

Testimony to the Board of Trustees Queens Borough Public Hearing
Submitted via dropbox on May 13, 2025 by the EC of the Hostos PSC-CUNY Chapter

Dear Chancellor Matos Rodríguez and Board Trustees,

We are writing to express our alarm and indignation about CUNY's decision to call the New York Police Department's Strategic Response Group (NYPD-SRG) to forcibly disperse a peaceful pro-Palestine student demonstration at the Brooklyn College campus on May 8, 2025.

As many witnesses have remarked, the police incursion – their sheer number in riot gear and the utterly disproportionate force they used against the protesters – created an atmosphere of panic and intimidation that should have no place on our campuses. It was horrific for us to watch on videos and photos the police attacking and tasing the demonstrators, and we can only imagine how terrifying it must have been for those who witnessed or experienced firsthand the physical harm and the psychological trauma of the police violence.

Summoning the NYPD-SRG was not only a disastrous and unnecessary escalation; it was also a flagrant violation of the University's commitment to "the free exchange of ideas and expression of all points of view for members of the University community."ⁱ

This situation could and should have been handled differently, especially given the current political climate. Our students, as well as faculty and staff, should not risk their physical safety, deportation, or arrest for voicing their ideas; and CUNY should not cave in to political pressure. On the contrary, CUNY should proudly and forcefully uphold the University's role in service to the public good: namely, to defend unequivocally democratic principles and "the rights of CUNY students and employees to speak, write, associate, and assemble both on and outside of university grounds — even to advance unpopular or controversial viewpoints at odds with those of other members of the university community."ⁱⁱ

As PSC President James Davis wrote in a letter to you immediately following the incidents, "CUNY campuses should be spaces in which students who are not infringing on the rights of other members of the campus community may exercise their constitutionally protected right to freedom of speech and assembly."ⁱⁱⁱ

CUNY is among the most diverse institutions of higher education in the world, and, as a result, different viewpoints and potentially uncomfortable ideas are central to both its fabric and its mission to providing an excellent education to all students, regardless of their social, racial, ethnic, religious, or political background.

At a time when universities and our rights to free speech, protest, and assembly are under serious attack, we urge you to reaffirm in the strongest terms the importance of free expression at CUNY and to safeguard this right to *all* members of the CUNY community.

Respectfully,

The Executive Council of the Hostos PSC-CUNY chapter

Marcella Bencivenni
Craig Bernardini
Aaron Botwick
Daniel Casey
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Alexandra Milsom
Felipe Pimentel
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ⁱ https://policy.cuny.edu/policyimport/board_meeting_minutes/2016/06-06/pdf/index.html#Navigation_Location – pp. 44-47 (160-163), Committee on Academic Freedom-Rev. 4/23/24

ⁱⁱ <https://www1.cuny.edu/sites/cunyufs/2024/10/11/lippman-report-and-faculty-governance/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://psc-cuny.org/news-events/psc-condemns-cunys-use-of-nypd-strategic-response-group-to-intimidate-and-disperse-a-group-of-non-violent-student-protesters-at-brooklyn-college/>