



PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY

TESTIMONY

EXECUTIVE BUDGET:
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, FY 2026
JOINT HEARING, NEW YORK STATE:
SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
ASSEMBLY WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

February 25, 2025

Delivered by Dr. James Davis, President
Professional Staff Congress/CUNY

Good afternoon, Senate Chairpersons Krueger and Stavisky, Assembly Chairpersons Pretlow and Hyndman, and all members of the committees. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to testify today and for your critical support for public higher education.

We are grateful that this Legislature has supported CUNY, especially during Governor Hochul's administration. You have built upon the Governor's investments to accelerate the restoration of funding for the University after decades of disinvestment. With your help and the help of advocates, CUNY now has \$53 million in recurring funding for new faculty hires. Thanks to your hard-nosed last minute negotiations, CUNY senior and community colleges have an additional \$40 million in new operating aid this year. That was a critically needed increase above the FY24 enacted budget. We were told it was crazy to try to increase our funding in a year dominated by K-12 funding formula concerns, contentious housing negotiations, and healthcare needs—but you heard the needs of our members and students.

Additionally, recent wins like expanding TAP eligibility, including to part-time students, and increasing minimum TAP awards, has opened doors to students.

Wins like these lead us closer to making a New Deal for CUNY a reality. This campaign has boosted the resolve of our 30,000 member union and countless CUNY students. Thank you Senator Gounardes and Assembly Member Reyes for your leadership on this legislation; it deserves to be fully funded and passed.

Challenge the national threat to public higher education

Before I begin my testimony about the budgetary needs of CUNY, I must address the current dismantling of federal agencies and services, including programs on which our members and students rely. The Trump Administration is determined to use higher education as the wedge to divide Americans on everything from free speech to diversity in teaching and student body to what our members can research. Life-saving medical research may grind to a halt, and universities may be targeted for funding cuts. Our students have a target on their backs. Mayor Adams' opening the door to Immigration and Customs Enforcement and allowing access to campus and other sensitive locations has made matters worse and has failed to slow the chaos. You must draw a line. ICE cannot have free reign in our city and in our classrooms. CUNY students must be safe in their academic and career pursuits. New York State has the resources to protect our members, students, and communities. Protecting our immigrant neighbors makes our schools and cities safer, and helps to grow our economy.

We see hope in Governor Hochul's Executive Budget

First, we are happy to report that last month – after two years of bargaining and more than 40 bargaining sessions – our members ratified our Collective Bargaining Agreement.¹ We are grateful that the governor has included expenses associated with the contract in her budget. The CUNY administration is advocating for an additional \$34 million to cover the full cost of the

¹ [Contract Ratification Results - PSC CUNY](#)

contract. The PSC-CUNY contract encompasses dozens of titles, full and part-time, at institutions governed by the state and the city. It's a complicated agreement finalized just as the Executive Budget was being finalized. Funding the remaining \$34 million will fulfill the state's recent practice of fully funding labor contracts.

Governor Hochul's proposed New York Opportunity Promise Scholarship to provide free community college to New Yorkers ages 25-55 in associates degree programs in high-demand fields. This \$18.8 million investment will help meet the increasing demand for healthcare professionals, teachers, and qualified graduates to enter growing technology and renewable energy industries. This is exactly the leadership the PSC is excited to support.

Our New Deal for CUNY vision for free, fully funded high quality CUNY education compels us to strongly urge approval of the Opportunity Promise Scholarship and to further broaden access to free tuition. To that end, to invest in our students, our workforce, and the future of our state, we urge you to support the Opportunity Promise Scholarship and join us in advocating to: ²

1. eliminate the age restrictions to include students coming out of high school;
2. permit students to complete 60 credits at any CUNY or SUNY college, not just community colleges;
3. include those who have already completed a degree.

Other areas of the Governor's budget we welcome include \$131 million in new operating aid for CUNY. We appreciate that the Governor maintains the funding floor for community colleges, but believe strongly that the floor has been set too low. Enrollment in the academic year 2019-2020 should be the set point for the community college funding floor. Restorations are also needed for programs like SEEK and the Black Male Initiative and the Rangel Infrastructure Workforce Training Initiative.

Additionally, we urge you to support supplemental allocations of the Environmental Bond Act and to expand the vision and plans of the New York Power Authority to quickly advance decarbonization at CUNY, SUNY and the public schools. This will protect our communities and serve as a model for what progressive states can do to safeguard our climate and health.

PSC budget platform for Fiscal Year 2026

The attacks from Washington are alarming and dangerous. We cannot let the improvements this legislature has worked so hard to achieve be lost. Enrollment is continuing to rise. Now is not the time to remain still. It is time to make a commitment to a New Deal for CUNY.

As enrollment trends up, Albany must increase investment in the faculty and staff CUNY needs to improve retention and student success. Our 6-year graduation rate at senior colleges of 62% is well below the national average; our community college 3-year graduation rate of 23% also trails the national average.

² [FY2026-Executive-Budget-Briefing-Book.pdf](#)

Too many of our campuses are vastly understaffed, dependent on a patchwork of adjunct faculty and overworked professional staff. Students need more academic advisors and mental health counselors to help keep them on track to graduation. Older students who return to CUNY thanks to the Opportunity Promise scholarship will be in particular need of advisement and support. And we cannot improve students' progress to completion without the full-time faculty staffing the courses students need to graduate. CUNY is short 5,000 full-time faculty. The Legislature should demand investments in faculty and staff this year and embrace the New Deal for CUNY's five-year plan to end CUNY's staffing crisis. Assistance with the cost of books and transportation will also improve graduation rates.

Year one breakdown and additional, urgent needs

1000 Full-time Faculty	\$87 Million
55 Academic Advisors	\$8 Million
40 Mental Health Counselors	\$7.5 Million
New Deal for CUNY Year-One Investments	\$102.5 Million
Fully fund Mandatory Needs: + \$40.3M in fringe benefits; +\$34M in unfunded operating support	\$74.3 Million
Increase funding floor allocation for Community College Base Aid	\$11.7 Million
Expand nursing program capacity	\$10 Million
Other Critical Investments	\$96 Million
Total Increase Over the Executive Budget for FY 2026	\$198.5 Million
Needed Capital Investment in FY 2026	\$1.8 Billion

Five Year Plan

To fund the New Deal for CUNY

New Deal for CUNY Priorities (Over 5-year period)	First Year Investment*	Total Cost
Hire 5,000 full-time faculty	\$87M	\$435.1M
Hire 275 academic advisors	\$8M	\$40M
Hire 200 mental health counselors	\$7.5M	\$37.3M
Total	\$102.5M	\$512.4M
First 60 Credits Free		\$700M

*First Year Investment assumes hiring of 1,000 FT faculty, 55 academic advisors, and 40 mental health counselors

Common ground with CUNY

There are many aspects of CUNY’s \$3.4 billion Budget Request the union is pleased to support. Highlights include:

- \$7.3 million to expand its nursing and healthcare programs
- \$4.7 million to hire academic and career advisors
- \$10.3 million for the University’s Student Well-Being Initiative
- \$4.1 million Increasing staff in the Access, Success and Inclusion Services
- \$3.1 million to help facilitate transfers

It’s time to Share our Wealth

Income inequality is a stubborn issue in New York which cannot be tampered unless equitable, redistributive policies are implemented. We know that investing in CUNY graduates makes our economy strong. Numerous reports prove that CUNY’s return on its investments are significant, bringing billions of dollars to the state.³ Investing in students, lifting them into the middle class, is what makes our state strong.⁴ We urge you to support the proposals of the Share Our Wealth campaign:

³ [CAL1224.pdf](#) December 2024, CUNY Budget Request, p17

⁴ In 2020 the Brookings Institution listed 12 CUNY campuses that propelled its students toward the [nation’s greatest upward mobility to the middle class](#).

- Increase the top tax rates for those earning over \$5 million and \$25 million by 0.5%. This raises approximately \$1 billion annually.
- Increase the corporate tax rate by 1.75%. The current rate is 7.25%. The new rate would be 9%. This raises approximately \$2 billion a year.
- Make these changes permanent. These taxes at their current rate are about to expire due to the sunset provisions. If they end the state will lose an additional \$6 billion annually that these higher rates are generating. The governor proposes to extend the PIT in its current form through 2032.

The Senate and Assembly included these proposals in their one-house budgets last year. Implementing them would generate up to \$3 billion annually—funding essential services like childcare, education, higher education, healthcare, transportation, and housing, services our students and members rely on.

Related to fiscal equity, we are proud to support Senator Liu and Assembly Member Mamdani for sponsoring the REPAIR Act. This visionary legislation would allow New York City to collect revenue from private universities that enjoy more than \$100 million in annual property tax exemptions - Columbia and NYU - and to direct these resources to the City University, which educates hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers.

Conclusion

It is not an exaggeration to say the challenges the University faces from Washington are unprecedented. But you can take action to ensure our state's great public universities not only survive, but thrive. CUNY's enrollment continues to climb toward pre-pandemic figures; this legislature and Governor Hochul have worked to turn back years of austerity budgets; this year's Executive Budget addresses critical needs in the workforce and sets the stage for free college.

Students, faculty and staff at CUNY need you to stand with us. Stand with us to defend public higher education from threats from Washington and ensure that CUNY grows, continuing to support the state economy and the contributions that it brings to New York.