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Chancellor Felix Matos Rodríguez
City University of New York
205 E. 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017

June 30, 2025

Dear Chancellor Matos Rodríguez,

We are profoundly concerned about recent apparent violations of academic freedom and retaliation against CUNY faculty members for constitutionally protected speech. This situation has all the appearances of an ideological purge.

On June 13, three Brooklyn College adjunct faculty members in different departments were notified by Human Resources that they had been non-reappointed. The notifications followed a similar notification to an adjunct faculty member the previous week, terminating the instructor for cause. The four instructors were removed from the schedule of Fall 2025 classes to which they had been assigned - and a summer class in the case of the terminated instructor. In each case, the personnel and budget committee and department chair had approved the instructor's reappointment. In no case was the job performance of the instructor evaluated as unsatisfactory. In no case did the college inform the instructor or the department chair of a misconduct finding that could warrant such an action. In no case was it the department chair who notified the instructor of the non-reappointment, nor was the chair notified in advance. All of this is highly irregular.

The classes remained on the schedule, but the instructors were let go. Three of them had Fall teaching appointments at other CUNY colleges, all of which were also immediately revoked. No reasons were provided for the non-reappointments. While the unexplained non-reappointment of teaching adjuncts is not unusual at CUNY, this fact pattern is deeply concerning. What the four instructors who lost their CUNY jobs at the same time have in common is their public protest against Israel and advocacy for Palestinian rights.

The university's Manual of General Policy Article 1.02 states, "The City University of New York should remain a forum for the advocacy of all ideas protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution and the principles of academic freedom." For over fifty years, it has been CUNY policy to adhere to the purpose of 1940 AAUP statement of principles as quoted in Article 1.02. Indeed, the PSC-CUNY collective bargaining agreement begins with a preamble stating, "Whereas CUNY and the PSC seek to maintain and encourage, in accordance with law, full freedom of inquiry, teaching, research and publication of results, the parties subscribe to Academic Freedom for faculty members."

When academic freedom and freedom of speech are not protected, irrespective of the faculty member's particular rank or title, it sends a chilling message to the campus community. It also devalues the profession. It says that some faculty members possess these rights, but not those on contingent appointments. The labor contract and Manual of General Policy must

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be upheld. If the faculty members in question failed to fulfill their professional responsibilities, a condition of their academic freedom rights, then it is incumbent on the university to prove it. Otherwise their appointments must be reinstated immediately.

The recent AAUP decision to censure Muhlenberg College should be a caution to you and your colleagues in the CUNY administration. Their investigation showed plain violations of fired Anthropology professor Maura Finkelstein's constitutional rights and academic freedom in retaliation for her exercise of academic freedom and her rights as a citizen. CUNY should not risk such an investigation and formal censure by our foremost professional association. The university has been down this road before, as you know. During the McCarthy trials of the 1950s, professors Harry Slochower of Brooklyn College, Bernard Reiss of Hunter College, and Oscar Sheftel and Vera Shlakman of Queens College were suspended without pay or forced to resign under allegations of conduct unbecoming faculty members and indoctrination of students with ideas inimical to the nation's domestic and foreign policy interests. Brooklyn College President Harry Gideonse believed then that he was helping the country root out communism. This ideological purge at CUNY and beyond is widely understood today as a terrible stain on the nation's history. Yet the administration appears today to be taking the same path as President Gideonse, targeting faculty members for ideological reasons.

The PSC demands the immediate reinstatement of these four faculty members to the Fall 2025 schedule and an explanation to the affected department chairs, around whose backs these non-reappointments occurred. In light of your July 9 appearance before the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, it is particularly urgent that you stand up for academic freedom and freedom of speech for CUNY faculty members, irrespective of rank or title.

Sincerely,



James Davis
PSC President

cc: William Thompson, Chair, CUNY Board of Trustees
Hector Batista, Executive Vice Chancellor and Interim Senior Vice Chancellor for
Human Resources and Labor Relations