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April 6, 2026

Testimony – Borough of Brooklyn CUNY Board of Trustees Hearing

Introduction Good evening, members of the Board of Trustees and Chancellor Matos Rodriguez.

My name is Laura Stephens, serving as both a PSC Part-Time Personnel Officer and Delegate for Medgar Evers College—a campus named after a civil rights leader who understood that justice requires more than words, it requires action. As a Social Psychologist who examines the effects of social environments, I witness daily how our physical spaces reveal institutional values.

The Reality We Face: In Chancellor Matos Rodríguez's 2025 State of the University Address, he declared CUNY's commitment to building programs and serving students by ensuring campuses were equipped to serve them. Yet the reality in our classrooms and offices tells a different story. During late fall and winter months, students sit in winter coats during lectures, while others sweat through spring and summer classes without proper ventilation. Faculty and professional staff work in offices exceeding 80 degrees with inadequate HVAC and air circulation (Brooklyn College and Medgar Evers College). Children accompany parents to libraries contaminated with black mold and poor air quality (Medgar Evers College).

These conditions are not merely inconveniences—they are fundamental failures of your institutional duty. When our community is subjected to substandard facilities, it communicates a profound disrespect for the very students we claim to educate. Every delay, every temporary fix, every ignored maintenance request sends a message: your health and safety matter less than our budget concerns.

The Solution We Demand: The Five-Year Capital Plan (FY 2023-28) provides the roadmap. But plans without action are merely paper exercises. We need immediate, aggressive implementation. Black mold must be eradicated—not covered over. HVAC systems must function properly—not operate intermittently. Leaks must be repaired permanently—not patched temporarily. Every solution must be built to last because our community deserves more than temporary fixes.

The Call to Action: The time for incremental change has passed. We demand:

1. **Immediate commencement** of all priority repairs
2. **Clear accountability** for college administrations to address these failures substantively

3. **Alignment of our physical infrastructure** with CUNY's stated mission of providing "a public first-rate education to all students, regardless of means or background" (CUNY, 2026)

CUNY's legacy was built on the promise of educational opportunity. But opportunity cannot thrive in buildings that compromise health and dignity. As trustees, you hold the authority—and the responsibility—to ensure our campuses reflect the excellence we claim to represent.

References:

About Cuny. The City University of New York. (2026). <https://www.cuny.edu/about/>