

## Testimony

CUNY Board of Trustees Borough Hearing, April 6, 2026

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Welcome to City Tech. My name is Carole Harris, and I'm speaking today in my role as PSC Chapter Chair. We have a lot to be proud of at our college, starting with our history. In 1946 City Tech was founded to accommodate returning veterans attending college on the GI Bill. We have a lot to be proud of regarding our physical plant, too, including this Theater. Completed in 2019, the Theater at City Tech has served our campus and community well.

But now I invite you to take a walk on the Wild Side.

Just outside these doors, across Jay Street, is the Namm Building. Walk through the turnstiles and continue straight ahead to the Library Building.

Take a seat in a row of chairs that have been set up for a Town Hall. Students, faculty, and staff are in attendance. It's October 16, 2025, and several guests have just spoken. Next up is Council Member Lincoln Restler. He stands up to address the audience and is immediately encased in a cloud of thick dust that blasts through a hole in the ceiling, covered up only with a tarp. The dust lingers in the area for a good twenty minutes. Several members in the audience whip on masks. I suggest you do the same. Members from Public Safety rush to the scene, and construction is immediately halted.

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The Library Building Ground Floor is located just below an ongoing construction site taking place outdoors at the Namm Plaza, designed to repair a leak in one of the walls above. This construction project poses ongoing risks for students, faculty and staff, who work or congregate just below on the Library Ground Floor.

In an emergency health and safety meeting with City Tech President Santiago, we expressed concern about the dust that shot out from the ceiling at the Town Hall. People reported symptoms after the incident. One attendee reported feeling a "grittiness" in his throat that day; a student reported "coughing up a storm" after his asthma acted up. After returning home, he needed to use his nebulizer machine due to a full-blown asthma attack. I remained congested for several days. We circled back to our major question: what was in that dust?

President Santiago confidently replied that it was only cinder block dust (“Nothing to worry about.” “No harm, no foul”). But cinder block dust often contains silica, a dangerous toxic substance. In fact there's no such thing as harmless dust. All dust is bad. Cinder block dust might well contain silica, but it's also very alkaline which is damaging to the lungs. During 9/11 people breathed in pulverized dust from cement and cinder blocks, and they did not fare well. OSHA thus requires strict compliance to limit exposure to dust caused by construction.

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In the meeting President Santiago abruptly interrupted this discussion and turned to me, “Why did you invite Lincoln Restler in the first place? You know you shouldn't invite elected officials to campus.”

I was floored. (I had received permission.)

With this question the purpose of our meeting was derailed, our health and safety concerns went unaddressed, and the potential health hazard remains because City Tech didn't take the incident seriously. Soon thereafter President Santiago instead sent out an email to the entire campus restricting our speech with elected officials.

The Town Hall is just one of the many health and safety crises we've dealt with in recent years. Our administration routinely withholds documentation and provides patchwork solutions that keep our students, staff, and faculty at risk. In the meantime, our health and safety activists, like myself, are reprimanded for speaking up.