



TESTIMONY OF DR. JAMES DAVIS, PRESIDENT  
PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY  
BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON FINANCE  
DECEMBER 11, 2023

OVERSIGHT - MAYOR'S NOVEMBER FINANCIAL PLAN

Good morning, Chair Brannan and members of the Finance Committee. I am James Davis, President of the Professional Staff Congress, the union representing 30,000 faculty and professional staff at CUNY. We are grateful to the committee for holding this important hearing and for its ongoing support for resources for CUNY students.

As the country's largest public, urban higher education system, CUNY is an economic engine for New York State and a community where 250,000 students receive instruction, advising, and mentorship from our members. Over 80 percent of CUNY undergraduates are New York City high school graduates - your constituents - and the majority stay in the City after graduation. Together they contribute over \$4 billion annually to the state economy.<sup>1</sup> Some become the needed teachers and nurses our city so badly needs. Some even become legislators. With applications for the fall 2024 semester up a whopping 386% thanks to recent efforts by the University and Governor Hochul, CUNY's enrollment will continue to rebound and its prominence will only grow.<sup>2</sup>

PSC appreciates the opportunity to remind this council of CUNY's economic and cultural impact on our city. But this body understands this. Thanks to your efforts to restore \$32.4 million, CUNY's community colleges were shielded from the worst of the Mayor's cuts in FY24.<sup>3</sup> So it concerns us that the Mayoral Administration is using a midyear budget

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<sup>1</sup> [Comptroller Stringer Analysis: CUNY Graduates Earn Combined \\$57 Billion Annually, Highlighting CUNY's Significant Contributions to Local and State Economies](#), March 2021

<sup>2</sup> [CUNY Applications More Than Quadruple in October – CUNY Newswire](#) November 2023

<sup>3</sup> Statement from PSC/CUNY, [Fight for Full City Funding of CUNY FY2024 - PSC CUNY \(psc-cuny.org\)](#)

modification as a political tool to hurt his alma mater with a proposed cut of \$23 million through the Program to Eliminate the Gap (PEG).

CUNY students, as you know, are not typical college students: Nearly half are first generation college students; half come from households with annual incomes below \$30,000; 36% have reported food insecurity; 35% are foreign-born; 80% are people of color. The city should be focused on supporting these students, not defunding them.

While it is unclear how CUNY would implement the proposed cuts, the PEG report cites reductions related to the ASAP program.<sup>4</sup> ASAP is a nationally recognized, landmark program providing 1-1 guidance and financial support to participating community college students. To jeopardize any part of this program is both cruel 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. Additional line items for CUNY include savings restoration of \$5.9 million and a \$16.3 million reduction in fringe benefits. Which begs the question, “whose fringe”?

As we speak, the CUNY administration is cannibalizing its own colleges to cover operating costs, to the tune of nearly \$128 million over the last two fiscal years.<sup>5</sup> My campus, Brooklyn College, has been asked to find an additional \$3.5 million in savings in this fiscal year and another \$4.5 million next fiscal year after having over \$6.6 million in savings demanded by the university administration in the current fiscal year. There is a hiring freeze, and 62 fewer full-time faculty members are teaching this fall semester than in 2019, before the pandemic hit.<sup>6</sup> These are unsustainable trends that will drive students away.

At a time when progress has been made at the state level toward a New Deal for CUNY and a fundamental shift in funding public higher education, it is dismaying to see the Mayor inflict cuts that are unnecessary and injurious.<sup>7</sup> After decades of disinvestment, Governor Hochul pledged \$1.5 billion for SUNY and CUNY over five years in her first budget; expanded the Tuition Assistance Program to part-time students; and streamlined the loan

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<sup>4</sup> [Program to Eliminate the Gap \(PEG\) - November 2023 \(nyc.gov\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> FY2023 savings targets totaled \$41,487,000. FY2024 savings targets totaled an additional \$86,380,000, for a two-year combined total of \$127,867,000 savings sought from the colleges.

<sup>6</sup> According to CUNY, there were 420 full-time faculty teaching at Brooklyn College in Fall 2023, compared to 482 in Fall 2019.

<sup>7</sup> To learn more about New Deal for CUNY (S2146/A4425) please visit [Fight for Full State Funding of CUNY FY 2024 - PSC CUNY \(psc-cuny.org\)](#)

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forgiveness program<sup>8</sup> We will continue to advocate for the state resources our students deserve, but the city's proposed across-the-board cuts to CUNY will inflict unquestionable damage on our campuses, especially the community colleges, and make our advocacy at the state level far more difficult.

It is unconscionable that PSC members and students face austerity in a variety of services, not just CUNY. Libraries are expected to cut hours; Parks Department will cut maintenance staff; composting programs and associated jobs will be lost<sup>9</sup>; a hiring freeze for teachers at DOE; slots eliminated from Universal Pre-K programs next year<sup>10</sup>. If there is a problem with recruiting and retaining a workforce in a vibrant New York City, these cuts will exacerbate it.

The middle class is the backbone of this city. Yet, the proposed PEG cuts directly target us. PSC members, students and all New Yorkers benefit from robust social programs and well managed city-services. Essential services like those mentioned above benefit all New Yorkers; cutting them is shortsighted and will have a lasting impact on our communities. We deserve better than what the Mayor has proposed.

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<sup>8</sup>[Governor Hochul Signs Legislation to Expand Public Servants' Access to Student Loan Forgiveness | Department of Financial Services \(ny.gov\)](#) September 15, 2022

<sup>9</sup> [New York City will eliminate community composting programs when budget cuts go into effect \(msn.com\)](#) December 1, 2023

<sup>10</sup> [NYC Education Department cuts \\$547 million to comply with Eric Adams order - Chalkbeat](#) November 16, 2023

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