

Good evening, members of the Board of Trustees.

My name is Kevin Adams, a proud PSC HEO delegate from Medgar Evers College, named after the acclaimed civil rights leader and located footsteps away from the site of where Jackie Robinson bravely broke the color barrier in baseball.

I am here today to address a matter of significant concern and frustration for the dedicated faculty and staff represented by the Professional Staff Congress – the delays in the disbursement of our negotiated retro pay and signing bonuses.

For many of our members, these funds are not discretionary income. They are essential for managing household expenses, addressing outstanding debts, or planning for the future. The delays create unnecessary stress. We are living in an age where the prices of groceries and other essentials continue to soar. We have heard from countless colleagues who meticulously plan their finances to sustain their household. The lack of clear, consistent communication regarding when they can expect to receive these funds has only drawn their ire.

The agreement, which was a result of good-faith negotiations and represents a vital investment in the hardworking individuals who are the backbone of this University, included provisions for retroactive pay increases and, for many, a much-anticipated signing bonus. These were not merely symbolic gestures; they represent compensation earned and, in the case of the signing bonus, an incentive for continued service and commitment to CUNY's critical mission.

We understand the complexities involved in administering payments across a large system like CUNY. However, the specter of protracted delays has created undue frustration and eroded the trust that our members place in the university's administrative processes. Particularly, after these very same members have watched as:

- Executive Vice Chancellor Hector Batista received a 27% increase in 2022,
- Executive Vice Chancellor Derek Davis received a 30% salary increase in 2022,
- the then Vice Chancellor Doriane Gloria received a 15% salary increase in 2022.
- Last summer, this very board voted to give Gayle Horowitz a 16% salary increase as she was elevated to senior vice chancellor as well as secretary to the board.

In defense of the last action, a CUNY spokesperson stated, “CUNY recognizes that it must remain competitive in order to recruit and retain talented staff.” Today, I demand that very same recognition be afforded to my union siblings.

While we appreciate any updates that have been provided, they have often been vague and have not offered concrete timelines or explanations for the persistent issues. This lack of clarity breeds uncertainty and undermines morale. Our members deserve to know precisely what is causing these delays and, more importantly, what concrete steps are being taken to rectify the situation immediately.

In a December 2024 press release about the tentative agreement, CUNY Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez shared, “full-time and part-time faculty and professional staff are at the heart and soul of the CUNY system, responsible for fulfilling our mission to provide a high-quality public education to all students, regardless of background.” Chancellor Matos Rodríguez continued, “this inclusive contract is a testament to our commitment to our teaching and non-teaching staff and determination to ensure CUNY continues to provide students with a top-tier education.”

The faculty and staff of CUNY have navigated challenging times with dedication and resilience. The timely and accurate disbursement of the compensation we have rightfully earned is a matter of basic fairness and respect. The continued well-being and morale of the CUNY workforce depend on this disbursement. And it is time that testament of your commitment to my hard-working colleagues becomes more tangible – with the disbursement of our negotiated retro pay and signing bonuses.

I also stand before you today with a profound sense of disappointment and frankly, outrage, regarding the recent news concerning Arlington National Cemetery. The reported erasure – and I use that word deliberately – of the names of Medgar Wiley Evers and Jackie Robinson from the rolls of those who served our nation in World War II is not merely an administrative oversight; it is a deeply disturbing act that demands immediate attention and a clear, public response from this Board.

For far too long, we at CUNY, and indeed the broader community, have witnessed a deafening silence from this body on matters of crucial historical significance and social justice. This silence, in the face of such a blatant disregard for the service and sacrifice of two iconic figures who bravely fought for our country, is simply unacceptable.

Medgar Wiley Evers, a decorated WWII veteran, went on to become a pivotal leader in the Civil Rights Movement, ultimately paying the ultimate price for his fight for equality. Jackie Robinson, beyond breaking the color barrier in baseball, was also a proud veteran who served his nation with honor. To diminish their military service in this manner is not just an insult to their legacies, but a disservice to the very principles this university claims to uphold.

Where is the statement from the Board and the Chancellery condemning this historical revisionism? Where is the affirmation of CUNY's commitment to acknowledging and honoring the contributions of Black Americans to our nation's history? This silence speaks volumes. It suggests a lack of urgency, a lack of understanding of the profound impact such actions have on our community, and a failure to recognize the moral imperative to speak out against injustice, even when it occurs beyond our immediate institutional boundaries.

We, the faculty, staff, and students of CUNY, expect more from our leadership. We expect you to be vocal advocates for historical accuracy and social justice. We expect you to stand in solidarity with those whose contributions have been marginalized or erased.

The erasure of Medgar Wiley Evers and Jackie Robinson from the Arlington Cemetery rolls is not just a mistake – it is a symptom of a larger societal issue that demands our unwavering attention. Your silence in this matter is not neutrality. I urge the Board and the Chancellery to break their silence. I ask that you ensure that such historical injustices are never ignored and that the contributions of all Americans, regardless of race, color, creed, national origin, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, and disability are properly acknowledged and honored.

The legacy of Medgar Wiley Evers and Jackie Robinson, both as veterans and as champions of civil rights, deserves nothing less. Such words may seem trite, but your response to such an affront will speak volumes about the values this institution truly holds dear and provide comfort to those who feel attacked.