

CUNY BOT Testimony 4-1-24

My name is Sofya Aptekar. I am an associate professor of urban studies at the School of Labor and Urban Studies. I am here to publicly reject the proposed changes to the bylaws and to speak in favor of improved adjunct job security.

The bylaws changes threaten to gut our shared governance system and undermine the academic mission of this university. CUNY is at its best not only as an engine of social mobility for our students, but as an institution that promotes social justice, democracy, and public health, fosters the development of new knowledge and grounds us in a robust understanding of our history. We must not allow the city of New York to be robbed of its People's University through the drastic corporatization proposed by CUNY management. Our department chairs are fellow faculty. They understand and can balance the complex needs of our departments, programs, students, and workers, and they are accountable to their coworkers. As the chair of the curriculum committee at my school for the past three years, I am especially disturbed by the attempt to move curricular matters away from faculty and department chairs to management, when it is the faculty who have the discipline-specific expertise and experience in the classroom to make curricular decisions. The new bylaws would gut the current system in favor of a corporate system ill fit for a public university with a mission driven by the public good, not profit. CUNY administration must drop the proposed bylaws.

As are most PSC members, I am carefully following the progress of the collective bargaining process, as I work without a contract for over a year. I am a tenured professor with considerable job security, but what I have found most infuriating in bargaining is CUNY management's attempt to more than double the time it takes for my adjunct colleagues to qualify for any job security, all while making the continuing appointments laughably short – only two years. As a coworker, I am deeply concerned about the insecurity of adjuncts, who often do not know from semester to semester what they will teach, how much they will be paid, and whether they have health insurance. To state the painfully obvious, the most important thing that happens in college happens in a college classroom. How can we ensure that our students thrive when this is how we treat the workforce that teaches them? I see a direct connection between the contingency of our instructors and our ability to develop and run robust programs, provide continuity for our students, and improve our pedagogy. Adjuncts should be paid a living wage and have a robust path to job security. Moreover, those who are interested should have an opportunity to be hired as lecturers through conversion lines.

Our students deserve a quality educational experience just as good as the students at elite private universities. A quality educational experience is built on fair working conditions for staff and faculty, and a robust shared governance to ensure that we honor the academic mission of the People's University.