

**Testimony of The City University of New York
New York City Council Higher Education Committee Hearing
“How Fit are CUNY Facilities?”
April 17, 2024**

Hector Batista

Good afternoon, Chair Dinowitz and esteemed members of the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education. I am Hector Batista, Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer of The City University of New York. With me today is Vice Chancellor of Facilities Planning, Construction and Management Mohamed Attalla, and Senior Vice Chancellor and Chief Financial Officer Sherif Soliman. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We appreciate your continued and unwavering support.

I want to begin by noting that while the University was founded over 175 years ago, our historic mission to provide a first-rate education to all students, regardless of means or background is just as important today. Our commitment to this mission has made CUNY a true engine of social mobility with our graduates diversifying the city's workforce in every sector. And, it's undeniable that our students, faculty and staff contribute to the city's economic, civic, and cultural life.

CUNY is also part of the physical landscape of the city. With 25 campuses spread across the five boroughs, the University has 300 buildings encompassing 29 million square feet dedicated to classrooms, labs, and various facilities supporting our mission. Through our system we have more than 2,400 classrooms CUNY-wide. These spaces are vital, not just to our students and faculty, but also to the communities we serve. As noted, when the Chancellor unveiled the University's Strategic Roadmap, we are committed to undertaking projects to maintain and improve the University's infrastructure, recapture underutilized spaces, improve technology, and provide for campus expansions to support student success. Upgrading our facilities portfolio is vital to ensuring that our graduates are ready for the high-demand industries.

A significant aspect of our infrastructure reality is the age of our facilities. The average age of CUNY's buildings stand at 62 years, with 50% being 52 years and older, and 40 buildings exceeding 100 years old. Some of the areas most challenged due to aging infrastructure include Boilers, Chillers, HVAC Equipment, Elevators, Windows, Roofs, and Electrical infrastructure. This historical depth adds complexity to our maintenance and upgrade strategies, emphasizing the need for careful planning and execution in preserving these assets for future generations.

The upkeep and enhancement of CUNY's extensive facility portfolio, which is overseen by the Office of Facilities Planning Construction and Management ("FPCM"), entails a sizable load of 497 in different Design and Construction phases valued at \$3.5 billion. Adding to our achievements, we've recently wrapped up 44 projects, totaling an impressive \$555 million. An example of one of these major projects is the completion of our new Nursing Education, Research, and Practice Center Building at Lehman College. This is a transformative project, not only for advancing nursing education but for also addressing health inequality in the Bronx. We are thankful for the generous funding and support that made this a reality. And, we were happy that Chair Dinowitz joined us at Lehman for the opening day celebration in February.

Of course, our seven community colleges play critical roles in advancing the CUNY mission by offering students an empowering education and the professional skills they need to succeed. We are committed to providing community college students with modern facilities to support their educational journeys. For example, at Bronx Community College, we are replacing decades old boilers to ensure that the campus is energy efficient but also has reliable heat and hot water. Also at Bronx Community College, we are implementing the 'Bronx Express' which is a consolidation of several departments for improved user efficiency, as well as a considerable utility project "Utility Upgrade Project Phase 5". At Hostos Community College, we are deploying a large HVAC project where (9) air handlers are currently being replaced at 475 Grand Concourse which will contribute significantly to the improvement of air quality. Our projects serve as the seed for the creation of a circular construction industry that reuses construction materials providing for sustainable growth of our Community College programs. New building management systems at Queensborough Community College will reduce energy consumption, eliminate temperature swings and provide a consistent learning environment for our students.

The replacement of critical health and safety systems is a part of two areas of strategic investment. The first is "asset preservation" which is the investment in critical infrastructure – like the boilers at Bronx Community College– and the other is "program growth" which includes new construction like that contemplated in our most recent capital request for a new Applied Health & Sciences Building at Hostos Community College.

Here's the reality of our community college infrastructure—111 buildings, spanning roughly 7.6 million square feet, with an estimated replacement value of \$9.2 billion. Common Facilities Management standards advocate for a renewal budget of about

2% of the replacement value of facilities. For CUNY community colleges, this translates to \$200 million.

Over the past five years, CUNY has received an average of \$64 Million for both Senior and Community Colleges which includes only \$29M for Community Colleges per year in city capital funds, which is only about 0.3% of the estimated replacement value of the facilities. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues and the Administration to secure additional funding to continue modernizing our buildings.

I will now turn it over to Vice Chancellor Attalla to discuss details of our capital planning process, challenges that we are facing and efforts to improve our process.

Mohamed Attalla

1- Introduction and the state of CUNY Facilities

Thank you very much, EVC Batista. Good afternoon, CM Dinowitz and members of the committee. My name is Mohamed Attalla and I joined CUNY in 2021. My mission and the COO's charge has been to improve our capital planning and construction processes, enhance the capacity of the team and develop a plan for a State of Good Repair.

Central to our strategy is the pursuit of system efficiencies and the exploration of new capital funding opportunities. These efforts aim to deliver superior facility performance and ensure a long-term State of Good Repair across all CUNY properties. This includes developing campus-specific procedures for building infrastructure condition assessment, sustainability, and fully realizing the value of our real estate assets.

2- Facilities Condition Assessment and Execution Strategy

We have undertaken a major initiative that is essential for the future of our University – developing a Facilities Condition Assessment. This isn't just a routine evaluation; it's a comprehensive review of our assets that is the cornerstone for our strategic capital planning, guiding us towards informed and impactful decisions.

The Facilities Condition Assessment spanned across twenty campuses and measured approximately 26.9 million square feet. The objective is to determine the current state of repair of all systems and infrastructure and identify any future needs or deferred maintenance backlog.

The assessment identified around 27,000 systems that were then grouped into categories, such as HVAC, Electrical, and Plumbing, among others. These systems include exterior doors, elevators, switchgears, chillers, boilers, and other equipment. Each system was rated based on its existing condition and age-based degradation, as Good, Fair, Poor, or Critical, and the requirements, if any, for each of the systems were identified.

The preliminary assessment concluded that the University would require \$6.8 billion to address the deferred maintenance backlog and capital renewal needs over the next seven years. Of that, \$5.6 billion would be needed to address 18,000 systems that are identified as being 'Vital' for ensuring the safety and integrity of the assets. The top three areas with the highest needs are HVAC, Electrical and Plumbing.

To prioritize capital spending, the University plans to use the data collected through the assessment and implement an approach we are calling the Strategic Method and Responsive Timing, or SMART. This approach involves assessing system groups based on their financial needs and dividing them according to their assessed rating (fair, poor, critical). The University will also consider the recommended life expectancy of those critical items to schedule their replacement action year.

The University's strategic roadmap includes a goal of achieving a 55% of its vital building systems in a State of Good Repair by 2030. The SMART Approach will help the University prioritize capital spending, with an emphasis on efficiency, safety, and cost-effectiveness, all crucial for the smooth and effective operation of its facilities.

3- Process of developing the Capital Request

We recognize the importance of being effective stewards of the precious funding that you allocate for the University's capital needs and that is why we have been focused on administrative improvements to raise the bar on performance. But equally important is our budget planning process so we could advance a capital budget request that meets the expectations of all stakeholders.

I'd like to share with you the process of crafting our annual Capital Request book. The book captures the aspirations of our 25 campuses over the next five years and is the product of strong collaboration between each campus and our central office. The process starts with a series of engaging meetings where we invite every campus to share the projects they envision.

Following these discussions, we evaluate each request, assess the scope, and determine the estimated budget need. The culmination of this exercise is a catalog of individual campus needs, but also system-wide needs as informed by the Facility Condition Assessment and necessary to achieve 55% of our buildings vital systems in a State of Good Repair condition by 2030.

Our capital budget request for FY2025 is the largest to date, reflecting a five-year baseline request of \$400 million for Senior Colleges and \$200 million for Community Colleges to address deferred maintenance State of Good Repair needs and meet ongoing infrastructure needs and also support some programmatic needs.

The five-year request also includes \$170 million per year for Senior Colleges and \$29 million for Community Colleges to support the University's sustainability projects. These initiatives are aligned with our Strategic Energy Management Plan, aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions significantly by 2030 and achieve both State and City mandates.

Recognizing the critical role of science and technology in contemporary education and research, we are requesting \$50 million a year for Senior Colleges and \$12 million per year for Community Colleges to upgrade our science labs. These renovations will enhance the learning experience, support cutting-edge research, and contribute to student success and retention across the disciplines.

To further these goals, we're also focusing on large capital projects that modernize our facilities and align with CUNY's strategic direction. Projects like the renovations at Baruch College, Brooklyn College, and the request for new facilities at York and Medgar Evers Colleges underscore our commitment to providing state-of-the-art educational environments.

4- Community Colleges Capital Needs vs funding levels

Community colleges are a crucial priority, with plans for new and enhanced facilities like the Applied Health & Sciences Building at Hostos Community College.

As EVC Batista mentioned, the community college portfolio totals 111 buildings, and about 7.6 million square feet with an estimated replacement value of about \$9.2 billion, which translates to the need for \$200 million a year to keep these facilities in a state-of-good repair.

CUNY's FY25 January capital budget was \$735 million (FY24 – FY28), while the City's five-year capital budget was \$85 billion. CUNY is less than one percent of the City's capital portfolio. CUNY has made strides to demonstrate that it can deliver higher registrations, over 100% of plan in FY23.

It is our hope that we can continue to capitalize on our momentum with additional funding. We understand the fiscal challenges with capital funding, specifically outlined in the call letter memo explaining that cuts were needed due to the limit imposed by the New York State Constitution on the City's ability to borrow. The limit is based on a five-year rolling average of New York City property values, which declined sharply during the pandemic.

CUNY has been having positive conversations with OMB about our capital program, and we look forward to working with the Administration and you and your colleagues to allow CUNY to continue that momentum by securing additional funding to improve our overall campus environment at our community colleges.

5- Administrative Process to spend the allocated funds

CUNY makes every effort to maximize every capital dollar we receive to ensure efficient and timely project delivery. Once CUNY receives generous support, we navigate the detailed administrative processes that require approvals from OMB and the State's Division of Budget. For CUNY projects, we detail the project's needs, costs, and tracking details as required for the City's Certificate-to-Proceed process.

We take great care to clearly define these details to ensure that the timeline for the CP process is as short as possible, preventing a prolonging of the process that could result from additional factors like project detail questions and revisions.

After obtaining city OMB approval and receiving the Proceed Directive, contract registration with the city's Comptroller's Office is required. Comptroller's Directive 10 requires projects to be fully funded within the fiscal year before registration. This can delay projects, especially if funding is incremental.

The Preliminary Budget's capital cuts, necessitated by the New York State Constitution's borrowing limits, impacted CUNY's capital program. We responded by reducing future "lump-sum" allocations, affecting our ability to fund urgent capital needs.

These delays of crucial projects that are essential for our modernization efforts and the well-being of our community. Commitment delays are more than administrative

balancing; they represent delays in advancements that can truly make a difference for our students and for the city.

CUNY's commitment plan highlights delays in projects waiting for full funding. Despite these challenges, CUNY registered over 100% in FY23, a testament to potential success when delays are minimized. If additional funding materializes, we can maintain high project commitment rates and aim to spend \$200 million annually on community college repairs.

6- Steps towards CUNY's process improvements and capabilities

Finally, I'd like to share the progress and plans the University has made specifically our efforts to enhance our annual spending and the volume of completion of our projects.

To achieve these goals, CUNY has been proactive in implementing several key initiatives. Let me walk you through some of these:

First, we established a Project Management Office, or PMO. This move was designed to bolster our team's capacity to deliver projects not just on time, but within budget. The PMO is playing a crucial role in improving our department's reporting capabilities, which in turn, supports better decision-making and project monitoring.

We've also taken steps to redefine the roles of our Project Managers and Assistant Directors. This was done to heighten accountability and ensure our leaders are more directly involved in the management of projects. We're moving towards a model where involvement and oversight are key.

We've also introduced a new Project Management Methodology to guide our processes and unify our steps. This provides a clear roadmap for efficient project management.

Technology plays a big part in our strategy, too. We're implementing PMWEB, a project management tool, across our operations. This technology integrates functions like schedule management, cost, procurement, budgeting, and accounting. Furthermore, DASNY, also, utilizes the same technology, and we're working closely with them to ensure seamless integration.

Standardization is another area we're focusing on, particularly in reporting. We've introduced new levels of reporting, both micro and macro, across project management. This includes a variety of reports that offer greater visibility into our projects.

Collaboration with DASNY has been instrumental. Together, we're looking at ways to enhance project outcomes through various activities. This includes everything from streamlining, project scoping, expediting design completion, contract awards, and contractor's accountability and all with the objective to increase annual spending and deal with the funding backlog.

As mentioned earlier, significant effort has been made by our Facility Condition Assessment. By engaging a third-party consultant, we've gained a comprehensive understanding of the condition of our buildings, which is critical for planning and achieving our State of Good Repair objectives.

Maintenance is also key. We're upgrading our maintenance capabilities to ensure all campuses can perform to a standardized level of maintenance. This includes regular and preventive maintenance for critical components like elevators, boilers, and fire alarms.

On the procurement front, we've improved our capabilities to procure services more efficiently. This has been done by integrating procurement into our PMWEB application. We have also established over 250 Requirements Contracts in all disciplines of Design and Construction in order to facilitate faster procurements of vendors, which therefore reduces project times and enhance completion.

Lastly, on the sustainability front, we've developed Energy Management Master Plans for our colleges, aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve infrastructure conditions, contributing to our State of Good Repair initiative.

As we navigate the complexities of aligning our aspirations with the realities of budget constraints, our narrative evolves. Again, FY2025 capital budget request reflects our unwavering commitment to this journey. It's a call to action, seeking support not just for maintenance but for transformation, ensuring our campuses are safe, sustainable, and conducive to the high-quality education that defines CUNY.

In closing, it's important to note that the essence of our mission transcends the physical state of our facilities. It's about nurturing an environment where education thrives, where students are empowered to succeed, and where communities are strengthened. With your support, we can realize this vision, ensuring that CUNY not only stands in a state of good repair, but shines as a pillar of opportunity, social mobility, and educational excellence.

Building a Greener NYC Starts With CUNY

Testimony of John Surico

Senior Fellow for Climate and Opportunity, Center for an Urban Future

Before the New York City Council

Committee on Higher Education

April 17th, 2024

Good afternoon. I'm John Surico, the Senior Fellow for Climate and Opportunity at the Center for an Urban Future, an independent think tank focused on creating a stronger and more inclusive economy in New York. Thank you to Chair Dinowitz and this committee for the opportunity to testify.

The Center for an Urban Future has published extensive research on opportunities for policymakers to strengthen CUNY as the city's most important economic mobility engine—from launching CUNY Reconnect to expanding the vital CUNY ACE program. But policymakers have another massive opportunity ahead: to help that engine go green.

Building a greener CUNY won't just help the city meet its crucial emissions reduction goals. It will also modernize an institution that helps more New Yorkers achieve economic mobility than any other, but, sadly, is also home to an alarming number of buildings that are failing its mostly low-income students.

CUNY's nearly 300 buildings cover 28 million ground square feet. The [majority](#) are over 50 years old, reliant on gas- and oil-fired boilers and window A/Cs. They are equipped with their original single-pane glass windows, insufficient insulation, and fixtures consuming far more resources than modern alternatives. Only about 8 percent are in a state of good repair.

Even so, CUNY has made progress. After a pandemic lull, the system's carbon emissions intensity continued to drop in 2022 and 2023. But the system now faces a 24 percent cut to capital funding, which was already woefully insufficient to meet basic needs, let alone help slash the system's carbon footprint. CUNY has [developed](#) a [smart five-year plan](#) to meet its climate goals, but lacks the resources to see it through.

Meeting the city and state's commendable targets for carbon emission reduction will be all but impossible without a major new focus on helping decarbonize CUNY.

Now is the time to act. State and federal legislation has catalyzed billions of dollars in new funding and financing for building retrofits. New York should leverage this moment to make a generational investment in CUNY's net-zero future.

Fortunately, this effort has a secret weapon: CUNY itself. The CUNY Building Performance Lab serves as a hands-on research center for New York's decarbonization efforts. City College has

cutting-edge renewable energy and building electrification research centers. Students can earn degrees and certifications in everything from clean energy HVAC to solar power to sustainability in the urban environment.

CUNY has the talent to realize this vision, with a sustained capital investment.

The next steps are clear. First, this Council should lead a major new initiative to green CUNY and identify it as a key target for federal and state decarbonization funds. Second, City Hall and Albany should work together to boost CUNY capital investment in this and future budgets, with a focus on decarbonization and state of good repair needs. Third, city and state leaders should work with CUNY officials to harness its immense pool of talent to build a more sustainable future.

By tapping into this unprecedented alignment, the nation's most effective public university can become its greenest, too. Thank you.



MANHATTAN | 1010 Avenue of the Americas, Suite 301, New York, NY 10018
tel: 212.674.2300 fax: 212.254.5953 vp: 646.350.2681

QUEENS | 80-02 Kew Gardens Road, Suite 400, Kew Gardens, NY 11415
tel: 646.442.1520 fax: 357.561.4883

www.cidny.org

Testimony for the Committee on Higher Education in Support of Better ADA Compliance on CUNY Campuses

April 18, 2024

To Whom it Concerns:

My name is Molly Senack, and I am testifying today on behalf of the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY) as their Education and Employment Community Organizer. This testimony is supported by Sharon McLennon Wier, Ph.D., MEd., CRC, LMHC, Executive Director of CIDNY.

True accessibility on college campuses is crucial for students with disabilities. According to the US Census 2022 American Community Survey, 21% of undergraduate students and 11% of graduate students reported having a disability during the 2019-2020 school year. Yet only 8% of students, or about a quarter of students who privately reported having a disability, registered as having a disability with their institutions. This discrepancy is consistent with a 2022 report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which found that only 37% of students who acknowledged having a disability registered with their institution.

If the majority of students with disabilities on college campuses are choosing not to report, there has to be a reason. The National Center for College Students with Disabilities has found that the most significant barriers to access and participation on college campuses include fear of discrimination or feeling unwelcome, challenges navigating necessary campus procedures, being unaware of resources and services the student might qualify for, faculty being unaware of resources and services they might qualify for (or the faculty being aware of these supports, but being unresponsive or uncooperative in providing them), and receiving inadequate accommodations from the school. That same 2022 NCES report found that of the 37% of students with disabilities who reported their disability to their school, almost 40% did not receive accommodations when they asked for them.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), students with disabilities are entitled to an accessible college campus, but it is important to acknowledge how broad the definition of "accessible" is. Accessibility must exist in all forms (accommodations can be physical, technological, sensory, etc.), in all spaces, and at all stages of the college experience, from application through graduation.

In recent years, New York State has made a significant effort to improve financial accessibility for students enrolled in the City University of New York (CUNY) system. The Accelerated Study in Associate Program (ASAP) provides textbook fees, transportation stipends, free tutoring, and tuition funds. The program has successfully improved graduation rates to 53%, versus 25% of a statistically matched group for the third of CUNY students who are enrolled in the program.

However, despite the progress in this particular area of accessibility, many CUNY campuses fall short of what the ADA stipulates: classrooms, libraries, students housing, dining facilities, and offices are not always physically accessible. Signs, including on bathrooms and classrooms are not always available in large print or Braille. There are shortages in assistive technology (e.g. screen readers). Students with learning, mental, or developmental disabilities who are entitled to accommodations within the classroom must often depend on professors who do not know how to offer aid.

A report published earlier this month by the office of the NYC Comptroller presents a comprehensive view of CUNY campuses. It breaks down the demographics of its students by age, race, the degree they are pursuing and how they are paying for it. It breaks down its staff demographics, its admission policies, and the industries its graduates joined. Disability is not mentioned. We urge the Council to consider the importance of ADA compliance on CUNY campuses, and ask that making all of CUNY's campuses accessible for students with disabilities be central in any conversations regarding the fitness of CUNY's facilities.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Molly Senack (She/Her)
Education and Employment Community Organizer
Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York
Email: msenack@cidny.org Phone: (917)-415-3154



University Student Senate
555 West 57th Street, 1420
New York, NY 10019
Tel: (646) 664-8844
Website: www.usscuny.org

New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
City University of New York: New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on
The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2025, The Preliminary Capital Plan for Fiscal
Years 2024-2028, and The Fiscal 2024 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report
Testimony of Salimatou Doumbouya
Student Trustee, Student Government President of New York City College of Technology,
City University of New York (CUNY)
USS Chairperson, CUNY University Student Senate (USS)
March 18th, 2024

Dear esteemed members of the New York City Council,

My name is Salimatou Doumbouya, a proud student of the New York City College of Technology and a graduate of Borough of Manhattan Community College. I stand before you today not just as University Student Senate Chair or student trustee, but as a representative of the future workforce that this city will depend on. I am here to advocate for the 225,000 students of CUNY and to discuss the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2025, the Preliminary Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2024-2028, and the Fiscal 2024 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report.

The City University of New York (CUNY) is more than just an institution of higher learning. It is an economic engine that fuels the city's growth by educating its workforce and economically uplifting families. Our students are the city's future engineers, teachers, nurses, and entrepreneurs. Investing in CUNY is investing in the city's future.

The need for New York City to revitalize its workforce is apparent. CUNY students can serve as the workforce needed to make city agencies more responsive to the needs of New Yorkers. In response to a growing mental health crisis, CUNY students are in opportune positions to impact the industry.

However, to continue playing this crucial role, CUNY needs to be fully funded. We need additional funding for transportation, mental health services, support for students with disabilities, housing, and food. These are not luxuries, but necessities for our students to succeed.

Transportation is a significant barrier for many students. Additional funding of \$37 million could subsidize MetroCards for students, ensuring that no student misses class because they cannot afford the fare.

Mental health is another critical area. Balancing school, work, and personal life can be overwhelming. By increasing funding for mental health services by \$5 mil, we can provide students with the reliable support they need to thrive academically and personally. Students can also be trained as mental health service providers.



University Student Senate
555 West 57th Street, 1420
New York, NY 10019
Tel: (646) 664-8844
Website: www.usscuny.org

Students with disabilities face unique challenges that can hinder their academic progress. Additional funding of \$7 million can provide them with the necessary accommodations and support services, ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed.

Lastly, no student should have to worry about **housing and food**. Yet, many of our students are housing insecure or do not know where their next meal will come from. Increased funding of student well-being initiatives of \$7.5 mil can expand housing assistance programs and food pantries, ensuring that all students have a safe place to live and enough to eat.

Esteemed members, I urge you to consider these requests as you review the budget and capital plan. Remember that when you invest in CUNY, you are investing in the future of New York City.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Salimatou Doumbouya
CUNY Trustee
University Student Senate Chairperson
Student Government President of New York City College of Technology



**New York City Council
Committee on Higher Education
Submitted by Clementina Jose, Young Invincibles
Wednesday, April 17, 2024**

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Clementina Jose and I am a NY Youth Advisory Board member at Young Invincibles. I want to thank the New York City Council, especially the Committee on Higher Education, for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing concerning my experiences with CUNY's facilities.

During my two years at York College before transferring, I encountered significant challenges with the campus facilities. I vividly remember instances where I couldn't occupy certain seats due to deteriorating ceilings or sagging structures with fluids, which required frequent chair relocations. Moreover, elevators and escalators would constantly malfunction, which created constant inconveniences. It was a weekly bet among my friends and me concerning whether the elevators would be operating that day, and they seldom were. It's essential to recognize that while I am able-bodied, these challenges also impact my disabled counterparts, highlighting the need for accessible infrastructure for all members of the campus community. These issues significantly detracted from the quality of the academic environment and student experience at York College.

If you ask any York College student about their experience, complaints are almost inevitable in nearly every sentence. Many expressed plans to transfer out soon due to frustrations with the campus infrastructure and their overall experience.

Eventually, I found myself at the Hunter Silberman School of Social Work, where the contrast in infrastructure was striking. The facilities were modern and well-maintained. They also had highly functional bathrooms and elevators; they didn't have deteriorating ceilings or noticeable paint chips. Not to mention, the academic atmosphere had inviting colors. This shift underscored the importance of investing in quality infrastructure to enhance the student experience and foster a conducive learning environment. Ultimately, every student deserves a safe and clean academic environment.

Therefore, I implore the New York City Council to consider renovating CUNY campuses to enhance their modernity, and accessibility, and address issues like deteriorating ceilings. Every CUNY student deserves a quality experience, regardless of their borough of residence. It's imperative to prioritize these improvements to ensure equitable access to education

Again, thank you to the Higher Education Committee for allowing me to speak with you today and share my experiences.

YOUNG INVINCIBLES

**New York City Council
Committee on Higher Education
Hearing on CUNY Infrastructure
Submitted by Malika Christopher, Young Invincibles
April 17, 2024**

Good afternoon, my name is Malika Christopher, and I am a NY Youth Advisory Board member at Young Invincibles. I am a CUNY York College alumna and a senior at the CUNY School of Public Health. Thank you to the NYC Council Committees on Higher Education for the opportunity to provide written testimony of my firsthand experiences with CUNY's facilities.

I've lived close to CUNY York College my entire life and have been on campus for various iterations - whether it was for Science Engineering Mathematics Aerospace Academy (SEMAA) Saturday school in elementary school, attending undergraduate classes or voting during a local election. As a student, I have witnessed buildings, escalators, elevators and fields that need repair and maintenance. These issues pose significant challenges for students, staff and community members alike. The soccer and track field has been deprecated for about a decade. Once a thriving place to host soccer games and track meets, it has been abandoned and useless. I am a former Track & Field and Tennis athlete and have endured shin splints and pain from running in the outdoor space of the Physical Education building due to the uneven ground and hills instead of the designated area. I often spoke with fellow students about how the soccer/track and field area would make a great community space and could've been efficiently used during COVID-19 to encourage distant physical activity. In addition, the tennis court has weeds and torn nets and is inaccessible to students unless you're on the team. Once facilities are updated, designated open hours should be established. I was often embarrassed to face off against other teams, especially after playing on their campuses. Because of my school and my neighborhood, I am used to people passing judgment about me. It's difficult to have pride when the reputation of York worsens with the crumbling infrastructure.

In addition, last year, I signed up for alumni benefits to gain access to indoor fitness center facilities. After a week, I didn't return. Much of the equipment remains unchanged from my undergraduate days in 2017, showing signs of wear with peeling paint, faded cushions, discolorations, and several machines being out of order. Lastly, I visited campus a few days ago as it was a designated polling site, and I was disgusted by the condition of the restroom. The toilets are discolored, and there aren't automatic soap dispensers or dryers. In 2024, this should be an expectation, as well as a basket for menstrual care products and feminine hygiene for student cleanliness.

In contrast to my experiences at CUNY York College, I am currently a student at the CUNY School of Public Health, which has occupied its space for six years. The difference in the physical environment is stark. The computers are well-maintained and free of dust, contributing to a more pleasant and efficient workspace. This clean and organized environment has had a positive impact on my mental health, making my time on campus a far more positive experience than my years spent at CUNY York College.

It is crucial for our elected officials to understand the physical state of our campuses and its direct impact on our academic environment and well-being. Neglecting these issues not only undermines the quality of education but also jeopardizes the dignity of everyone involved. I strongly urge our elected officials to prioritize investments in structure to ensure all students have equitable access to a conducive and clean learning environment. This is not just a matter of infrastructure, but a reflection of our commitment to excellence and our diverse student body. Thank you for the opportunity to advocate for these necessary improvements in CUNY campuses. Together, we can make a difference.



**New York City Council
Committee on Higher Education
Submitted by Onyekachi Okeke, Young Invincibles
Wednesday, April 15, 2024**

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Onyekachi Okeke, and I am a member of the NY Youth Advisory Board at Young Invincibles. I want to thank the New York City Council, especially the Committee on Higher Education, for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. I am here today to speak about infrastructure issues at my campus, Hunter College.

Attending Hunter as an undergrad, I always witnessed many students bustling through the hallways, moving from classes to student clubs, cafeterias, libraries, offices and the like. Key transportation methods were the elevators and escalators, which unfortunately have been well-known for malfunctioning numerous times. Along with a large crowd of students, faculty, and staff, I would be forced to wait for unreasonable periods of time due to having only two or three elevators function properly out of the many elevators in CUNY Hunter College's North Building. The elevators present were continuously broken for semesters long, rendering students late for classes, such as myself, who would have to travel from the first floor to the highest floor, the sixteenth. This inconvenience often proved time without number to be a major disservice when needing to go to different classes, and in addition, resulted in the few elevators that did work being packed with people; this could be regarded as both a health concern especially upon the return to in-person classes during the COVID-19 pandemic and another hindrance, forcing people to wait for even more additional time for the next available elevator to take. Coupled with this, the escalators would often freeze mid-way, causing students to trek up the escalators, resulting in "traffic jams" in which a staggeringly huge crowd of mainly students would be stuck, huddled together on top of one another at often the busiest traffic points (the third floor of the East building), and several other floors. This often resulted in potential safety hazards, such as having many students packed on top of one another at busy times and points of entry and exit. Hunter College which has the largest CUNY undergraduate population, should not endure having malfunctioning elevators and escalators that will disservice the hundreds of undergraduates, staff, and faculty that walk the halls daily.

It's important to recognize the progress made by Hunter College in enhancing its infrastructure. The opening of the fifth floor of the Leon & Toby Cooperman Library in the East Building has significantly improved the study and gathering spaces for students. This positive change has been widely appreciated and has notably enhanced the overall experience for Hunter students.

Therefore, I strongly urge the New York City Council to prioritize the repair and maintenance of CUNY infrastructure. Thank you once again to the Higher Education Committee for this

opportunity to share my experiences and stress the importance of continuous investment in improving CUNY's infrastructure.

Good afternoon. Thank you for holding this hearing and giving us the opportunity to share with you.

My name is Jean Grassman and I'm an Associate Professor at the CUNY Graduate School of Public Health in the Department of Environmental, Occupational, and Geospatial Health Sciences

I'm going to speak to the desperate need for funding to improve our building's physical infrastructure so that the nearly 42,000 instructional and classified CUNY employees (of whom nearly 30,000 are PSC members) along with over 225,000 students have safer and healthier conditions in which to work and learn.

I'm well qualified to address this topic. Professionally, I'm a certified industrial hygienist with experience in consulting, teaching and doing research in occupational and environmental health. I've been a Health and Safety Coordinator at the PSC for 15 years and during that time, I've been to virtually every CUNY campus and done walkthroughs in dozens of buildings.

From CUNY's website, we know that the university has more than 300 buildings with an average age exceeding 50 years. Fifty of these were built before 1929. Their environmental controls are outdated — they're often extremely hot or extremely cold and more ominously, lacking adequate ventilation.

It's not surprising that upkeep is a challenge but what we experience at CUNY is the consequence of decades of deferred maintenance, which is not merely unsightly, it is dangerous.

As an example, consider some of the infrastructure related problems at Bronx Community College. BCC is a black and Hispanic serving school where the majority of students receive financial aid and 40% have annual household incomes less than \$15,000.

In 2019, heating pipes in Colstan Hall froze flooding dozens of offices and classrooms raising concerns about mold and forcing relocation for 6 weeks.

You might say, well, that was a long time ago.

Just last year, the heat went out in several buildings including Meister Hall leaving students, staff, and faculty shivering for weeks despite pleas for relief from the

New York City Council Higher Education Hearing
Jean Grassman jean.grassman@sph.cuny.edu
April 17, 2024

cold. It was only after the situation was covered in a national story published in [Inside Higher Education](#), was a mobile boiler brought in to provide heat.

You might say, that was an isolated incident but....

Early last year, a steam pipe broke in a classroom in Colstan Hall soaking rooms 302 and 303. Let me repeat that, a steam pipe in a classroom broke. Luckily, no one was present and there were no injuries.

So there's a pattern of failure. Also consider

When we were doing a COVID reoccupancy walkthroughs at BCC, one of our members was horrified by decayed condition of the classrooms. I will include a photo with my testimony. It was so bad that the instructor was in tears and pleaded for a better space saying "please do it for the dignity of my students"

BCC is not the only campus with problems – I could tell you about the extremely hot studio temperatures or the black goo dripping from a ceiling at Brooklyn College, the water leaks and associated black mold at BMCC, Medgar Evers, City College, City Tech and so on but I only have three minutes.

I urge you support the funding needed, as we at the PSC will, to correct these conditions. The focus on improving working conditions comes with many levels of benefits – not only does it reduce the burden of illness and injury for our members but also permits us to better do the work that we love at CUNY.

New York City Council Higher Education Hearing
Jean Grassman jean.grassman@sph.cuny.edu
April 17, 2024

Room 804 Meister Hall, Bronx Community College



Richard Jones

The City College of New York, Class of 2024

Double Major in Political Science and History

Student Liaison with the CUNY Rising Alliance

When I first saw City College in 2019 I was, frankly, underwhelmed.

I chose this school because of the academics. I allowed myself to accept that college was simply class and home. Why spend time on campus when the college abandons upkeep of the public spaces and facilities?

The North Academic Center at City College, for example, is an asbestos ridden monstrosity. When I began college, the upper plaza and bridge connecting to Marshak, across the street, was closed. The plaza is open now, with no work done, but the bridge connecting the two buildings is still closed, it took 5 years to start working on it.

Elevators, escalators, and even the plumbing barely work, with buckets, trashcans, and ceiling tiles; moving, vanishing, and perpetually dripping. The outdated elevators and escalators are perpetually being repaired. I should not hear stories of professors being hurt because all the accessible options to get upstairs are out of service.

My own experiences alone makes me consider keeping count if the train or having to walk up seven flights of stairs have made me more late for class.

Your funds primarily benefit Community Colleges, and I'm here as an advocate for these Community Colleges too. They face the same issues as the four year schools like broken heating and bad ventilation perpetuated by chronic disinvestment from the city.

CUNY graduates provide so much benefit to the city and so many of them stay to show their commitment to New York, in spite of the innumerable options in and outside New York City.

As the Mayor continues to push for disinvestment, this makes CUNY a less attractive choice to prospective students.

In the face of CUNY's severe infrastructural issues, and pleas from faculty, students, and alumni, will you uphold the promise of CUNY and provide quality places of learning and working for New Yorkers? Or will you continue to disinvest and risk the educational pillar of modern New York City crumbling, literally and figuratively?

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 04/17/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Johanna von Meade

Address: _____

I represent: CUNY Students

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 04/17/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Juan Carlos Vasquez

Address: _____ Bronx NY 10452

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SONOT FIDELIA CARP FIMLEY

Address: _____ BAYSIDE 11360

I represent: YASSA/SHOF

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Abiah Suck

Address: _____

I represent: CUNY - York

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jean Grassman

Address: _____, Brooklyn

I represent: PSC CUNY

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4-17-24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Peter Koloz

Address: _____, Bronx NY 10471

I represent: PSC

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/17/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ALYSON BARDSLEY

Address: [REDACTED] / 51 10301

I represent: CSI / PSC

Address: 2800 Victory Blvd 51 10314

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/19/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ayesha Schmitt

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: New York Public Interest Research Group

Address: 9 Murray St lower level

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 04/17/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JOHNSON

Address: _____

I represent: CENTER FOR AN URBAN FUTURE

Address: 80 EIGHTH AVE

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL *4/17/201*
THE CITY OF NEW YORK *2/4/29*

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: *Ahmed F. Abdulkarim Fardave*

Address: *CFO and Senior Vice Chancellor*

I represent: *CUNY*

Address: *CUNY*

THE COUNCIL *CUNY*
THE CITY OF NEW YORK *4/17*

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: *Hector Batista, Executive*

Address: *Vice Chancellor and COO*

I represent: *CUNY*

Address: *205 East 42nd NY NY*

THE COUNCIL *CUNY*
THE CITY OF NEW YORK *4/17*

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: *Mohamed Attalia*

Address: *Vice Chancellor of Facilities*

I represent: *Planning - CUNY*

Address: _____



Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/17/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Richard Jones

Address: _____

I represent: City UNIVERSITY of New York

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/17/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Erin Lawson

Address: 429 E 52nd St

I represent: New Yorkers for Higher Ed Funding Justice

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Heather Jones

Address: _____

I represent: Brooklyn College

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms