



Testimony

OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY

**EXECUTIVE BUDGET:
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, FY 2021**

**JOINT HEARING OF THE NY STATE SENATE FINANCE
COMMITTEE AND THE ASSEMBLY WAYS AND MEANS
COMMITTEE**

February 4, 2020

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TESTIMONY OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY FY2021 EXECUTIVE BUDGET FOR CUNY

Good afternoon, Senate Chairpersons Krueger and Stavisky, Assembly Chairpersons Weinstein and Glick. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to testify today, and thank you for your continued support for public higher education. Legislators on both sides of the aisle have fought to increase funding for community colleges, protected opportunity programs year after year, and understood the need to stabilize public funding for CUNY and SUNY senior colleges. On behalf of the 30,000 members of the PSC, I thank you for your efforts. I also want to thank Senator LaValle for his four and a half decades of service in the legislature.

I am proud to be here with my colleagues from NYSUT and UUP, and I strongly support their testimony.

Impoverishment by Design

While the PSC appreciates your efforts to increase funding and your support for the PSC's landmark contract settled last year, I need to tell you that **CUNY cannot withstand another year of New York State's current funding policy.** New York's policy on CUNY funding is planned poverty, impoverishment by design. State budgets that consistently fail to cover even mandatory costs and collective bargaining increases amount to a *policy* of sabotaging CUNY and CUNY students. To make up for missing State funding, CUNY either cuts resources or increases tuition, or both. Neither approach is acceptable, or sustainable.

Incremental cuts and flat budgets may look innocuous, but repeated year after year they add up to a policy of destroying the University. On a per-student basis, State funding for CUNY senior colleges has been slashed by 21 percent in the last decade, adjusted for inflation.

How is a university supposed to continue to educate students when operating funds have been cut by more than a fifth? If one in five students cannot get into a class needed for graduation, if college libraries have to close one day out of five, if one in five full-time faculty positions are cut, if every advisor is responsible for hundreds more students, if buildings are dilapidated, roofs leak, rats and mold endanger the classrooms, and students have to navigate around buckets catching rainwater as they try to make their way to class?

That any state would allow—or even *cause*—such shortfalls is shameful, but it especially so in New York. This state prides itself on leading the nation in progressive policy. And in many areas, it does. We celebrate the legislature's landmark policy achievements last year. But in fiscal support for public higher education, New York is far from a leader.

The consequences are heaviest for those least able to bear them. CUNY undergraduates are overwhelmingly from poor communities of color. They are 80 percent Black, Latinx or Asian. They

have average family incomes of less than \$30,000. They work at low-wage jobs. They raise children and support parents. They have survived under-resourced public schools, immigration, refugee status and poverty. Why does New York erect barriers to their success? That many of them manage to stay in college, graduate and thrive is testimony to their own determination and to the support they receive from the faculty and staff. Whether we as a state support their college education is a measure of our policy and of our humanity. We can, and we must do better.

Models for Change

The PSC believes that New York can change its CUNY funding policy, just as you have changed other seemingly intractable policies. The 30,000 CUNY faculty and staff call on you to make this the year you reject New York's policy of impoverishing CUNY and pass a budget that covers CUNY's basic costs. It will take new revenue and political will, but the legislature demonstrated last year that this state can achieve major progressive change.

We call on you to make sure that full funding for CUNY's essential needs is a priority in your conference and that the leaders of each house take a stand in favor of the new revenue that will be needed to achieve it. **Refuse to pass a budget unless it includes new revenue from progressive taxation and covers CUNY's basic operating costs—without raising tuition.**

Last year, the PSC achieved a breakthrough contract with your support, the support of Governor Cuomo, and of CUNY's new chancellor, Félix Matos Rodríguez. Thank you. Many of you spoke up for increased adjunct pay as an issue of both educational justice and wage justice. The contract provides modest increases that will allow salaries to keep up with inflation, and mandates that CUNY's 12,000 adjunct instructors will receive an average raise of 45 percent over the term of the agreement. A centerpiece of the contract, a provision for paid adjunct office hours, means that tens of thousands of CUNY students will now have guaranteed access to time for individual work with their adjunct instructors outside of class.

There is much more to do to improve pay and working conditions for adjuncts and all CUNY workers, but your advocacy was critical, as was the Governor's support. With the same support, New York could achieve a similar breakthrough on CUNY's operating costs. We call on you to work with the Executive Office and your legislative colleagues to set a new policy for CUNY, one that begins with funding mandatory costs.

CUNY Funding Needs in Fiscal Year 2021

The PSC is requesting **\$208 million more for CUNY senior colleges** and **\$24.6 million more for CUNY community colleges** in next year's State budget. The funding is needed to cover mandatory cost increases, including collective bargaining increases, to close the TAP Gap, to add vitally needed full-time faculty and counselor positions, and to increase community college base aid.

Unmet Mandatory Needs:	\$97 Million
Fill the TAP Gap:	\$79 Million
New Faculty, Advisors & Mental Health Counselors:	\$30 Million
Restore Legislative Funding for Senior Colleges	\$2 Million
Senior Colleges Total:	\$208 Million
Community College Base Aid:	\$18 Million
Restore Legislative Funding for Community Colleges:	\$6.6 Million
Community College Total:	\$24.6 Million
CUNY Total:	\$232.6 Million

The current funding model for the senior colleges is not sustainable. It was established in the SUNY/CUNY 2020 legislation passed in 2011. Funding for some fringe benefit increases is provided, but other annual cost increases (e.g. rent, energy, collective bargaining) are not funded. Tuition is increased annually, but the total revenue from the increase is reduced because of the requirement that CUNY waive all or part of the tuition increases for TAP recipients.

Before 2011, State funding cuts to CUNY and SUNY were sporadic and deep and were accompanied by large tuition increases. Now the tuition hikes come every year, and the underfunding is normalized, built into the funding model and hidden in the widening area between the University's costs curve and its revenues curve. The disinvestment may be less obvious, but it is no less intense.

The CUNY senior colleges face shortages of supplies and equipment, reduced course offerings, limited hours for writing and tutoring centers, even reduced hours for libraries. Faculty and staff lines are being left unfilled. Adjunct budgets have been reduced for academic departments throughout CUNY, chairs in some departments have been asked to increase class size, and fully enrolled course sections have been cancelled.

Cuts to course offerings began this Fall at Queens College in the departments of Secondary Education, Political Science, Media Studies, and Philosophy. Tutoring was also drastically under-resourced at Queens College this fall. The reduction of course sections makes it harder for students to stay on pace for graduation. In 2016, before the latest round of reductions, 22 percent of CUNY students reported being unable to register for a course needed for graduation. Course reductions also mean lost pay and sometimes lost health insurance for CUNY adjuncts.

A hiring freeze at The CUNY Graduate Center will begin this semester, along with 10-percent cuts to their administrative department budgets. The hiring freeze at City College continues. And PSC members at Brooklyn College report that hiring of faculty and staff has been far outpaced by faculty and staff departures and retirements.

CUNY needs to accelerate its hiring, not freeze it. There is only one mental health counselor at CUNY for every 2,700 students. The nationally recommended ratio is 1:1,000. There are 4,000 fewer full-time faculty today than when CUNY served fewer students. In 1975, CUNY had 11,500 full-time faculty and 250,000 students. Today, it has 7,500 full-time faculty and 274,000 students. Without its reliance on underpaid adjuncts, CUNY would have had to close more than a third of its colleges.

Closing colleges has been averted, but the crisis has not. There are a thousand silent crises at CUNY every day.

The result is lost opportunity for individuals, their families, their communities and the state's economy. Many CUNY students take extra years to graduate or never attain degrees because CUNY lacks the resources essential for student success. CUNY's two-year associate's degree graduation rate is six percent; its three-year graduation rate is 18 percent, compared to the national average rate of 22 percent. CUNY's four-year graduation rate is 26 percent; its six-year rate is 55 percent, compared to the national average rate of 59 percent.

Unmet Mandatory Needs, \$97 Million

The FY2021 Executive Budget fails to provide funding for most of CUNY's mandatory cost increases, including collective bargaining increases. The value of the contract that Governor Cuomo strongly supported is undermined when it results in cuts to academic programs. CUNY cannot continue to absorb these costs. The Executive Budget does provide an increase in State funding for fringe benefits at the senior colleges, as it has for the past several years. This year, the fringe benefit funding is \$24 million. Beyond that, the Executive Budget's enumerated investments in the CUNY senior colleges are essentially flat. The fringe benefit funding is critical, but it is far less than CUNY requested to cover its FY 2021 mandatory cost increases for expenses such as rent, energy and collective bargaining.

Fill the Entire TAP Gap at CUNY, \$79 Million

The "TAP Gap" is a structural deficit built into CUNY's budget, and a growing one. The TAP Gap is the difference between the amount the State pays to support the education of the 56,000 TAP recipients at CUNY senior colleges and the actual tuition cost of their education. Tuition is currently \$6,930 at the CUNY senior colleges, but the State's TAP payment to CUNY is capped at \$5,000 per student. By law, the \$1,930 difference must be waived for maximum TAP award recipients. Students who receive partial TAP awards receive partial tuition waivers. The TAP Gap grows with every tuition hike. The waivers for all TAP recipients this year will amount to a combined \$79 million in lost revenue. Next year's planned tuition hike would increase the TAP Gap further.

This policy penalizes public colleges for enrolling low-income students who depend on TAP awards. It especially disadvantages CUNY colleges with large numbers of low-income students.

Middle-income CUNY students, who typically qualify for very little financial aid and still struggle to afford college, are paying almost \$2,000 more per year to attend CUNY than the State is paying for the lowest-income students. CUNY is cannibalizing itself to make up the difference.

CUNY and SUNY need funding to fill the TAP Gap allocated to their FY 2021 operating budgets, and New York needs a structural solution to the TAP Gap going forward.

Invest in New Faculty, Advisors & Mental Health Counselors, \$30 Million

CUNY needs a massive increase in the numbers of faculty, advisors and mental health counselors, far more than can be hired without a fundamental change in the way New York State and New York City choose to fund CUNY. The PSC is calling for such a change and partnering with coalitions and legislators to build the power to make it so. In the context of this year's CUNY budget, we are urging the State and the City to invest a combined \$60 million (NYS: \$30 Million | NYC: \$30 Million) in the faculty and staff that students need at the senior colleges.

Full-time Faculty

CUNY has about half as many full-time faculty per student than the national average for public colleges and depends on adjunct faculty to provide the majority of its instruction. The latest Performance Management Report for CUNY shows that only 39 percent of undergraduate instruction at the senior colleges is provided by full-time faculty. The percentage declines to 35 percent or below at Hunter College, John Jay College, NYC College of Technology and the College of Staten Island.

Even with the advances won in our current contract, adjunct faculty do not have the same teaching conditions as full-time faculty; their best teaching efforts are undermined when they must commute between multiple campuses or hold their office hours in less than adequate spaces. Adjunct faculty are providing instruction that is critical to the mission of CUNY, and many would like full-time positions at CUNY, but the funding for the positions is not available.

CUNY needs 5,000 new full-time faculty to bring it in line with the national average faculty-to-student ratio. The University "aspires to hire 500 new full-time faculty in the next four years," but its request for funding to hire 125 faculty this year was not met in the Executive Budget.

Mental Health Counselors

At CUNY, inadequate mental health counseling is indicative of a broader funding crisis at the senior colleges and a disinvestment in the education, health and life chances of the people that CUNY educates. The International Accreditation of Counseling Services calls for a ratio of one mental health counselor for every 1,000 students. At CUNY, the ratio is closer to 1:2,700. Anyone familiar with the student body at CUNY knows this disparity is a tragedy.

Stress, anxiety and depression are major problems on college campuses where the added pressures of racism and poverty are less extreme than at CUNY. Experts throughout the nation are pointing to a “mental health crisis” on college campuses and mobilizing university-based responses. At CUNY, where many students are struggling just to meet their physiological and safety needs, the response must be in proportion to the pressures students face.

More than 60 percent of CUNY undergraduates have family incomes under \$30,000 a year. Eighty percent are people of color. Forty-five percent are first-generation students. In a recent survey, 48 percent reported being food-insecure in the last 30 days. More than half reported experiencing housing insecurity and 14 percent reported being recently homeless in the same survey.

The need for mental health counselors at CUNY is so great that the University has proposed for the first-time a \$120 fee to fill the demand. The fee would not be covered by TAP. Federal Pell grants can be used for fees, but the low-income students at CUNY who receive Pell need that money for other college costs. CUNY needs more funding from the State and the City, not another fee to add to the financial pressure on students. The PSC opposes the “health and wellness fee” and calls on New York to meet its responsibility to students’ survival.

Academic Advisors

Quality academic advisement helps students to choose the courses they need to meet their prerequisites, stay on track for graduation and make the most of their financial aid. For the 45 percent of CUNY students who are in the first generation of their family to attend college, it should provide guidance that parents and relatives cannot provide from their own experience. Students are more likely to succeed despite financial or academic challenges, or family or work obligations, when they have access to a qualified advisor.

Compared to the overall CUNY student body, students in the Accelerated Studies in Associate Programs (ASAP) initiative, SEEK and other highly resourced programs are less likely to drop out or stop out and more likely to graduate on time. The high retention and completion rates of these programs are due, in large part, to the resources they devote to advisement. As ASAP has scaled up thanks to investments from NYC and the state legislature, CUNY has added academic advisors at a ratio of one advisor to 150 students. The three-year graduation rate of ASAP is 53 percent, as compared to 24 percent for a comparison group of CUNY community college students. The investment in qualified staff makes a tremendous difference. For the rest of CUNY, student-to-adviser ratios can range up to 1,500 students to one advisor.

Increase Base Aid to Community Colleges by \$250 per FTE, \$18 Million

The legislature has been steadily increasing funding for community colleges since the deep budget cuts of the Great Recession. We again thank you for your continued support, but it took eight years for the

legislature to return the Base Aid Rate to a level commensurate with its FY 2009 level. CUNY lost close to a decade in funding growth.

The needs of CUNY's community colleges are great and the drawback of the per-FTE funding model for the community colleges is that it leads to reductions in funding when enrollment declines.

The Executive Budget would reduce funding for CUNY community colleges by \$3.6 million due to enrollment declines. CUNY community college students are predominantly low-income people of color. Compared to CUNY senior college students, they are more likely to have remedial academic needs, to have annual family incomes below \$30,000, to be first-generation students, or to be supporting children. CUNY's community college students need more resources at their colleges, not fewer. The Base Aid Rate of funding for community colleges should be increased by \$250 from \$2,947 per FTE to \$3,197 per FTE to fund education and services, and the formula should be adjusted to average out over three years the enrollments used to calculate community college funding. This reform would smooth out volatility in funding that community colleges receive. At CUNY, the per-FTE increase would add up to about \$18 million in FY 2021.

Restore Legislative Investments, \$8.6 Million

The Executive Budget maintains funding for SEEK, College Discovery and other opportunity programs. We commend Governor Cuomo for leaving intact these critical programs that improve college access and success for CUNY students. We hope that funds that in the past were needed to restore these programs will now be made available to the legislature to make other CUNY investments.

The Executive Budget, however, eliminates funding added by the legislature last year to certain special programs at CUNY, including the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (\$2.5 Million), the CUNY School for Labor and Urban Studies (\$1.75 Million), CUNY LEADs (\$1.5 Million), the CUNY Childcare Centers (\$900 Thousand), and other programs. We urge the legislature to continue its investments in special programs at CUNY.

ASAP is the best-known example of how investment in student success pays off. Its extra investments per CUNY community college student have more than doubled the graduation rate of students enrolled in the program. The scaling up of ASAP to more CUNY students is driving improvements in overall graduation rates at CUNY community colleges. Reports published just last week show that the ASAP model works in other states as well, in settings more similar to SUNY than CUNY. ASAP should be fully funded; it is the example New York should follow.

Sixteen percent of CUNY community college students are supporting children. Research shows that student parents have fewer hours to study and are twice as likely to drop out. The need for childcare at CUNY already exceeds the supply. The legislature should continue its funding for the CUNY Childcare Centers, the School for Labor and Urban Studies, CUNY Leads and for all of the special programs it has supported at CUNY.

Fund Capital Improvement and Critical Maintenance at CUNY

Enrollment at CUNY has increased 40 percent since 2000, but college facilities have not been adequately expanded. Investments in new facilities and technologies are needed to provide an up-to-date learning environment for CUNY's student body. There is simply not enough space for students, faculty and staff. Many of the spaces that are available are in various states of disrepair and are inadequate for today's instructional needs.

CUNY has outmoded science labs and teaching facilities. Many buildings have leaky roofs, crumbling ceiling tiles, floors and walls, old HVAC systems and plumbing, and many other problems. Escalators and elevators are often out of order. Mold is a problem in many CUNY workplaces. In the spring of 2019, at NYC College of Technology, more than two dozen PSC members in admissions, the registrar's office and financial aid reported being sick for reasons that our chapter suspects were related to a mold infestation. York College's entire Performing Arts Center building is closed due to mold.

The mission of CUNY is undermined when faculty, staff and students must work and learn under such conditions. CUNY's Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan for FY 2020-21 through FY 2024-25 requests \$5.2 billion in total funding (State: \$4.5 Billion | City: \$704 Million). For FY 2021, the State's share of the CUNY capital budget request is \$1.08 billion ([Senior Colleges: \\$868 Million | Community Colleges: \\$211 Million](#)).

CUNY needs that capital investment this year, and it needs a five-year plan of funding from Albany for capital improvements so new buildings can be built, facilities can be upgraded, modernized and expanded. The Executive Budget appropriates \$685 million for CUNY's capital needs, including \$248 million for critical maintenance, \$200 million for a new two-to-one matching program for the senior colleges and \$64 million for the community colleges.

Maintenance on many of CUNY's 300 buildings has been long deferred. The investments made in critical maintenance by the State in recent budgets have helped, but much more is needed. The proposed \$248 million investment in critical maintenance at CUNY's senior colleges for FY 2021 should be increased.

The new \$200 million matching program to fund new construction and/or major renovations at CUNY senior colleges requires that for every \$2 invested by the State, campuses contribute \$1 toward project costs. We do not object if alumni and others who support CUNY's mission make major donations to build badly needed new facilities. But the *obligation* to secure outside donations from other sources before receiving public funding could dramatically delay the process for new facilities and major renovations that are needed now.

CUNY is a public university. State funding to fix and build New York's public colleges should be allocated based on the needs of the colleges and their student bodies, not based on the private fundraising prowess of the college presidents, or the wealth of their alumni networks.

Tuition Increases Are Not Sustainable

Affordability is fundamental to CUNY's mission. The PSC, in solidarity with CUNY students, calls for a tuition freeze for FY 2021. We join the growing demand for truly free and fully funded public higher education in New York. CUNY was free for some students for more than a century.

New York should freeze tuition. But the legislature must understand that the tuition freeze must be paired with significantly increased State allocations. Without money to cover the rising costs, quality and student services at the CUNY senior colleges will be critically compromised.

At CUNY, tuition at the senior colleges has increased by 36 percent since FY 2009 and 17 percent since FY 2011, when adjusted for inflation. Community college tuition has increased by 71 percent and 45 percent over the same periods, even though CUNY has been able to freeze tuition at the community colleges since FY 2016.

A recent analysis from NYPIRG estimated that CUNY and SUNY students have paid \$2.5 billion in increased tuition since the enactment of SUNY/CUNY 2020 in 2011. That figure excludes tuition costs that were paid (incompletely because of the TAP Gap) by the State through TAP.

The State's current tuition authorization extends one more year through FY 2021. The Executive Budget, however, proposes another five years of annual tuition hikes of up to \$200 per year through FY 2025. The PSC opposes the extension of five more years of annual tuition increases, especially outside of the context of reconsidering the entire law. And while we always support expansion of opportunity to attend college, we believe that the \$26 million proposed for an increase in the income eligibility level for the Excelsior Scholarship is not the best use of the State's money. Only two percent of CUNY students receive Excelsior Scholarships.

Fair and Progressive Taxation

The only real solution, especially in a year with a \$6.1 billion budget deficit, is progressive taxation. It is absurd that working-class New Yorkers pay a higher effective tax rate than billionaires.

New York should fairly tax corporations, billionaires and the ultra-rich to better fund CUNY, and schools and the services and infrastructure that people depend on. The PSC supports the platform of twelve progressive taxes put forward by the New York Budget Justice coalition that would raise some \$30 billion in new State revenues. More than two-thirds of New Yorkers support such taxes, as do many State legislators. We urge each member of the legislature to add their aggressive support to the push for significant increases in revenues for next year's budget.

Several legislators have also made innovative proposals for new revenue streams specifically to benefit CUNY and SUNY. We applaud their efforts and urge the legislature to support progressive revenue proposals.

New York needs a new approach to CUNY funding, one that invests in lower ratios of full-time faculty to students, robust advisement and counseling, and the other wrap-around support services that ensure students' retention, completion and learning. New York needs A New Deal for CUNY, not another essentially flat operating budget, more tuition hikes and increasing tuition dependence.

There is money in this rich, powerful state for free, high-quality public higher education for all who need and desire it. There is money for a New Deal for CUNY—and for universally great schools, quality health care, better public services and an expanded, well-maintained stock of public housing, too—if we make the progressive political choice to redistribute a fair measure of resources from those who have the most to those who have the least in New York State.

New York Must Invest in CUNY Student Success

Increasing funding for CUNY would be an investment in racial justice, in educational justice, and in redistributive economic justice. Now is the time to begin to make the investment.