

"I'm John Dennehy, a professor of biology at Queens College of the City University of New York. Our college motto—'We learn so that we may serve'—guided my actions during the COVID pandemic when, as a virologist, I asked myself: How can I serve my city in its time of great need?

My collaborators and I developed a COVID wastewater surveillance program for the Department of Environmental Protection and Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. During this work, we discovered these agencies faced critical personnel shortages in essential positions.

To address this challenge, we secured a \$1.8 million grant from federal Health and Human Services—with Representative Grace Meng's support—to establish the CUNY Wastewater Epidemiology Student Training Laboratory. We also obtained \$1 million from the National Science Foundation to create a training program helping STEM students transition from Queensborough and LaGuardia Community Colleges to Queens College. In one year of the program so far, we trained and mentored over 30 community college STEM students.

Tragically, on May 2nd, NSF terminated this grant without possibility of appeal, claiming it "no longer aligned with current NSF priorities." The true reason? We proposed training students from financially disadvantaged and underserved communities for high-paying positions in city agencies.

Ours wasn't the only CUNY grant canceled. At least 30 grants totaling over \$25 million in federal funds—all reviewed and allocated by leading US scientists with Congressional backing—were rescinded through terse emails providing no clear justification.

These widespread grant terminations, combined with proposed funding cuts to NIH, NSF, NOAA, NEA, USDA, and other federal agencies, and the move to reduce the indirect cost rates that allows colleges to support faculty research to 15%, threaten the entire CUNY research enterprise with extinction.

These cancellations represent more than just lost funding—they are a direct attack on the health and wellbeing of all city residents, particularly those in underserved communities who would benefit most from these programs. CUNY has always stood as a beacon of opportunity and public service in New York City. Now, we need your vocal advocacy, your political engagement, and your unwavering support to continue our vital mission of serving the residents of this city through both education and essential public health infrastructure.