

Natalie Milbrodt Testimony

CUNY Board of Trustees Manhattan Borough Hearing, City College of New York

Tuesday, December 9th

My name is Natalie Milbrodt. I am honored to serve as CUNY's inaugural University Archivist. I'm leading a 3-year project funded by the Mellon Foundation to explore, unify and uplift archives across our 26 campuses. I'm here today to share some of the successes of our project with you as well as a serious problem that we need your help to remedy.

Last month, we completed a major deliverable for our project, a massive physical survey of CUNY's archival collections. An archival survey is quite simply a box-by-box inspection of everything held in an archival repository. All together, we have discovered that CUNY holds 46,350 linear feet of archival collections. To put that number in perspective, if we lined up every box of CUNY's historical documents, photos, and other archival records, it would be nearly 9 miles long. CUNY archives are a New York City treasure and our work has uncovered some environmental conditions that currently imperil the collections and must be addressed.

In total, we found mold at sixteen of the twenty-seven archives our team surveyed. In most cases, the mold was extremely limited. We might have seen it on a few isolated boxes, or on a single range of shelving near a leaky pipe. When we flagged these materials for our archivist colleagues, they were often able to replace moldy boxes immediately or successfully sought help from leadership on their campuses to remedy more pervasive problems. In other cases, the picture is more severe. The mold has exceeded our ability to contain and remediate without the assistance of external experts.

My colleagues and I collected samples of mold found on archival collection materials at City Tech and Medgar Evers. The samples were analyzed by EMSL Analytical, Inc., the same lab used by DASNY for their mold analyses. The results indicate substantial evidence of mold growth, many types of mold, and evidence that the current environmental conditions support their growth. Both campuses have experienced multiple flooding incidents due to construction and HVAC issues.

With every new flooding event, like the one that happened just two weeks ago at City Tech, mold spores fruit and spread, destroying archival collections and creating costly clean-up situations. We must dedicate money to substantial repairs and upgraded systems to ensure a dry and cool environment for our archives. Mold is not a mysterious or insurmountable problem, but it is a problem that requires a prompt response. Concealing

a mold problem by painting over it or denying its existence instead of addressing it quickly and transparently makes the problem grow far worse.

I ask the Board of Trustees to support the acquisition of services we need to address current and future mold outbreaks in our archives at CUNY. My team has gathered a list of vendors who can provide a knowledgeable assessment of what engineering and remediation work is needed to make our facilities safe storage spaces for the irreplaceable records of CUNY's history.