

April 7, 2025, CUNY Board of Trustees Hearing

Testimony from Penny Lewis, Vice President for Senior Colleges, PSC,
and professor of Labor Studies, CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies

The Board of Trustees will be considering a number of proposals in your meeting next week authorizing payments for items including new security contracts for various campuses. What I do not see on your agenda is a plan for security for the basic mission of our entire enterprise here: How are the trustees of the City University of New York rising to meet the moment of the frontal attacks on higher education, our students – especially immigrant students--our free speech, and academic freedom? What steps and scenario planning are you undertaking to assure the CUNY community that you will support us as our funding is being taken away, as it already is, when our faculty and students are targeted, when our curricula and research come under direct attack?

The faculty senate at Rutgers has urged its administration to take steps to plan with others in the “big 10” public universities to coordinate and defend each other in the case of direct attacks from the federal government. In the past few days, we’ve seen statements from University of Massachusetts and Tufts University defending their students-unfortunately after action had been taken against them. We have heard from Wesleyan University’s president about the critical need to defend the academic enterprise.

We need to hear from you. Will CUNY Trustees work with their SUNY counterparts to plan for mutual support? Will CUNY provide bridge funding for the disappearing grants? Are you using your political capital to build support for CUNY, now, so that elected, business and cultural leaders across New York City and New York State are ready to defend our work, students and freedoms within CUNY? Are you organizing the alumni to rally for their alma maters? We need to see those kinds of plans in your agenda, and resources allocated for *those* kinds of security.

Speaking of allocating resources, the Trustees must also, today, this week, immediately, ensure that the administration that you supervise has completed all the work necessary to ensure that CUNY faculty and staff receive the salary increases and ratification bonuses we are entitled to with the passage of our most recent contract. We have heard that the state is still waiting on information from CUNY. What is happening? Why isn’t this work complete? These are the questions you should be asking the Chancellor, Vice Chancellors, and leaders who report to you. Administration got its raise quite quickly when you all passed that. Meanwhile, the core workers of the university are watching the economy tank, and CUNY has still not even met its contractual obligations to us. We need to hear positively from you, immediately, that CUNY has completed all work necessary to pay the tens of thousands of faculty and staff represented by the PSC the money you owe us.