



Office of the University Student Senate
555 West 57th Street, 1420
New York, NY 10019
Tel: (646) 664-8844
Fax: (646) 664-8863

2025 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Higher Education
Testimony of Daniel Reden
City University of New York (CUNY) Student Trustee,
CUNY University Student Senate (USS) Chairperson,
February 25, 2025

Dear Esteemed Members of the New York State Assembly Higher Education Committee,

My name is Daniel Reden, and I am a proud student at the CUNY School of Professional Studies. I serve as the Chairperson of the University Student Senate (USS) and as a Student Trustee of the City University of New York (CUNY) Board of Trustees. I am here today to represent over 225,000 CUNY students across our 25 campuses who work tirelessly to achieve their dreams of earning a degree despite facing numerous barriers.

CUNY is the nation's largest urban public university and one of the city's most powerful engines of economic mobility and workforce development. Over 80% of CUNY graduates remain in New York, contributing to every sector of the city's economy—from healthcare to technology to education. Yet, while the university system continues to fuel New York City's growth, its students are too often left to contend with inadequate resources and deteriorating facilities.

I am here today to urge you to fully fund CUNY because doing so would be an investment in New York City's future.

CUNY's Role in Equity and Economic Mobility

CUNY serves a student population that is 76% students of color, with most coming from working and middle-class families. These students face significant challenges, including housing and food insecurity, rising tuition costs, and the increasing cost of transportation. Yet they persevere, determined to graduate, build careers, and give back to the communities they call home.

To truly support these students and ensure their success, the state must prioritize investments in the areas that matter most: transportation, infrastructure, housing, food security, and modern technology.

Transportation: Free Metrocards for CUNY Students

Transportation is one of the most significant barriers to success for CUNY students. Many of my peers cannot afford commuting, leading to missed classes, academic struggles, and even dropping out.

The CUNY Student Commuter Metrocard Pilot Program, included in the FY2026 CUNY Budget Request, is vital to address this issue. The 2025 Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Caucus



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People's Budget also recommends extending free or reduced-cost Metrocards, that is \$75.5 Million Dollars, for all CUNY students, recognizing the critical need for transportation equity.

We propose a partnership between CUNY and the MTA to make it free. By leveraging state funding and congestion pricing revenue, this initiative could:

- Reduce fare evasion, a problem that disproportionately affects low-income students.
- Improve graduation rates, as students would no longer have to choose between attending class and affording the fare to get there.
- Enhance the city's workforce, ensuring that more students graduate and contribute to New York's economy.

Infrastructure: A Crisis in CUNY Facilities

CUNY students learn in buildings that are crumbling around them. Across our campuses, classrooms have leaking ceilings, mold, and peeling paint. Bathrooms are often in such disrepair that they are effectively unusable. These unsafe and outdated conditions undermine the educational experience and contribute to lower graduation rates.

- For example, at my own campus, there are frequent complaints about broken elevators, inaccessible facilities, and insufficient classroom resources. These issues are not isolated—they are systemic, and they require immediate attention.

I propose that CUNY implement a student feedback system to address infrastructure issues in real time. This system could include:

- Surveys tied to technology fees, allowing students to report facility conditions.
- AI-powered tools to identify high-priority issues based on feedback and correlate data to identify recurring problem areas.
- Social media analysis to track complaints and gather evidence for facility repairs.

With sufficient capital funding and modern tools, CUNY can create safe, functional, and inspiring learning environments for its students.

Housing: Supporting Housing-Insecure Students

Many CUNY students are housing insecure, struggling to find stable and affordable places to live while pursuing their education. Expanding and repairing student housing must be a top priority.

I urge the Assembly to:

- Allocate funding for the construction of new student housing.
- Repair and renovate existing student housing to ensure it meets modern standards.
- Develop targeted programs to address housing insecurity among CUNY students, allowing them to focus on their studies without fear of homelessness.



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Food: Combating Hunger on Campus

- Hunger is a silent crisis among CUNY students. Many cannot afford nutritious meals, and food insecurity directly impacts their ability to focus and succeed academically.

To address this, we need:

- Investments to retain vendors and reopen campus cafeterias.
- Funding to support and expand campus food pantries.
- Affordable, nutritious meal options that are accessible to all students.

Modernizing Technology and Resources

To compete in a global economy, CUNY students need access to state-of-the-art technology. Outdated computers, insufficient Wi-Fi, and a lack of modern learning tools place our students at a disadvantage.

Community colleges, in particular, require immediate capital funding to upgrade their facilities and resources to remain competitive and to meet the needs of their students.

Esteemed members of the Higher Education Committee, I urge you to fully fund CUNY. This means:

- Supporting the Student Commuter Metrocard Pilot Program and expanding it to provide free or reduced-cost Metrocards for all students.
- Allocating sufficient capital funding to repair and modernize CUNY facilities.
- Expanding student housing and addressing housing insecurity.
- Combating hunger by investing in campus food services and pantries.
- Providing the technology and resources needed to prepare students for a global workforce.

Investing in CUNY is an investment in the future of New York City. When you fund CUNY, you are funding the dreams of 225,000 students who will become the backbone of this city.

Thank you for your time, your dedication to higher education, and your commitment to supporting New York's students. I am happy to answer any questions and to work with you to achieve these critical goals.

Respectfully,
Daniel Reden
Chairperson, University Student Senate
CUNY Trustee