

After an encouraging conversation with the representative of the CUNY Reconnect program, she went to Brooklyn to meet with the Medgar Evers College admissions director. Just a few weeks later, she said, she was “assigned an academic advisor,” and she “registered as a full-time student.” At 72 years old, Hamler is on the cusp of completing her first full semester as a college student.

### REENROLLING

Hamler is one of the 25,000 CUNY college students who have reenrolled since the CUNY Reconnect program was piloted for the 2022-2023 school year. On November 30, Hamler and representatives of the PSC and the CUNY administration testified at a City Council higher education hearing to praise the program and encourage further investment. Committee Chair Eric Dinowitz noted that the program was inspired by a similar statewide program in Tennessee and by a Center for an Urban Future report on the need to reenroll former college students who have yet to reach a degree. The program was enacted with a \$4.4 million investment under the leadership of Council Speaker Adrienne Adams. For the 2023-2024 academic year, the Council invested \$5.8 billion into the program.

It’s a great program, the PSC believes, but the program’s success hinges on hiring more full-time advisors to do the work.

“The PSC is elated at the prospect of exponential growth in enrollment of new returning students at CUNY,” PSC Secretary Penny Lewis said in her testimony. “We’re less elated at the reality that CUNY is not structurally or financially ready for this, making the job of members even more difficult than it is now.”

Lewis added, “Are there enough advisors to help shepherd them through the labyrinth that is such a large university? Are there enough faculty to teach classes so students can graduate on time? What about mental health counselors to help them adjust to returning to school while balancing childcare, other jobs or lack of financial support?”

### MORE INVESTMENT

For the PSC, the answer to all of these questions is more city and state investment in CUNY. “Many of Reconnect’s navigators are advisors who were reassigned to the program,” said Heather James, the union’s legislative representative and an assistant professor of social science at Borough of Manhattan Community College. “Their work in



Heather James, PSC legislative representative: More advisors are needed for the program's success.

CUNY Reconnect shows the power of consistent advising. Students do better when they have help navigating the complexities of college. During the last budget cycle, the PSC asked the council to focus on wraparound services such as mental health counseling, advising, food access, transportation and child care. Without these supports, we know that students must often leave our campuses. Our goal is to reconnect and retain. Wraparound services are needed for all students and can be seen as an extension of the speaker’s Reconnect efforts.”

### HIRING WORKERS

James added, “The success of Reconnect should serve as a catalyst for hiring more advisors and mental health counselors because it shows what guidance and intervention can do to help students.”

The CUNY administration believes that the program is already showing how effective the city’s investment has been.

Reine Sarmiento, CUNY’s vice chancellor of enrollment management, said in the first year of the program, CUNY “surpassed its enrollment target by 70%, admitting 17,065 students, with a noteworthy 59% of the cohort being female” and “with 67% of the enrolled students identifying as Black or Hispanic.”

Lehman College President Fernando Delgado said that at his campus, 1,849 students returned looking to complete their degrees. He pointed out that the program is working because campuses like his have a dedicated workforce to cater to returning students.

“Students who express interest in returning to the college are assigned

an advisor to work with them to minimize challenges when seeking to restart their academic journey,” he said. “All students over the age of

### A CUNY program has positive results.

24 are offered the opportunity to complete their studies as a part of the college’s Adult Degree Program, which allows students greater flexibility in general education requirements and the ability to complete a Life Experience Portfolio for credit to accelerate degree completion.”

He added that “students who express interest in returning with financial obligations to the college are supported with monetary awards of up to \$1,000 to satisfy outstanding balances,” and City Council funding has “supported over 100 students at Lehman this fall semester.”

Dzelika Daniel, CUNY’s director of strategy and operations, hammered home this point by noting that CUNY navigators help students with their return to campus.

“Our CUNY navigators ease re-admission, conduct transcript evaluations and coordinate transfers and other duties to systematically remove obstacles to reenrollment,” she said.

### MAKING PROGRESS

John Surico, senior fellow at the Center for an Urban Future, hailed the program’s success, but said more can be done.

“Although CUNY Reconnect has already exceeded expectations, tens of thousands of New Yorkers have yet to be reached,” he said.

Surico offered a few ideas to improve the program.

“First, the City Council should work with the administration to review support for CUNY Recon-

nect in the upcoming budget,” he said. “Second, the Council should consider targeted investment to supercharge the effectiveness of CUNY Reconnect and help ensure that far more returning students succeed next time around.”

### SERVING STUDENTS

CUNY has made progress in addressing such needs. In late November, the administration announced a three-year pilot program in the Bronx called Comprehensive Access to Resources for Essential Services – or CUNY CARES – which, according to a CUNY statement, “pays students to conduct outreach to fellow classmates who may qualify for services such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Medicaid” to ensure that they sign up. The program aims to help students receive needed services from the city’s Human Resources Administration and to connect students with housing providers.

The Council committee hearing came as CUNY boasted increased enrollment after declines during the pandemic, saying in a statement that “freshman applications for the Fall 2024 semester reached 40,960 in October, an increase of 386% from last October when 8,420 students applied.”

Dinowitz noted that the hearing came as the mayor pushes even more drastic cuts to all city agencies, including CUNY community colleges. He didn’t want to see programs like CUNY Reconnect take a hit.

“These are financially responsible programs to invest in,” he said.



Grace Hamler is a beneficiary of CUNY Reconnect.

Gerald Romo/NYC Council Media Unit

Ari Paul



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1. Members marching to CUNY headquarters, to demand a contract with CUNY that lifts pay for faculty and staff and for part-timers and full-timers.
2. From left: Comptroller Brad Lander, City Council Member Carmen De La Rosa, Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, Assembly Member Harvey Epstein.
3. PSC First Vice President Andrea Vásquez leads members in singing.
4. Resistance Revival Choir.
5. Radical Evolution.
6. Members cheering the speakers decrying the historic underfunding of CUNY and calling for a New Deal for CUNY.



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# Singing and marching in the streets for CUNY

By CLARION STAFF

Nearly 1,000 PSC members and supporters gathered outside Governor Kathy Hochul's Manhattan office and marched to CUNY's headquarters on December 2 to deliver a message: CUNY is a central economic engine for New York City, and it needs full funding.

The theme of this year's end-of-semester show of force was a

## PSC & supporters gather for massive action

“sing out, shout out” for robust funding for the University in the next state budget agreement and a contract with CUNY that delivers equitable raises, increased promotional opportunities, flexible work schedules and much more. While state budget agreements under Governor Hochul have been better

for CUNY than under her predecessor, the University needs more investment in the coming years to make up for decades of disinvestment, PSC members and their supporters said. “CUNY is a jewel that needs to be polished over and

over,” Public Advocate Jumaane Williams told the crowd.

Members from all around the union – full-time faculty, principal officers, adjunct faculty, professional staff – as well as students and elected officials, also spoke.

The event featured performances from Radical Evolution, the New York City Labor Chorus, musicians from the American Federation of Musicians Local 802, Resistance Revival Choir, the Rude Mechanical Orchestra and, of course, the spirited members of the PSC, including PSC First Vice President Andrea Vásquez. See more on page 8.



Erik McGregor



Erik McGregor



Erik McGregor



Paul Frangipane

## ANTI-AUSTERITY

# Tax the rich, fund CUNY

By JAMES DAVIS  
PSC President

**W**e need a fundamental shift in how New York funds public higher education. Governor Kathy Hochul seemed to recognize this when she took office. Announcing her first executive budget nearly two years ago, she pledged \$1.5 billion in new state operating aid to SUNY and CUNY over the next five years. She committed to reforming TAP, the Tuition Assistance Program. Why did she do that? It was because you, the members of this union, along with students and alumni and allies, had been agitating and educating the public and the legislature for years.

This union, our students, alumni and allies have been calling out the failure of public funding, the practice of racialized austerity, and the policy of planned starvation of an institution that serves New York's working class, communities of color and immigrant communities, many students the first in their families to attend college. You named that problem – that systemic insult – and made it vivid and inescapable. And you said another way is possible.

## NEW VISION

You saw an opportunity when the previous governor left office, disgraced, to usher in a new vision for CUNY and the students we serve. A CUNY without falling ceiling tiles and busted drinking fountains, where the library and the food pantry stay open, where the offices supporting our students are fully staffed, where the faculty have job security and decent wages. Together you pushed into that moment, and our legislators felt your groundswell of support, and they pushed too, further than the executive budget.

The result was hundreds of millions of dollars in new operating aid to CUNY, more than \$1 billion in capital funding, expansion of TAP for part-time students and, finally, the money to close the TAP gap, which had decimated college budgets. Yes, New York State did that, but you made it happen.

But last year, CUNY didn't fare quite as well in the state budget. There was talk of a recession; there were other urgent needs. This year we know that we cannot allow our elected officials to let up, so we cannot let up. The state and city are projecting major budget deficits ahead. That cannot become an excuse not to pass the New Deal for CUNY. That cannot become an excuse not to fully fund a great contract for the PSC members who make this university run. We cannot let up because letting up means letting our students down. Letting up means letting their children and our children down, the CUNY students of tomorrow.

That could mean making some people uncomfortable. The governor has said she doesn't want to raise taxes. Well, that's not acceptable. Not in a state with 135 billionaires (who are not leaving New York as it turns out), and with Wall Street taking in huge profits. Not when *The New York Times* is running headlines that say "New York Is Rebounding for the Rich. Nearly Everyone Else Is Struggling"; that's a testament to massive inequality. The island we're standing on has the awful distinction of having the largest income gap of any large county



PSC President James Davis speaks at the union's December 2 demonstration.

in the nation. How is it that this city has recovered nearly all the jobs lost during the pandemic, but so many New Yorkers, including CUNY workers, barely make ends meet? Our city and our state are riven by extreme, racialized inequality.

So how about this? Instead of prioritizing the desires of large corporations, the ultra-rich, and the real-estate developers; instead of blaming asylum seekers; instead of pitting working-class people against one another, isn't it time to raise revenue by making everyone pay their fair share?

## THE REAL QUESTION

The question can no longer be: How can we afford to fund CUNY? How can we afford a strong and just labor contract for CUNY workers? The real question is: How can we afford to forgo a capital gains tax that yields \$12 billion in annual revenue, \$7 billion in annual revenue from corporate tax reform or the inheritance tax and the billionaire's tax? These are not figments of our imagination – each proposal has a bill number in the legislature today. How can we afford to continue letting two of the largest real-estate holders in the city – Columbia University and New York University – use their non-profit status to avoid paying property taxes? That too should be on the table. The answer is we cannot afford this level of punishing inequality and concentration of wealth, and we certainly can afford to fund CUNY.

Defunding CUNY has long been the goal of the right wing, because of who students are, and what they think this population deserves or doesn't deserve. CUNY is an extraordinary institution that supports everyone. Our alumni are in every community and career across the state, including legislative leaders – public advocate, assembly members and senators, even the attorney

general and mayor. But the right wing has sought to defund CUNY for as long as most of us can remember.

They decry waste, inefficiency or overpaid intellectual elites. And now the same "culture warriors" that have placed a right-wing target on the backs of our K-12 colleagues are threatening public higher education, too. The same scare tactics about Critical Race Theory, "indoctrination," "anti-parent" and "anti-American" teaching are being used to come after university funding, looking to discredit what we do.

While we seek to open up discussion and debate, they seek to close it down. While we seek to foster critical thinking and to allow the unrivaled diversity of our student body and the intellectual diversity of our faculty to challenge received wisdom, they seek to curtail our academic freedom, the lifeblood of a public university in a free society. This is why we need the New Deal for CUNY. We need a transformative investment that puts the full funding of the nation's largest public urban university beyond reproach and beyond doubt.

## MAKING STRIDES

Together, we have made strides toward the New Deal for CUNY, but much is left to do. We have not prevailed yet on adding the thousands of new full-time faculty that our students need, but our efforts led to over 500 such hires in the past two years alone, many of them from the ranks of our adjunct faculty. We have not yet won a return to free tuition, but our efforts succeeded in blocking tuition hikes at CUNY last year, even as they were imposed at SUNY. We have not yet prevailed on hiring all of the academic advisors and mental health counselors that our students deserve, or the full funding packages that our doctoral students need, or

the resources to repair and maintain our facilities. But together we have made progress toward the New Deal for CUNY.

The union has also been engaged at the bargaining table. What are we fighting for? Real raises and equity for our lowest-paid titles. Support for research, professional development and promotional opportunities. Flexible schedules and remote work options. Badly needed health and safety protections. Paths to job security instead of radical contingency.

## CUNY'S VIEW

CUNY management has a different vision: a stripped-down, hollowed-out university. A university with more insecurity and precariousness, more opportunities for exploiting a staff that is already overworked and a faculty that is already underpaid.

Their approach is a betrayal of the values expressed in the administration's own "strategic road map." They claim to be "creating a student-centered, equity-driven university," but management's demands undermine that goal. They claim to be "catalyzing upward mobility and prosperity," but management's demands impede the upward mobility and prosperity of their own employees. They claim to be "nurturing and renewing the academic core of the university," but we are the academic core. Do you feel nurtured and renewed by management's contract demands? Neither do I.

CUNY: PSC members pulled this university through the pandemic. Now our programs and departments are being cut to the bone. It's time to make good on your end: Put an economic offer on the table. Go to the governor, go to the mayor, and get us the funding we need for the university – and the funding and contract that we deserve.

*A version of these remarks was delivered at the December 2 demonstration in Midtown Manhattan (see pages 6-7).*

## PSC: fighting for more investment



# MEMBERS PREPARE TO SPRING INTO ACTION

February 28, 2024, will mark the one year anniversary of the expiration of the PSC-CUNY contract. Since the summer of 2023, the union has been bargaining with CUNY. While progress has been made, many issues remain unresolved.



## IT IS TIME FOR PSC MEMBERS TO TURN UP THE PRESSURE.

In the spring semester, the union will be mobilizing across the five boroughs to demand CUNY reach a contract settlement that offers members adequate raises, job protections and opportunities for promotion.

**BE IN TOUCH WITH YOUR CHAPTER LEADERSHIP ABOUT ORGANIZING EFFORTS ON YOUR CAMPUS AND CITYWIDE.**

## MLC eyes new health insurance provider

By CLARION STAFF

The health-care benefits PSC members receive are a product of negotiations between the city and a coalition of unions representing city workers called the Municipal Labor Committee (MLC), of which the PSC is a member. The MLC and the city are in the process of deciding between two health insurance groups to provide the city-paid Comprehensive Benefits Plan (CBP) to members of the MLC unions: Aetna and a consortium of Emblem (GHI) and United Healthcare. PSC members should be aware of and ready to take action regarding key aspects of this deal.

### SAVING MONEY

The city wants to save money on the price it pays for premiums by restructuring benefits. The big difference between the city and many other large employers is that the MLC has negotiated for the city to

## PSC prepares for shift

pay the entire premium – employees do not pay a co-premium. Other than that, the city does not spend more than many large employers for employee health care.

### SOLICITING BIDS

The CBP is a Preferred Provider Organization health benefit plan, currently provided by a consortium of Emblem (GHI) and Empire, which covers about three quarters of active city workers, pre-65 retirees and dependents, roughly 730,000 participants. This is the first serious reconsideration of the CBP health contract in several decades.

The city issued solicited bids from selected insurance companies to set up a new CBP. Implementation of a new plan will not be before July 1, 2024, and likely later. Once a carrier is chosen, a contract

will be negotiated for five to seven years. There will be no participant premiums.

The city's goal is to reduce health-care costs by 10%, or roughly \$1 billion. The MLC's goal is to maintain high-quality, premium-free health care and members' ability to choose their providers and hospitals. There are some ways in which the city and the MLC intend to accomplish these goals that are good ideas and will benefit members, such as choosing a carrier with a national network of providers, negotiating larger discounts from hospitals, better administration and "performance guarantees" from the insurance companies.

However, there are two potentially concerning ways in which the successful bidder could seek to save money:

- Participants will continue to have a choice of providers and hospitals, but the city and MLC plan for out-patient providers and hospitals to be "tiered." Some hospitals/providers would charge zero or low deductibles/co-pays, while others would charge mid-level and higher-level deductibles/co-pays.
- The new CBP may reduce participants' choices by shifting costs to participants, likely through higher co-pays for out-of-network provider visits, higher charges for imaging and/or more pre-authorization requirements.

### REVIEW OF PLANS

Except for the foregoing, union representatives to the MLC haven't yet received information on the pending changes to the CBP. One key feature we will be looking for is a clear, independent appeals process. Another is a comprehensive system of reporting and oversight.

The PSC does not know when the decision on the insurance provider will be announced, but we anticipate it will be soon.

In anticipation of potential changes, PSC has expanded the working group led by PSC President James Davis that has been providing strategic guidance in opposing the city's effort to force retirees into Medicare Advantage. This working group, including former PSC President Barbara Bowen, former Executive Director Debbie Bell and Baruch College health policy experts Barbara Caress and Karl Kronebusch, is already at work on broader health-care strategy recommendations, including member education.

The PSC's long-term goal remains single-payer health care. In the meantime, watch your email inbox and the PSC website for information about actions you can take to help avert any reductions to the quality of care or increases in cost to PSC members or other city workers.

## ACADEMIC FREEDOM

# Admin must defend Hunter faculty

By ANTHONY ALESSANDRINI

*Editor's note: Since the Hamas attacks of October 7, and the ongoing Israeli offensive in Gaza, academic freedom within higher education has been under ceaseless scrutiny, erosion and attack. At CUNY, union chapters are hearing from members concerned about protected speech in the classroom and in the office, and members who are concerned about safety.*

*As of this writing, the chancellor has made anemic statements in general communications about academic freedom, and has not yet condemned the worst examples of chilling administrative actions or external harassment taking place in or near campuses, including the postponement of a teach-in at Baruch and the events at Hunter College described in the letter above. The union, however, has been addressing the issue. Beyond communicating directly with the chancellor through an open letter, the PSC has offered trainings for elected union leadership and staff through partnerships with Faculty First Responders and the New York Peace Initiative.*

*The following is an edited version of a letter sent on November 28 by the chair of the union's academic freedom committee to Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez and Hunter College Interim President Ann Kirschner.*

**W**e note with great alarm two situations at Hunter College: One involves actions taken by management that are in clear violation of the principles of academic freedom and free expression; the other, equally alarming, involves a failure to act in the face of attacks by outside groups against Hunter College faculty and staff that are clearly intended to deter them from being able to exercise their rights to academic freedom and free expression. Taken together, they constitute what we see as an attempt by management to chill academic freedom and free expression.

The first instance was the cancellation, apparently at the direction of Interim President Kirschner, of a screening of the film *Israelism*. The screening was organized and sponsored by two academic units at the college: the Department of Film and Media Studies and the Arabic Program. The administration had been informed of the screening, scheduled for November 14, well in advance. As the screening date approached, and in light of the terrible events of October 7 and what followed those events, the Department of Film and Media Studies was approached by Hunter College administrators with various sets of demands.

## SILENCING

The first demand was that Professor Tami Gold, who was going to host the November 14 event, not refer to the events of October 7 in her introduction. She agreed to this request. Subsequently, the department was asked to limit attendance to Hunter College ID holders only, even though well over a hundred people had already RSVP'd to attend the film. The department agreed to this request. On the morning of November 14, the department was informed that the film screening was being cancelled at the direction of Interim President Kirschner, who later that day released a



Anthony Alessandrini is the chair of the PSC Academic Freedom Committee.

statement, and that it could be rescheduled for a later, unspecified date.

This decision was immediately challenged by the executive council of the Hunter College chapter of the PSC. On November 15, Hunter College PSC Chapter Chair Jennifer Gaboury introduced a resolution to the Hunter College Senate objecting to the cancellation of the screening; an amendment was then added demanding that the screening be allowed to occur in November. The resolution passed by a vote of 32 to 7, with 16 senators abstaining. It is our understanding that some of the organizers of the event have since met with Interim President Kirschner, who has agreed to allow the film to be screened "within the next two weeks," though as of this writing we are not aware of an exact date having been set.

## ARBITRARY

It should go without saying that the arbitrary cancellation of a faculty-organized event by Hunter College management is a clear and blatant violation of the principles of academic freedom and free expression, and an infringement upon the contractual rights of our members. The film in question has won numerous awards, including an Audience Award at the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, and has been widely screened at colleges and universities. We reiterate the demand from our colleagues at Hunter College that the screening be allowed to go forward without further delay, and that the college administration reform its approach to free expression on campus.

At the same time as Hunter College management was acting to cancel an academic event organized by faculty members in the name of "ensur[ing] the safety of our learning community," to quote from Interim President Kirschner's statement, it has utterly failed in its responsibility to protect the safety and professional rights of faculty and staff from outside attacks.

During the week of November 13-17, 2023, a truck operated by an outside special interest group, Accuracy in Media (AIM), circled the main campus of Hunter College (as well as the CUNY Law School campus) with a rotating display of photographs and names of 25 Hunter faculty and staff members. Their images were projected onto a large, triple-sided digital screen under the caption, "CUNY's Leading Antisemites." The faculty and staff whose images are being displayed by AIM have apparently been identified for targeting because they signed a letter titled "We Reject the Palestine Exception to Free Speech at CUNY," a statement intended to be a defense of freedom of expression and assembly at CUNY.

As part of this public "doxxing" campaign, AIM has also purchased internet domains using the first and last names of the faculty and staff being attacked to create malicious websites that display their photographs, full names, and false and ungrounded accusations. The URL for each website was prominently displayed next to each faculty and staff member's name and picture. These AIM-created websites use both a CUNY logo without the shaded square and an alternative version of a Hunter College logo, which are clear examples of trademark infringement. The websites are intended to create reputational harm for the individual faculty, staff and students who have been targeted, and to cause reputational damage to Hunter College and to CUNY.

## PROTECTING WORKERS

Yet, in spite of these egregious attacks, neither Hunter College management nor the CUNY administration have made any statement or taken any action – either publicly or privately – to either condemn these attacks or to express support for faculty, staff or students subjected to this targeted harassment. This lack of response from

Hunter College and CUNY administration contrasts unfavorably with that of other universities whose faculty, staff and students have been similarly targeted. AIM has used similar tactics, including doxxing trucks, on a variety of college campuses this fall. Most, if not all, of these visits have been followed by immediate denunciations and actions by those colleges' administrations, including those of Harvard, Columbia and Yale. Harvard set up a task force to aid doxxed and harassed students, while Columbia set up a doxxing resource group and "retained experts in the field of digital threat investigation and privacy scrubbing to support...impacted community members." Harvard College's Dean Rakesh Khurana called attacks against students "deplorable and despicable" in a statement to *The Harvard Crimson*. Yale also issued a statement on the doxxing trucks.

By contrast, no member of CUNY management has said they intend to protect employees or students, nor has anyone in the administration issued a single word of denunciation about this affront to academic freedom and intellectual integrity, which also represents a very serious potential threat to the personal safety of those who have been targeted. At the time of this writing, the Hunter and CUNY administrations have remained disturbingly silent about these attacks. This lack of response from CUNY management is particularly astonishing since the AIM harassment also constitutes an attack on the institution's reputation and integrity, as well as its intellectual property.

## LETTER WRITING

On November 22, faculty and staff who have been the victims of these attacks at Hunter College sent a letter to Hunter and CUNY administrators asking for, among other things, the administration to denounce the attacks and to better support its faculty, staff and students. It is our understanding that a number of department chairs and program heads at Hunter College have also sent letters demanding action to Hunter management. Several of the 25 faculty and staff members targeted by AIM have reported being chased around campus and provoked in order to get cell phone videos of them reacting, a well-known strategy of AIM. Others have received harassing emails and social media posts.

Taken together, Hunter College management's cancellation of an academic event and the inaction of Hunter and CUNY management in the face of attacks by an outside organization upon faculty and staff at Hunter have indisputably chilled free expression and academic freedom at Hunter and throughout the CUNY system. We echo the words of PSC President James Davis in a recent statement on freedom of speech and assembly at CUNY: "Our hearts are with all of our colleagues and students who are experiencing distress. As the PSC said in our October 2016 Resolution on Freedom of Speech and Assembly at CUNY, 'There is no place on a university campus for any form of bigotry or systematic oppression, including antisemitism or Islamophobia.'...Students, faculty and staff have a right, indeed an obligation, to speak up on issues about which they feel strongly." And we remind you of the principle put forth by the American Association of University Professors: "Free speech is not sim-

## Stopping threats to our members

ply an aspect of the educational enterprise to be weighed against other desirable ends. It is the very precondition of the academic enterprise itself.”

**NECESSARY RESPONSE**

Therefore, in addition to calling upon the Hunter administration to work with the organizers of the cancelled film screening to reschedule this event as soon as possible, we also call upon Hunter College management and the chancellor’s office to respond to the demands already made by faculty and staff under attack at Hunter. We reiterate those demands here:

1. Issue a formal statement condemning and opposing AIM’s actions against Hunter College and other CUNY faculty, staff and students;
2. Work with relevant authorities to prevent AIM’s doxxing truck from continuing to circle Hunter College or any other CUNY campus;
3. Ensure that each faculty and staff member targeted by AIM is not at risk of disciplinary or negative employment action, or breaches to personal privacy and safety, on account of AIM’s defamatory display;
4. Direct the CUNY Office of Legal Affairs to pursue legal means to remove websites

- with faculty names and likenesses from the internet and to prevent AIM from any and all further online harassment;
5. Hire an online reputation service to scrub all mentions of these defamatory messages;
6. Direct the CUNY Office of Legal Affairs to take action against AIM for using the CUNY and Hunter College logos without authorization.

*Anthony Alessandrini is a professor of English at Kingsborough Community College and the chair of the PSC Academic Freedom Committee.*

# CLTs honor chapter’s ‘unsung heroes’

Continued from page 4  
al resources for CLTs, as the workloads have ballooned.

The PSC is, indeed, fighting for an assortment of material gains for CLTs. In his address to the CLTs at the award ceremony, PSC President James Davis said the union’s contract bargaining agenda includes demands for equity raises for CLTs, on top of across-the-board raises, more promotional opportunities, and salary increases for CLTs with master’s degrees and PhDs. “It is eminently deserved,” Davis said.

**RAISING AWARENESS**

Gerarda Shields, the dean of technology and design at City Tech, spoke at the event. She explained how CLTs were pivotal workers in March of 2020 when the entire University had to suddenly switch its operations to a near fully remote setting. The CLTs, she said, understood what the transition meant for labs, computer systems and campus operations. “I owe everything to you,” Shields said.

Davis said that events like Unity Day were important because they raised awareness throughout the PSC about the importance of the work that CLTs do and why they are seeking certain demands at the bargaining table. “What you’ve done is you’ve educated our colleagues,” he said. “That has made our union stronger.”

The other winners were: James McNeil, Medgar Evers College; Denice Brown, Hostos Community College; Karen Manifold, York College; Dana Donovan, Kingsborough Community College; and Adam Michelman, Queens College.

**THE HEROES**

The other nominees were: Jeanette Batiz, Joanne Canales, Lourdes Rosario and Martha Sanchez of Bronx Community College; Mohamed Sofaini of Borough of Manhattan Community College; Edward Coppola, Isanna Agrest, Pontus Gunve and Stephen Keltner of Brooklyn College; Andrew Eng and Manal Abu-Shaheen of City College; Calvin Grace, Dimple Mirpuri, Jodi-Ann Douglas, John Robinson, Karen Neroulias, Peter Pineandi, Philippe Balan and Robert Mahalko of City Tech; Abraham Malz and Mitchell Lovell of the College of Staten Island; Julio Figueroa and Lee Jacob Hilado of Hostos Community College; Amy Jeu and Naitram Baboolall of Hunter College; Alfredo Cifuentes, Gary Vollo and Thomas Seymour of LaGuardia Community College; Alejandro Castro and Christina West of Lehman College; Rodger Phillips of Medgar Evers College; Aqsa Siddiqi, Justin Tricarico, Mustafa Kamal and Robert Lau of Queens College; Scott Underwood of Queensborough Community College; and Arijit Chatterjee, Frederick Samuels and Mohamed Jahed Sarwar of York College.

Perez said she believed that all CLTs are “unsung heroes” of a sort.

“I want to see everyone get what they deserve,” she said.

# GOT UNION?



**Jonathan Cope**  
Assistant Professor

Joining the Professional Staff Congress means joining a community of faculty and staff dedicated to fighting for our rights and the rights of our students. As a union, we can unite and demand that our hard work and contributions to the university are respected and appreciated. Don't miss out on the chance to have a voice in shaping the future of CUNY - join PSC-CUNY today and let's work together towards a better tomorrow! >>> <https://psc-cuny.org/join-psc> <<<





## 15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

### Job security for adjuncts

Winning multiyear appointments for teaching adjuncts was a major victory for the PSC. Now this vital protection is under attack from the CUNY administration. The union is fighting back on multiple fronts, and members should mobilize to protect job security for adjunct members.

Members can contact the chancellor, urging the CUNY administration and all college administrations to support the provision of multiyear appointments. Tell CUNY that part-timers deserve full-time respect on the job.

You can find the letter here: [tinyurl.com/multiyear-appointments](https://tinyurl.com/multiyear-appointments).

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# 2024 PSC Union-Wide Elections

**THE DEADLINE FOR FILING** for candidacy for the upcoming union-wide elections is January 12, 2024. The declaration of candidacy form is available online: [tinyurl.com/PSC-declaration-candidacy](https://tinyurl.com/PSC-declaration-candidacy). For questions, contact [elections@pscmail.org](mailto:elections@pscmail.org).

The spring elections are for the PSC's principal officer positions of President, First Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer; for Vice Presidents for Senior Colleges, Community Colleges, Part-Time Personnel and Cross-Campus Units; and for the other 19 positions on the PSC Executive Council. Members will also elect delegates to the AFT, NYSUT and AAUP. To vote, one must be a PSC member as of December 1, 2023. To run for elected office, one must have been a PSC member for at least one (1) year at the time of nomination.

### Deadlines & dates for the 2024 Election

- December 1 Deadline for individual to become member in good standing and be eligible to vote
- January 12 Deadline for submitting declaration of candidacy
- January 26 Pre-printed nominating petitions available
- March 1 Deadline for completed nominating petitions to be received by the Elections Committee
- April 1 Ballots mailed
- April 30 Deadline for ballots to be received
- May 1 Ballots counted

