

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

----- X

March 13, 2025

Start: 1:01 p.m.

Recess: 3:10 p.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: Eric Dinowitz  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Erik D. Bottcher  
Gale A. Brewer  
Oswald Feliz  
Christopher Marte

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Alicia Alvero  
CUNY Interim Executive Vice Chancellor and  
University Provost

Hector Batista  
CUNY Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief  
Operating Officer

Sherif Soliman  
CUNY Senior Vice Chancellor for Budget and  
Finance and Chief Financial Officer

Sascha Owen  
CUNY Senior Vice Chancellor for Strategy and  
Policy Implementation

James Davis  
President of PSC CUNY

Madison Pickney  
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

Samantha Ventura  
Bronx Community College

Dainma Martinez  
Hostos Community College

Davia Willis  
CUNY University Student Senate

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Akkeem Polack  
York College Student, Student Government  
President

Tahisha Fields  
Baruch College

Daniel Reden  
CUNY

Christopher Leon Johnson

John Jara  
CUNY

Sharon Brown



SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good afternoon and welcome to the New York City Council hearing of the Committee on Higher Education. At this time, can everybody please silence your cell phones? If you wish to testify, please go to the back of the room to fill out a testimony slip. At this time and going forward, no one is to approach the dais. I repeat, no one is to approach to approach the dais. Chair, we are ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. Good afternoon everyone. I'm Council Member Eric Dinowitz, Chair of the Committee on Higher Education, proud CUNY alum, proud husband of a CUNY alum, proud brother of a CUNY alum, proud son of a CUNY-- we're a CUNY family, you could tell. Welcome to today's hearing on the City's Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Budget for the City University of New York, CUNY. CUNY's Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Budget totals \$1.28 billion which includes a funding of \$916 million in personnel services to support over 6,000 fulltime positions and nearly \$370 million in other than personnel services spending. In this preliminary plan, CUNY's budget has decreased by roughly \$85 million compared to last year's Adopted Budget. The difference is mainly the

result of various CUNY programs not funded in Fiscal 2026, as well as the absence of a partial restoration to the program to eliminate the gap, the PEG. CUNY has great and really impactful important programs like Reconnect, ASAP and ACE. They're essential to ensuring that higher education remains accessible to all New Yorkers. The return on investment is clear, and we must continue to prioritize groups that uplift underserved and marginalized communities. CUNY consists of 25 colleges throughout all five boroughs. At today's hearing we will examine the University capital budget to ensure that it provides equity for repairs and maintenance across all colleges. I would like to emphasize the serious need for innovation at CUNY Hostos in the Bronx. I look forward to hearing about other CUNY colleges that are in need of structural capital improvements as well. It is imperative that our campuses are kept up-to-date and attract new students, ensure safety and academic success for all. CUNY plays a vital role in encouraging New Yorkers to pursue higher education which contributes to making New York City vibrant. Regardless of the actions by the federal government, CUNY must continue to prioritize its mission of

encouraging all potential students to access higher education. Programs like the Black Male Initiative and a Search for Education Elevation and Knowledge, or SEEK program, must be prioritized by not only CUNY, but by the mayoral administration as well. At today's hearing we hope to hear about the funding changes in this preliminary plan, CUNY's fiscal 2026 budget needs, and CUNY's current vacancies. We will seek clarity on the impact of the federal administration's policies that may impact grants allocated to CUNY research. Furthermore among other topics, we will analyze the proposed New York State Fiscal 2026 Executive Budget allocation to some CUNY programs. CUNY has the power to bring positive change to New York City, and we must continue to fund creative programs to better serve existing students and attract the perspective ones. In the Speaker's 2025 State of the City she advocated for a couple of new initiatives, including CUNY Flex. We will question the University to know whether they align with these proposed initiatives and how the budget prioritizes them as we move forward to the Executive Budget. I wish to thank our committee staff for their work in preparing for this budget hearing,

including Allie Stofer [sp?], Florentine Kabore[sp?],  
Regina Paul, Julie Goldsmith-Pinkham [sp?], and my  
Budget and Legislation Director, Adam Staropoli[sp?].

I would like to remind everyone who wishes to testify  
in-person today that you must fill out an appearance  
card which is located at the Sergeant of Arms near  
the entrance of the room. Please fill it out even if  
you have already registered to testify in advance.

To allow as many people as possible to testify,  
public testimony will be limited to two minutes per  
person. Please note that witnesses who are here will  
testify before those on Zoom. Colleagues will limit  
their questions and comments to five minutes. In  
accordance to the rules of the Council, I will  
administer the affirmation to the witnesses from  
CUNY. Please raise your right hand. Do you affirm  
to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but  
the truth in your testimony before this committee and  
to respond honestly to Council Member's questions?

Thank you. As a reminder to all of our witnesses,  
please state your name prior to the testimony for the  
record.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: Good  
afternoon, Chair Dinowitz and members of the City



Council Higher Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to be here this afternoon. I am Alicia Alvero, Interim Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost for the City University of New York since November 2024. I am joined today by CUNY's Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer, Hector Batista, and CUNY's Senior Vice Chancellor for Budget and Finance and Chief Financial Officer Sherif Soliman. I want to thank the City Council for your steadfast commitment to CUNY, our mission, our programs, and most of all to transforming the lives of our students. Like many of you, I have my own story of CUNY transformation. I came to New York City in 2003 when I accepted a faculty position at Queens College. My now 24-year-old daughter attended daycare on campus and then graduated from Queens College in 2022. We could not continue our work without the tremendous support from our partners in government. Undoubtedly, the Council support has shaped our success in our ability to meet our students' needs and our City's needs for highly-skilled and adaptable workforce. You invest in CUNY because you understand the value we bring to each community in the five boroughs. Each year, over 80

percent of our 50,000 graduates choose to stay in the City, enriching every sector of the workforce and fostering economic and civic growth that benefits the City and State. CUNY alumni in New York generate approximately \$70 billion in annual earnings and contribute nearly five percent to the State's GDP. Moreover, when considering their enhanced future earnings and the tax revenues they generate, each taxpayer dollar invested in CUNY yields a return of at least \$15 dollars for New York State. Over the past year, CUNY has continued to earn recognition for its unwavering commitment to academic opportunity, affordability, and excellence, and its role as the nation's most potent engine of upward economic and social mobility. One of our most important advances is the CUNY Transfer initiative which has revolutionized the transition process for students moving from community colleges to four-year programs. We have developed a tool that allows every student to view their transferred credits immediately upon acceptance into a college before enrolling, allowing them to make more informed decisions about their academic path. Faculty have also aligned six of the most common transfer majors, accounting, computer

science, biology, mathematics, psychology, and sociology, ensuring that the most transfer students retain credits in their majors. This is just the beginning. We will continue to streamline practices and policies to remove obstacles to credit transfer, decreasing students' time to graduation and saving them an average of \$1,220 in tuition. CUNY has also continued to strengthen career pathways for students and partnered with employers to address workforce needs for the City and the State. We now have more than 31,000 employers of every size in every field, actively recruiting in the CUNY system. And with support from public and private partners, we've connected more than 16,000 students directly to paid internships in the last three years in addition to students who landed internships on their own. Meanwhile, over 100 of our academic departments have begun incorporating career-infused degree maps to help students reach milestones tailored to their majors as part of their course planning. To give you a few specific examples of our advancements in career development, over the past year we expanded a city-funded health career credential initiative and expanded our healthcare education programs, including

a new online certificate in nuclear medicine, LPN to RN programs, and a new Nurse Fellowship Academy. The University secured funding for a midwifery graduate program and is advancing plans for a genetic counseling program at Hunter. Innovation grants for AI in healthcare and many residency programs are part of our drive to sharpen our focus on faculty research and innovation. This spring, we are preparing for the fall launch of CUNY Beyond, our campus roadmap for career success, connecting classrooms to careers throughout our students' academic journeys. This wide-ranging strategy makes CUNY the first system in the country that will scale up approaches that we know work at every step of a student's academic journey. These approaches include working with high schools to offer career-connected college courses, introducing career discussion and orientations and first-year seminars, embedding careers in curriculum, expanding paid internships, and growing our engagement with employers. The CUNY Reconnect initiative, the brainchild of Speaker Adams, has quickly become a transformative force in expanding educational access for adult learners seeking to return to college to complete a degree or earn a

credential. CUNY Reconnect removes barriers to re-enrollment including forgiveness of prior balances and provides comprehensive support services, including academic advisement, career counseling and other critical resources. Now in its third year, CUNY Reconnect has enrolled over 47,000 students across the university with more than 8,400 graduates now contributing to the City's workforce. But this initiative is not just about degrees. It's about empowering everyday New Yorkers, particularly Black, Hispanic and female students who make up the majority of enrollees with opportunities that lift their families and communities. Also this year, CUNY's pioneering ASAP program recruited it's largest new cohort since 2019/2020, welcoming 11,590 new students. The program is now serving 22,450 students across fall and spring. To address the range of student needs and provide tailored wraparound services to even more of our students, CUNY will launch ASAP for part-time students in fall 2025. The ASAP model also continues to inspire other public university systems across the country. Most recently, Arnold Ventures invested \$35 million to launch ASAP replications at 15 colleges across North

Carolina Community College system, and SUNY has launched ASAP and ACE system wide. ACE, the sister program of ASAP, supports nearly 3,000 students across seven CUNY senior colleges and continues to demonstrate strong outcomes. Students in the program achieved a four-year graduation rate, 12.4 percent points higher than qualifying students who did not participate with notable differences observed among students of color. A recent report from Columbia University Center on Poverty and Social Policy found net benefits of nearly \$43,000 per CUNY ACE participant, primarily driven by greater lifetime earnings. The study also found an average benefit of over \$125,000 for the children of ACE participants, quantifying the intergenerational benefits of post-secondary education. These achievements reflects CUNY's success as a national leader in providing educational opportunity and social mobility to people of all backgrounds. This year, CUNY campuses once again dominated national rankings of colleges that deliver the best return on investment. Forbes named nine of our colleges to its list of the 25 colleges with the highest payoff, and CUNY schools counted for five of the top 10 on the Wall Street Journal's list

of best value colleges. Another facet of our university's core mission is our work to advance inquiry and discovery in the public interest. CUNY's research efforts, many of which directly benefit the communities where we all work and live have seen remarkable growth. In fiscal year 2024, University expenditures of external grant funds totaled \$622 million, an increase of 68 percent since 2014. The American Council on Education and Carnegie Foundation maintain the graduate center's designation as an R1 institution, the premier status for very high research activity. Hunter College joined City College as an R2 institution, marking the first time two CUNY colleges have achieved that status. Seven other CUNY senior colleges were named into a new classification, research colleges and universities, highlighting the university's growing impact in the research community and expansion of research opportunities. These advances come amid a climate of great uncertainty in federal funding for university-based research. We want our City leaders to know that we remain fully committed to our faculty researchers, their students and the work they do every day to advance discovery and knowledge. We're

also committed to adding opportunities for all of our students. We are proud to announce that the spring 2025 implementation of CUNY Accommodate, our new student disability management system. This platform will streamline the management of requests for accommodations and services provided by disability services offices on every campus. It offers an accessible mobile-friendly way for students to initiate accommodation requests, schedule appointments with campus disability offices, and access resources across CUNY. Faculty will use CUNY Accommodate to manage students' accommodation requests efficiently, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed. Building on this commitment, the Black Male Initiative has increased the enrollment, retention, and graduation rates of under-represented students through targeted academic and social assistance. To sustain and expand these positive outcomes, it is essential to maintain such critical support systems, ensuring all students regardless of background have the resources and encouragement that they need to thrive. Our childcare centers are crucial for student parents across our campuses. These centers provide a safe environment



for children, enabling parents to focus on their studies and achieve academic success. Addressing food insecurity also remains an ongoing and critical concern. Last year, our food access program served over 13,000 students and demand continues to grow. This work is crucial so that no student has to choose between their education and basic necessities. Addressing the mental health needs of our student body is another top priority. Our student veterans benefit from dedicated peer mentorship programs and essential services designed to meet their unique needs. Your continued support will enable us to build on these successes and ensure that all CUNY students have access to the resources they need to thrive. CUNY continues to strengthen its partnership with the New York City Public Schools through initiatives like College and Career Bridge for All, College and Career Advising Fellows, College Now, and Future Ready. Last year, these programs helped nearly 55,000 graduating high school seniors with post-secondary planning and financial aid. The programs employ recent CUNY graduates with full-time college advisors and enable more than 28,000 students a year to earn college credits through college preparatory courses.

Chairperson Dinowitz and members of the Committee, on behalf of the entire university community, I deeply appreciate your continued commitment to sustaining the high-quality and affordable CUNY education that so many New Yorkers depend on. I now turn to Chief Operating Officer Batista who will discuss University Operations that are vital to supporting our mission.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Thank you, Alicia. Thank you, Speaker Adams, Chair Dinowitz, and members of the Higher Education Committee and all members of the City Council.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I'm sorry, would you please state your name for the record?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Oh, my name Hector Batista.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: [inaudible] support for CUNY. We deeply appreciate your commitment for our students, faculty and staff, and for always recognizing the value CUNY provides to our city and state. Before I turn to the fiscal year 2026 Preliminary Budget, let me first offer an update on CUNY financial position. We testified before you last year with a clear picture of the difficult

financial challenges faced by CUNY and our plan to stabilize the financial at CUNY. Tackling CUNY's structure definitely has been and continues to be a top priority. The structure deficits largely driven by sharp, post-pandemic enrollment declines and unfunded mandatory costs the university had to absorb for several years. Another factor is the reduction of funding for community college due to the Program to Eliminate the Gap, or PEGs, which also affect college budget. With a detailed review of campus financial plans, sound decision-making, and close collaboration with campus community, we have made considerable progress, but there's more to do. The progress we made on the expense side of the ledger has involved hard but necessary decisions at campus level. We developed a framework for assessing college financial targets and across-the-board savings plans. These were hard to undertake, but we did what we needed to do to make sure we stabilize those colleges. These targeted approaches examine key indicators such as the presence of cash deficit, the size of a college structure deficit connected to the budget, and the campus overall reserves. After evaluating college financial conditions based on

these indicators, nine colleges were deemed to be of high financial concerns, which meant that we had to subject those colleges with heightened restriction and deficit reduction to reduce expenses. We continue to work closely with these colleges to improve the financial conditions while focused on a balanced approach to reduce the expenses and generate revenues. University-wide significant reductions of structural deficit has been realized. Among those factors leading to decline on the structural deficit, expensive reductions across the university, additional state aid, and an enrollment uptick. The combination of these factors have led to nearly 74 percent reduction in the overall universal structural deficit from \$234 million in fiscal year 2022 to an estimated \$62 million projected at the end of this fiscal year 2025, as of the first quarter. This year's enrollment growth was up two percent, and for the last two years increased by 5.2, or almost 12,000 students. This translates into additional revenue. It is estimated that for every percent of enrollment generates \$13.8 million of revenue. We enter this budget cycle with goals of sustaining our momentum, but we recognize the uncertainty that exists,

including actions at the federal level that can have a direct impact on CUNY or an indirect impact on increased pressures for the City and the State budget. That is why we're doubling down on our efficiency strategy. We're implementing various system-wide share service initiative, centralizing IT functions to benefit from economy of scale. We're pursuing effective [sic] deployment of maintenance and repair teams to campuses. We're consolidating contracts to negotiate better pricing. We're streamlining tuition and fees and collections. Plans for these initiatives include upfront investment required to build the infrastructure that we need in order to undertake these very important initiatives. We hope that by implementing these initiatives we're going to start to see some of the efficiency by Fiscal Year 2026. I will now turn to the Preliminary Budget and the impact on the operating budget. At this time last year, we had a ratified collective bargaining agreement with a label representing our classified staff. This year, we're pleased that we have ratified collective bargaining agreement for the faculty unit of the professional staff congress. We thank the Administration for including \$13.8 million

in the November Plan to support the classified staff contract and for including \$11.2 million in the Preliminary Budget for ongoing costs associated with this contract. We thank the Administration in advance for funding the PSC contract, and we look forward to its inclusion in the upcoming Executive Budget. We're also grateful for funding in the November Plan and prior plans for labor costs associated with new collective bargaining agreements for skilled trade persons employed by CUNY. Now, the PEGs restoration is not included in the Preliminary Budget. The baseline PEG for fiscal year 2026 is estimated to grow to \$95.5 million which represents 15 percent of the entire contribution of our operating budget. The PEGs have had-- continue to have a significant impact on CUNY Community College. As we testified last year, the PEGs have had an impact on everything from academic advisement, financial aid, counseling, library hours, facility maintenance, and more. These critical networks are essential for CUNY's ability to track and retain students. We all witnesses the [inaudible] and roll out of the Free Application Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA. University across the country were scrambling

around to engage students in their enrollment to make sure it didn't have an impact. This had a shock to a lot of those systems. Counselors are extremely important to making sure that these students are able to get the financial aid information that they need in order to remain in school. our top priority for this budget cycle is to restore as much of the PEGs as possible, and we're in communication with OMB for the need to return to the tie [sic] and to ensure that the students' success is at the forefront of everything that we do. We thank you for your advocacy of numerous programs at CUNY. We look forward to engaging with you, your colleagues, to include funding for the Adopted Budget, for programs for our students such as CUNY Reconnect, ASAP, ACE, funding for food insecurity, childcare, and more, as Provost Alvero mentioned in her testimony. Lastly, let me turn to our facilities. As you know, CUNY has set an ambitious goal to bring our facilities to 55 percent of our facilities to a state of good repair by 2030. Work is underway on this goal and much more needs to be done. We're proud of what we've accomplished so far. We approximately 27 percent of our vital building system are in a state of good

repair. That's up from 24 percent in prior years. During last year's hearing on facility you heard me discuss our strategy for meeting these goals, including accessing the health of different buildings and components to enable us to make better priorities of our capital program. By prioritizing the use of data metrics, we can more efficiently spend our capital dollars and improve our facilities for our students, faculty and staff. Our priority is to shape and to be in collaboration with our college community. We're engaging with elected officials as they seek to allocate discretionary funding for CUNY projects where we target what's needed to address these very important maintenance in our campus. We need to spend an estimated \$200 million a year to bring our community college to a state of good repair. We look forward to working with you to secure funding for this very important budget cycle. CUNY Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget capital includes \$1.5 billion in city funding, \$4.3 million in non-city grants in the 10 Year Capital Plan from FY2025 through FY2035. CUNY continues to align its capital projects to better schedule and to make sure that the project is being done at the same time as



the funds are being available. CUNY is in constant communication with OMB to ensure that those resources continue to be there. In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude for the City Council for supporting CUNY priorities. We've made tremendous progress in restoring some of our-- some of the PEG, but we need more. We need to be able to restore some of the PEGs. We need CUNY to be-- investment into CUNY to make sure that our students continue to have the success they need. CUNY success is the State's success and the City success. We look forward to working to deliver much-needed resources for this invaluable institution. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Look forward to your questions.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you, Vice Chancellor. I do-- before I begin with my questions want to highlight something the Provost said which we have often repeated at these hearings on this committee is that there is perhaps no better investment than education, and we as a city have a moral imperative to invest in the future of our city, but this is also a fiscal one where-- just to read again, "a return on investment of at least \$15 for

every dollar invested." Investments-- the children of students who engage in the ACE program making upwards of-- what was that, \$125,000, \$43,000 of additional earnings for students engaged with the ACE program. So these are smart fiscal choices which also means that when you cut these funds, when the Administration cuts these funds, we are losing out on money for our own city. So these are poor financial choices when we cut CUNY, and that is why we in the Council are fighting tooth and nail to make sure CUNY gets the funding it deserves. Again, not just because of the moral imperative, but we know fiscally as we talk about a budget, there is perhaps no better investment than our education system and CUNY. And given that we've had PEGs over the years-- in the Fiscal 25 Adopted Plan, CUNY was allocated \$15 million for a partial PEG restoration for Fiscal 25, bringing the PEG in fiscal year 25 to roughly \$80 million. This PEG restoration was not included in the Fiscal 26 Preliminary Plan, which has increased CUNY's PEG in the fiscal year 26 to roughly \$95.5 million. How is CUNY managing to meet the needs of their institution, your institution, and your

students without the PEG restoration in 26, fiscal year 26?

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Sure, and thank you for the question, Chair. I think that you're right, we were fortunate and we're thankful last year, of course, for the Council's advocacy and then of course for the restoration in the Adopted Budget for one-time funds of \$15 million which really helped us cover our expenses at the community colleges. The structural deficit at the community colleges is still at \$24 million and that is after we were fortunate enough to have the continuation of the community college funding floor at the State level so that we don't backslide with respect to the enrollment decline, and an additional \$5.3 million that was allocated as well in the State budget. So, between those three pots of revenue that were coming in, the structural deficit is still at \$24 million. So it was helping us cover our expenses. Clearly, there is more to do, and clearly when look at some of the areas certainly referenced in the testimony-- you know, just take a look at the financial aid counselors, for example, the shock to the system for last year with FAFSA. So, we really had to figure

1 out ways that we could either use overtime, use  
2 private funding to try to figure out how we could  
3 engage students so that enrollment would be where it  
4 needs to be, and we were successful. We have an  
5 uptick in enrollment for the fall, but I think that's  
6 just one example of what we can do. I think a lot of  
7 investments always goes into academic advisement  
8 which we know really helps support students. So,  
9 it's these, you know, wraparound supports that we can  
10 really invest in if we had access to that revenue.

12 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: If not for the \$15  
13 million, would there have been programs that you  
14 would have had to cut?

15 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: I think  
16 that there would have been other reductions in  
17 particular headcount in certain areas, so we know  
18 that. We've had, for example, when you look at the  
19 five-year change in headcount, we've gotten-- we've  
20 lost almost 500 positions in the community colleges  
21 since fiscal year 2021, and that's really had an  
22 impact across-- you know, across the spectrum. And  
23 so it maybe would have meant less investment in  
24 certain areas, right? So, for example, if you take  
25 BMCC, for example, an outreach center in Harlem where

1 we can engage students in their neighborhood or  
2 prospective students in their neighborhoods, right?  
3 So, if there's less revenue to invest in sort of the  
4 personnel and the headcount to be able to have boots  
5 on the ground so we are able to attract as many  
6 students as possible, that's just one micro-example,  
7 right?  
8

9 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Speaking of  
10 enrollment, how did your projections of enrollment  
11 match up with actual enrollment, and how'd that  
12 impact the budget?

13 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Sure.  
14 So as the-- as was said in the testimony by Hector,  
15 for every one percent in enrollment that we get, that  
16 translates into \$13.8 million in revenue for the  
17 system. We're fortunate enough that we are looking  
18 at enrollment of about two percent, and I think over  
19 the past two years, I think 5.5 percent. So we're  
20 really fortunate that-- and that's taken a lot of  
21 effort, right? There's been a lot of investment.  
22 One-time fund from the State, we've really invested  
23 in a lot of marketing and advertising, reaching  
24 students where they are, and there's a whole strategy  
25

in our strategic road map for that. So, over the past two years, about five and a half percent.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Do you make-- I'm asking, do you make projections as to what enrollment will be, create budgets based on that, and then the enrollment comes in, correct?

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Yeah. So, we-- one of the things we've done in terms of a new operating budget model which we have in our strategic roadmap is move to multi-year financial planning, right? So, we're looking at four years, and embedded in that we need to have as accurate as possible for enrollment projections. So, in addition to looking at last year's actuals, we are undertaking an effort to look at other projection models where we can look at other exogenous factors like, you know, economic factors, etcetera. So all those things together will give us an idea of what the projections are for enrollment.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: and how accurate are your projections? In other words, let's say there's a year where you project a certain number of students. Turns out fewer students apply or are admitted. You would need to cut programs. I'm

asking if that's the case, how accurate your projections are in those situations?

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: It varies across the financial plans in each of the campuses. I can say that we have in conjunction with the campuses talked about making sure that we are not overestimating. So they're on the conservative side, and I think where we're landing now is pretty much in line with what the majority of campuses had in terms of their financial plans.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And you've overestimated in the past or underestimated in the past?

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: I can't say in the past that we've overestimated. I think we are-- as the-- with the onset of the structural deficit, we are taking more of a deep dive, and we have regular meetings with campus leadership and the chancellery where we're talking about those financial plans, scrutinizing and making sure we're not overshooting the runway. So we're doing that now, in the past two years for sure, and can't speak to the past.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Regarding tuition, is there any consideration of changing or raising tuition rates based on the fact that the PEGs exist or because enrollment is lower? Because CUNY tuition has been kept the same for many years. So, would these PEGs impact student tuition?

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: There are no current plans to increase tuition.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay. The-- I want to talk about a few of the programs. CUNY's Fiscal 2026 budget-- I'm sorry, we've also been joined by Council Member Brewer, and we were previously joined by Council Members Marte and Restler. CUNY's Fiscal 26 budget is roughly \$85 million less than the Fiscal 25 Adopted Budget. The critical programs like CUNY Reconnect, ACE, and additional funding for ASAP are not included in fiscal 25 in the Preliminary Plan. How many students are currently enrolled in Reconnect and ACE, and how will these cuts impact students currently enrolled in these programs? Which again are either two or four years long for each student-- or should be, rather. How will these cuts impact those students and how many students are in each of those programs?



EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: So, currently in ACE we have 3,000, approximately 3,000 students across the seven colleges, and the impact would really be quite devastating to not continue a program that yields such substantial results and increase in graduation rates. Without continued funding, our commitment to the existing students would continue, because we made a commitment to them and a promise to the students currently enrolled, but the cost, personal cost and value would be devastating if these were not continued. And CUNY Reconnect-- did you ask about ACE numbers as well? I cannot--

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: ACE, ASAP, and Reconnect, yes please.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: So, ASAP is currently 22,450 students, and CUNY Reconnect we've enrolled across the last three years 47,000 students.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: That's a lot of students. And all the students, of course again, pay tuition and help with the budget. so, these programs that keep kids in school or bring students of any age back to school-- again, not only the right thing to

do for our city, but the financially responsible thing, and these PEGs are potentially impacting those programs, but you may have to make cuts in other programs, because of CUNY's commitment to these programs, these four-year-long or two-year-long programs. And can you talk a little bit about some of the decisions you've had to make to preserve these programs and cut in other places?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: The decisions we've had to consider are staffing and personnel and advisement and student advisor ratios, and make decisions about-- rather than completely eliminating a program, how do we maintain a program with the reduction in the budget.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Right. We had a hearing about a year ago, a little less-- 11 months ago, I believe, we had a hearing on ASAP, and the way-- what it is, advisement, wraparound services. What I said at the time was that should just be college. Every student should have an ASAP program where they have the advisement and support they need to just do well in college. You were on your way to that with part-time ASAP. What funding levels would you need to ensure that all students, full-time and

part-time get ASAP, all students get ACE? What funding levels would you need?

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: We'll have to get back to you on the certain number, but I would just say that we are appreciative clearly of the additions that the Council advocate for and make-- certainly in last year's Adopted Budget. But we can get back to you on sort of projections on growth.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay. In a joint legislative hearing with the State Assembly and Senate on February 25<sup>th</sup>, Chancellor Matos Rodriguez [sp?] testified that the funding for ACE will mainly be used to stabilize the program. What aspects of ACE need to be stabilized?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: What needs to be stabilized is our ability to project, because we do not have baseline funding. Every year it is difficult in planning the recruitment for the flowing cohort without knowing and having that stability so the State funding will allow us to provide a little bit of stability in that ability to project and recruit a new cohort.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I'm going to assume the amount in the State Executive Budget is--

the State Executive Budget is not sufficient to stabilize the program, is that fair?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO:

Correct.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: But based on your previous answer, you also don't know how much additional funding is needed--

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO:

[interposing] We can get you that number.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: to stabilize-- yes, please. The Speaker State of the City Address, she called for CUNY Reconnect to be enhanced and baselined at \$8.8 million in fiscal 26. What changes or impact would a baseline funding bring to the CUNY Reconnect program and its students?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO:

Baselining that funding would allow us to continue outreach and expanding outreach to cohorts of students. We know that we have reached 47,000 students, but we also know that there are many more adult learners that have some college whether within CUNY or without CUNY credits and credentials, and it would allow us to make this part of the culture that

we're continuously reaching out and really expanding the network of students that come to CUNY.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: How many additional potential students could CUNY Reconnect be able to support if it were allocated this increased funding of \$8.8 million?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: I want to look up a number before I answer that question if that's alright.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Sure. I'll give you the next one in case it's on the same page.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: Yes, that would be great.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: What is the cost per students for CUNY Reconnect? And similarly, to the ACE and ASAP question, the level of need for expansion and how much that would cost?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: I would have to get back to you on that number. I do not-- it does not look like I have that number with me.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Including the cost per students for CUNY Reconnect?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: ACE and ASAP should be coming up to me soon. Someone should be giving me a piece of paper with that, but it's the CUNY Reconnect answer.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay. I will tell you the suspense is killing me.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: so, I will tell you our projected enrollment goal for CUNY Reconnect in fiscal year 24 was 15,000, and with the funding we were able to reach 16,553. So with the continued funding, the 5.-- did you say eight or nine?

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: \$8.8 million.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: We would be able to reach our goal of 15,000 every year, minimum. We've exceeded it every year. And for ACE, the cost per student is \$3,600. And--

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [interposing] Per year?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: Per year per student, correct.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: I do not have it for ASAP here.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay. I'm sure your-- your numbers team is working on it, and we'll get. I have one more set of questions, and then I'm going to turn it over to a colleague. You mentioned that CUNY is implementing CUNY Accommodate. It should be no surprise that this is something-- I'm very excited about something close to my heart given my previous career as a special education teacher. It is the Student Disability Management System, can you talk more about that? For instance, who's the contractor for that system? Has it been released, or when is the projected release date?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO:  
Release of the contract? It's been fully implemented.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: It is implemented.  
That's--

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO:  
[interposing] It is fully implemented--

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: an outside vendor.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: Spring 2025.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So, a student graduates-- so it is on board now, so students can access it now?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO:  
Absolutely, right now.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Can you talk about, please, the relationship this has with the Department of Education, the K-12 public school system, if you're interfaced with them?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: It does not interface to my knowledge with the city department EOE, but I will say that the feedback from the students-- it just rolled out this semester. Feedback from students and faculty has been overwhelmingly positive. What it does do is it interconnects with all of the systems and all of the offices versus having student have to go from one office to get paperwork, to get accommodations. Everything is in one app streamlined. So all communication is now centralized. If a student transfers, all of that information would transfer with them as well.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I'll tell you how incredibly important this is and how relieved I am to



hear that, because when we had a hearing in 2022 on students with disabilities at CUNY, we had students testify that they couldn't find the office. And students were able to find out how to testify at a City Council hearing, but couldn't find the Office of Students with Disabilities. We had two Council Members testify that the only way they knew they were able to get accommodations and the only way they found it was because their friends told them. So it is extremely heartening to hear that this program is underway. In 2023, Local Law 18 was implemented. This was one of my bills that simply said the Department of Education, New York City Department of Education has to provide parents and students who are transitioning from high school to college the opportunity to share IEP and assessment data with the colleges of their choice. It seems to me that if you have an entire interface that is designed and dedicated to students with disabilities, their accommodations, their needs, that the Department of Education of New York City can interface directly with that. This is now law that they have to electronically transmit. Are you able to collaborate with the New York City Public School System to

enhance and make better Local Law 18 of 2023 by interfacing directly with the Department of Education who legally now have the authority with student consent to transmit IEP and assessment data?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: We'll absolutely follow up with that, and I can get you a more robust answer on that, because I do know that when students apply to CUNY, we have already automated and streamlined information process, and so I will ensure that that information is there. I did get the answer about the contract for accommodate--

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [interposing] Going back and forth in time feels like Christopher Nolan movie or something.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: No, we're still on accommodate, but I won't go back to before. But it's simplicity, in case you're curious.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: Do you want me to go back to some of the other things that I have, or?

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah, we'll go back in a second, but I do appreciate I have your commitment to work together to ensure the Department

of Education and CUNY are interfacing to fully, you know, realize Local Law 18 of 23 which really is designed to do what it sounds like you're doing, make life as easy as possible so our students with disabilities have every opportunity to succeed and get the accommodations they deserve, the accommodations to which they are entitled so they can succeed and be their best selves in college. Yes, I would like those numbers, and I'm going to turn it over to Council Member Brewer for her questions after these answers.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: For Reconnect, the \$8.8 million will serve about 22,000 students at a cost of \$3.9 per student, \$3,900 per student.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. I'm going to turn it over to Council Member Brewer for some questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. So, according to our material from the PMMR, because we were talking about ASAP, there was a decrease in the last three years in terms of students graduating from 44 percent in 22 to 36 percent in 24, despite the funding. So I'm just wondering what the

cause is, and I also want to know if it's true of ASAP?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: The decline in the graduation rate is accurate. However, it still is 50 percent higher for ASAP students through the three-year graduation rate than for non-ASAP students. What we have struggled with as has the DOE is the impact and the learning loss from COVID, and we are exploring and partnering with New York City Public Schools on what additional support services and academic supports are needed to lift all of the students. But the decline did occur, and this is the first year it's actually higher, so that trends. We are hoping that we are now changing that, but it's still 50 percent higher graduation rate for ASAP students.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And did the same issue occur with ASAP and the community colleges, the decline in--

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: [interposing] That's for ASAP.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Oh, ASAP, okay.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: That is for ASAP.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And then--  
alright, that wasn't ACE, okay.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: That  
was not ACE, no.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And ACE is the  
same situation?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: No,  
they still have a graduate-- two-year graduation rate  
of 6.89 percent for transfer students and 56.9  
percent for four-year graduation rate.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Now my  
question-- thank you. John [inaudible] is walking  
me, you know, watching us. Guttman, poor Guttman.  
They need space. So I guess the board is suing CUNY  
because they don't have new space. Can you comment  
on that? What happened to the north building near  
John Jay? I guess nobody responded to the RFP, but  
I'll find a nonprofit to respond, and we'll have some  
affordable housing in Guttman. So I just want to  
know what's going on with Guttman. And it does seem  
to be a waste of money for you to have to hire  
lawyers or use internal to fight this. Go ahead.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: It's  
good to see you, Councilwoman.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Nice to see you.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: With regards to Guttman-- well, let's talk about North Hall. We have an RFP that has been out. We're reviewing. We're reviewing proposals connected to that RFP to make sure that it sort of accommodates the things that we're looking for. So that's with regards to North Hall. With regards to Guttman, you know, obviously we're-- there-- as you stated, there is ongoing dispute with CUNY and we're dealing with that dispute, so I'm not going to comment on that particular dispute. We're committed to the growth of that college and are looking to see what other options we have as we're entertaining proposals connected to North Hall. So, more to come, and I know this is something that is--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]  
Yeah, I keep asking about it. I want nonprofit above and Guttman, and I don't understand why we couldn't try to do more of a-- not a sole source, but something that's more targeted, because I don't know that any of these developers-- they're going to get Community Board Seven on their case. They're going

to have me on their case. So, why not go with something that people want to start with?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: As I stated, we are reviewing proposals and determining-- as I told you once before privately, you know, we're-- my job is to make sure that we have the academic space for our programs.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: We're not in the housing business. So we're going to allow the marketplace to dictate sort of what goes above that particular project whether it's North Hall or something-- I mean, government or something else. But the reality is that as we-- you know, sort of looking at those proposals, obviously we will be making the decisions that's in the best interest of CUNY.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright, we'll skip it for now, because we're not agreeing on that one. So what about the Dean of Medicine. She needs a new building. What's with her building?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: So, the Board of Trustees passed a resolution to make the medical school independent. Now, there is-- there's

1 a committee that's been set up by the Chancellor in  
2 connection with the medical school to look at  
3 governance [sic], right? That is a process that is  
4 very, very, you know, elaborate process. also, I've  
5 been charged with looking at what their needs are,  
6 and we're doing an audit of what the needs are  
7 currently at the medical school, how this medical  
8 school looks compared to medical schools throughout  
9 the country, and then based on that process we'll be  
10 able to determine what's next when it comes to real  
11 estate, but it's something that's on top of our mind  
12 right now.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Another one,  
15 dorms, students need dorms. I teach at Hunter, as you  
16 know. They need dorms. What's the status? How many  
17 dorms does CUNY have now, and how many do you need?

18 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Yeah,  
19 I'm going to have to get you that number, because we  
20 have-- we actually acquired some more dorms in  
21 connection with a project that you and I have spoken  
22 about which is the Spark project, but right now  
23 Hunter has enough dorms to not only accommodate all  
24 the students at Brookdale, but accommodate sort of  
25 their future growth.



COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Macaulay wants  
dorms.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: We  
also have-- one of the Chancellor's initiative is to  
try to create affordable dorms. I'm happy to report  
as part of that-- part of the initiative connected to  
the Brookdale project we are allocating some dorms  
that are really below-- way below market to  
accommodate that students are Pell [sic] students  
that really are in need of dorm space. With regards  
to Macaulay, this is the first time I'm hearing about  
it, so I obviously will talk to the dean and see what  
her need is, and obviously we'll have a further  
discussion with you about it.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And then  
just finally, I'm a big supporter of Hunter Science  
and other high schools that work with CUNY. How much  
do you put into that effort and is it successful, and  
should you not be doing more? I always that you-- you  
know, those schools are excellent. So how are you--  
how many do you have? How do you want to do more of?  
Just give us some budget numbers on those, too,  
please.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Which ones? I'm sorry.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All the schools-- you have many high schools that are on campus or are work-- in other words, if you go to Hunter Science, then you get to take college courses at Hunter. You get into Hunter often, and you get an excellent education.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Yeah, so--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] I'm a big supporter of the high school and the CUNY campuses working together.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Yeah, so some of the high schools are really DOE's responsibility. They're in our campuses. So, that's a DOE question. Obviously, we're in partnership with them through an MOU. With regards to other Hunter Campus, as you know, we put in a request for them and within this-- and it's a high-priority for us within this capital budget. We requested, I believe, \$100 million. We've been out. We were in Albany advocating for that. Obviously, we could use your support in

making sure that we -- because those-- that school needs some work on their roof and some additional--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]

Well, I'm talking more about the high schools.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: areas.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: This is not on the campus. The high schools that have relationships with colleges, right? Like this one with John Jay not on the campus. Is there a cost to CUNY? In my opinion you should be doing more than that. The great Chair has already figured out how to some work with disabled-- I'm saying the schools that work directly are working. Will due respect to DOE, some of their other schools do not work. The ones with you, they work. So we should be doing more of them. Are you advocating for that, and what's the budget?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: That we have been in close conversation and are very close to signing a new updated MOU with larger target numbers and increasing enrollment in all of our dual enrollment programs, and you are correct, the ones with the very strong partnership offer more courses through College Now and Future Ready which are career-based courses, and the students do get to

benefit and take courses there. But we offer that. We have a relationship with many of the DOEs and are continually expanding that. The strongest ones are those that have that relationship, you are correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So, are you ex-- but are you advocating for more expansion? What--

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: [interposing] Absolutely. Absolutely. And this MOU--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] What's the cost factor?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: I can get you the exact figures, because that is actually what's being worked out right now between both Chancellors, and this MOU is what is the breakout of-- and breakdown of the budget. But we do--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] Could you get back to the Chair with that information?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: Absolutely.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you, Council Member Brewer. In the Preliminary Plan, CUNY Cares was allocated nearly \$560,000 in fiscal 25 only. What is the full cost of CUNY Cares?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: The total budget for CUNY Cares from all sources, so it was \$1.48 million, and-- what was the second part of the question? I'm so sorry.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: What was the fund-- well, I'll leave it out. What's the full cost for the program, and are you on track to continue that funding in the current fiscal year?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: We are on track to continue to advocate for that funding. Much of that funding aside from City funding has also been philanthropic, and we are hopefully going to receive continued funding for that which is based on three Bronx campuses. I can tell you that it has reached 6,500 students a year, so up 27 percent of all matriculated students in the three Bronx campuses have benefited from CUNY Cares.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: This is a three-year pilot program. Have the philanthropic funds been committed for three years, or is it year by year

you are going back and attempting to re-raise this money?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: I think it's a combination of the funding. There may be one source that's three years, but I can get you the exact breakdown, because the \$300,000 that comes from the City and the rest has all been philanthropic.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Did you have something to add? I saw the hand.

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: I was just going to add to in terms of the combination of different pots of money, we also have some one-time funds from the state that we're using for this. So clearly as we look towards expansion, we're going to need to have a discussion about additional tax levy funding to continue the program for expansion.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And you do, I believe, also have-- you do also have funds from the City Council for this program last fiscal year. Are you on-- this is a pilot program which according to the website, it's a three-year pilot that is going to be expanded to all campuses by 2026. Are you on

track to expand this type of program to all campuses by 2026?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: I would have to get back to you, unless you have an answer.

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: We'll have to get back to you. I think the evaluation of the pilot is still-- it hasn't been finalized, but we'll get back to you in terms of once that evaluation is complete, what the expansion plans are.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: How are you measuring the impact of the CUNY Cares program, and is there any publicly available data that would indicate that this is a successful program that is helping our students?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: I do not have any publicly available data yet other than what I just reported to you of the number of students that have received services through CUNY Cares, but I can ask the director and get you more--

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [interposing] Well, it-- so it's been in place since 2023. Going to wait for that siren. It's been in place since-- it was launched in Fall 2023. I would imagine there's

preliminary evaluation data to measure the impact of this program, which by the way I think is again similar to ASAP, exactly what school and college should be, but there's no preliminary data available, or should I expect that later?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: You should expect that later, other than the 6,500 students, and I can say because the students often have multiple interactions with CUNY Cares. Of those 6,500 students there's been about 26,000 direct interactions with CUNY Cares.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay. I'll ask one more question then turn it over to my colleague, Council Member Restler. After-- okay. Application fees are a barrier for many who apply to college. CUNY's application fee is \$65 for first-year students and \$70 for transfer students. How much would it cost to eliminate application fees for all New York City residents?

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Well, for all New York City residents, we'd have to do that calculation and come back to you. What I can say is that currently-- and we're grateful for the baseline funding of \$2.1 million that CUNY receives for the



1 application waivers. We have seen and you have heard  
2 about the CUNY Month where we are waiving the  
3 application fees that our Board of Trustees has  
4 adopted, and we've seen an incredible increase in the  
5 applications to CUNY paired with the fact that our  
6 chancellor and the DOE's school chancellor have been  
7 working together to personally visit classrooms and  
8 hand out personalized letters that basically say that  
9 CUNY has a place for you. So, based on the 65,000, I  
10 believe, applications that we have received because  
11 of that uptick, we would need another \$2.1 million to  
12 waive the application fees for that number of  
13 applicants. And that--

14  
15 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [interposing] All  
16 New York--

17 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN:  
18 [interposing] [inaudible] we'd have to come back to  
19 you.

20 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah, that's for  
21 public school students, right, that you're talking  
22 about? Okay. I'm going to turn it over to Council  
23 Member Restler for some questions.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you very  
25 much, Chair Dinowitz. I appreciate your stellar

1 leadership of this committee, and I think the  
2 Executive Vice Chancellor deserves kudos for putting  
3 together such a good team. It's good to see so many  
4 good people working at CUNY these days. Sahsa [sp?],  
5 Mike Day [sic], and my dear friend Sherif, and among  
6 many others. I just could use some help. Sherif, if  
7 I recall correctly, you testified last year that the  
8 Mayor's proposed 2025 budget was a 15 percent  
9 cumulative cut since he came into office. Do I have  
10 that right?

11  
12 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Yes.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And now we're  
14 looking at for fiscal year 2026, I think my notes are  
15 that we have an \$85 million less in proposed funding  
16 than in the FY 25 Adopted Budget. Do I have that  
17 right?

18 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Yeah, so  
19 let me clarify. Well, first, let me congratulate you  
20 on fatherhood.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you.

22 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: I'm  
23 looking forward to meeting Elliott soon. So, first  
24 let's just get that out of the way.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: After-- once we get through-- once we get through Ramadan.

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Okay. So, the \$95.5 million in terms of the PEG is what it goes back up to in fiscal year 2026. When you compare that number against what we receive in city support, that is 15 percent.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Right.

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: We are grateful that last year in the Adopted Budget we got the \$15 million--

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: [interposing] Got some restored.

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: a one-time fund. So, I just want to say--

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: [interposing] Say that \$15 million in one-time funds versus what was the cut-- versus an 85--

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: [interposing] So, it basically took--

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: [interposing] \$94 million--

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN:

[interposing] from \$94 million to \$80 million  
basically.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: So, \$79-- \$80  
million [inaudible]

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Right,  
exactly.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: So, still, just  
to be clear, because this can get complicated-- since  
the Mayor came to office we're still as of last  
year's Adopted Budget, we're looking at \$80 million  
less in funding since he came into office.

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Yes, and  
I would say that there active conversations going on  
with the budget director with his executive team to  
try to get those restorations. Those have been  
positive conversations, so we look forward to the  
Executive Budget.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And yet, we're  
looking at further cuts in the proposed FY26 budget.

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: There  
is-- there was no restoration or continuation I  
should say of the \$15 million--

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: [interposing] Of the \$15 million.

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: so the PEG pops up to \$95.5 now.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay. And we did see-- I was looking at some enrollment data. I think the latest I have is 2024 that we were back up to 233,000 students, a three percent increase year over year. Is that-- is that the current figure on enrollment? Is that it? Is that where we're at, or is there more updated figures?

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: The headcount was 233 as of fall 2024.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Correct.

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: And then as of-- I think we're looking at 237 or 238, I believe. Yeah, 237 or 238 in terms of headcount is what we're looking at based on the latest numbers.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Great. So, we're continuing to see headcount come-- we're continuing to see our student enrollment come back despite these very challenging cuts. And just wanted one more question on the impact of these cuts to the workforce. Headcount as a result gone down quite

significantly. I saw the Comptroller's report back from 23 said that we had lost 235 faculty positions. Is that-- help me on the right-- as a result of these cuts or since the beginning of the Mayor's administration, are we able to track the reduction in workforce, staff and faculty positions?

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Well, what I can tell you is that overall since fiscal year 2021 we have seen at the community colleges a reduction in full-time staff of 496 positions.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Wow.

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Full-time. So that's pedagogical and ped-- now, I do want to note in that in terms of the pedagogical, that there was allocated a few years ago in the state budget \$53 million for a full-time hires for faculty positions. That helped sort of blunt the impact, and that was for senior colleges and community colleges. So, we're grateful for that, but overall the full-time headcount is down 496.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Despite the State stepping up and providing some additional support.

1                    SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: That  
2  
3 number is net of the State support.

4                    COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: So, despite the  
5 State support-- and I appreciate Governor Hochul and  
6 the legislative leaders in Albany understanding it.  
7 We're seeing nearly 500 person reduction in full-time  
8 headcount at our community colleges. It is the  
9 City's responsibility to fund the operating budgets  
10 of our community colleges, and there is-- there are  
11 no single institutions in New York City that do more  
12 for socioeconomic transformation than our community  
13 colleges, and when we starve them of resources we are  
14 failing to create opportunity for low and moderate-  
15 income New Yorkers, immigrant New Yorkers, people of  
16 all backgrounds to achieve the American dream. I  
17 don't understand it, and I especially don't  
18 understand it from somebody with multiple community  
19 degrees. If I may, I just have two very brief  
20 things. I really appreciate it, Chair. One is a  
21 parochial question for District 33. We are home to  
22 City Tech. We're also experiencing a-- the downtown  
23 Brooklyn office market, the commercial market in  
24 downtown Brooklyn is struggling mightily. For  
25 reasons I don't understand it now costs more to rent

office space in downtown Brooklyn than lower Manhattan. That's not really your problem. What I am interested, though, in is how we can do a better job of forging partnerships between City Tech, perhaps with leadership from CUNY Central, and kind of some of the economic engines for opportunity in downtown Brooklyn to start more businesses, to build more opportunity in some of the vacant space that we have available. This should be a hub for new jobs and innovation, and it's not happening. I think NYU could be a real partner here, too. Is there an adjacent [inaudible]. Are you guys thinking about these kinds of ideas? Could we bring together some of the economic development leaders in downtown Brooklyn with City Tech and CUNY Central to try and create some plans?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: So, as a former-- as a Brooklynite, it's dear to my heart, and as you know, at one point I ran the Chamber of Commerce, so I am familiar with the downtown partnership and all that. I do believe that the president of the college has quite a few partnerships that he has established. I think there's more that could be done. For example, we



1                   COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION                   65  
2   have a project right now in partnership with the  
3   Brooklyn Navy Yard connected to some workforce  
4   development.

5                   COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And perhaps  
6   provide some funding for that project.

7                   EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: I  
8   think it is-- it is something that I welcome, the  
9   idea of partnering with the downtown Brooklyn. I am  
10  surprised, right? Many, many years ago I worked for  
11  the Brooklyn Borough President. I was in charge of  
12  economic development and was involved in Metro Tech  
13  and downtown-- I was involved in creating those  
14  projects. So I think there is an opportunity there  
15  to really create some economic development, so.

16                  COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: It could be a  
17  real win/win, and with your expertise--

18                  EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA:  
19  [interposing] So, would love to partner with your--

20                  COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: [interposing]  
21  That would be great.

22                  EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA:  
23  office to try to do something.

24                  COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: That would mean  
25  a lot. Alright, we will follow up and set

1 conversation. Last question. I was concerned about  
2 the decision around the-- at Hunter College and the  
3 pal-- and the professor that I believe was being  
4 recruited for Palestinian studies. I would like just  
5 to hear a clear explanation for why that position was--  
6 - is no longer being sought after. For me, it was a--  
7 - I was really concerned about freedom of speech and  
8 freedom of thought and why we wouldn't-- I think it's  
9 a beautiful thing for us to be learning about Israeli  
10 studies and Palestinian studies and all backgrounds,  
11 and I was-- the way that this was handled was really  
12 concerning to me, and so I'd just like to understand  
13 a little bit better.

14  
15 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: I'm  
16 going to turn it over to Sascha [inaudible].

17 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR OWEN: Thank you,  
18 Council Member for the question. The-- just be  
19 clear, and maybe--

20 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA:  
21 [interposing] she needs to be sworn in.

22 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Pardon me.

23 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR OWEN: Oh.

24 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: You just beat me  
25 to it. Yes. Yes, I'd like to swear you in.

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

67

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR OWEN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ:

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR OWEN: Sorry,  
Council Member. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: You want to do it,  
Hector? [inaudible] with your right hand raised. Do  
you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and  
nothing but the truth in your testimony before this  
committee and to respond honestly to Council Member  
questions?

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR OWEN: I do.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. And you  
stated your name for the record?

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR OWEN: Sascha  
Owen.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you.

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR OWEN: Thank you,  
Council Member. Good to see you. I didn't know you  
had a baby. Mazel tov. The position is going to ex--  
it's still existent at Hunter. It was the content of  
the posting that the Chancellor and others had found  
to be divisive, but there will be a new job posting.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Is the title for  
the position the same?

1                    SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR OWEN: I believe  
2  
3 the title's the same, yeah. There'll be a new-- yes.

4                    COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: So, the concern  
5 was in the content for how the position was  
6 described, not that there shouldn't be a position for  
7 Palestinian studies at Hunter College.

8                    SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR OWEN: That is  
9 correct.

10                   COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: That's helpful.  
11 I appreciate it. Thank you.

12                   SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR OWEN: Thank you.

13                   CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Good. Thank you.  
14 We've been joined by Council Member Bottcher. Thank  
15 you for joining us. Federal government, need to wax  
16 poetic about the damage he's doing, this  
17 administration is doing to our education system--  
18 changes day after day, but we know it's cuts and  
19 cuts, no clear guidance. Stock market is tanking.  
20 DOE's being cut in half. Lots of questions about  
21 funding, including a number of grants afforded to our  
22 colleges throughout the country. The federal  
23 government has threatened to reduce or eliminate  
24 grants from institutions. Grants from the National  
25 Institutions of Health are also at risk. How many

federal research grants have researchers at CUNY received in fiscal 25?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: I can tell you that monthly activity-- are you asking for number of grants or amount of money? I think I want to--

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [interposing] Well, both.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: There--

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: [interposing] So, the number of-- the amount of money we receive in NIH federal grants only is \$12.7 million a year. A total of all federal projects is \$47.2 million a year. I do not have the total list and number of the grants, but that's the total amount.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Have any of them been cut yet?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: We've received 24 stop work orders, and we-- it is because, to your point, it's a fluid situation. We have received sometimes a stop work order request, and then it's rescinded. So, right now we have 24 stop

work orders. So, the risk financially is \$21.7 million are at risk with those 24 projects.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: You said the risk is \$27.1 million.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: \$21.7.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: \$21.7 million.

Those are all to CUNY Graduate Center for projects funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: Across the CUNY system.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay. So you stand to lose tens of millions of dollars from cuts it seems are unclear. It seems unclear whether or not they're being cut, because you're being issued stop work orders, then maybe stop work orders and then notifications. Can you talk a little more about what it's been like with the potential stoppage of these funds from the federal government?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: We have implemented a process in place to try and keep the CUNY community and researchers abreast of the continuous updates, and I have to say, our CUNY Research Foundation and CUNY Office of Research, huge

kudos out to them for the tireless nights that they have put in constantly monitoring. So as changes are made and notices are received, we update the website. If a private invest-- the investigators, the PIs, receive a letter, whether it be an inquiry which are some of what we're receiving, or a stop work order, that is then funneled through various channels to help them determine what needs to be done and next steps. The Chancellor has actively been working with the President to contemplate what is the situation, what might our back-up plans and the President of the RF have been thinking of what are the potential back-up plans for the situation if it were to arise that we lose funding. And so we don't know what the impact is. We just have projections and anticipated possible situations.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Vice Chancellor, did you want to add something or did you whisper some--

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO:  
[interposing] He corrected me.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Oh, he corrected, okay.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: The President of RF.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah, the RF. We don't want to say the President.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: Yeah, yeah. No, not the President. The President of the RF is what I meant to say.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Fantastic. We have a number of policies coming down the federal government that are impacting all facets of life, including our colleges. And CUNY has various programs dedicated to increasing access to higher education such as Black Male Initiative and the Percy Ellis [sic] SEEK program at City College. Federal government may deem these as DEI programs, and they've somehow turned that into a dirty word or a dirty phrase, but these are critical programs in ensuring equity in our city and our college system. And have you projected any-- are there any concerns? Are these programs at risk of being eliminated or reduced due to the current federal administration's anti-DEI, anti-equity stance?



EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: I think without clarity and guidance or any changes to laws, that is a difficult question to answer.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Are you anticipating-- is the college anticipating or preparing for any Executive Orders that deal with this, and if so, in what manner?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: I think, Council Member, it's safe to say that what we're really doing is-- as these Executive Orders come in, two things we're doing. Number one, we're leaning into our mission, right? We are a university of 28 percent of our students are students of color or 26 percent is Latino. We're leaning into our mission. But second, we're also making sure that we're not over-panicking and over-reacting. We're assessing to ensure that-- and ultimately, we're guided by State and City laws, so we're leaning into those laws and making sure that as these mandates come in that we're-- they're not in conflict with State and City law, and we're looking at them very closely.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: I want to elaborate and just say that all of our programs,

including Black Male Initiative are accessible to all students. We do not have any exclusionary practices throughout CUNY. It's all accessible to all students. That is part of our mission.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. I want to acknowledge we've been joined by Council Member Feliz on Zoom. I know you're not panicking, and I appreciate your sober approach to this, but a lot of kids-- a lot of people in our country are panicking by the policies of this administration, how they're harming New Yorkers, and I think rightfully so. In line with that, on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025, it was announced that the State will allocate \$1.5 million in the CUNY Mexican Studies Institute. In fiscal 25, the Mexican Studies Institute was allocated \$1 million from the City Council initiative CUNY Research Institutes. How is the State funding differ, or how does it add to the work that has been done with the Council discretionary funding?

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: So, Chair, you're referencing the Governor's announcement at the Somos Conference in Albany where there was \$1.5 million committed. We thank the Governor. As was announced, it's additional support for the

institute and it can include a range of different pieces, but primarily for personnel and for personnel to basically focus on programming and educational resources and community events. So we appreciate that additional infusion of a State commitment that the Governor announced that would really help the institute at Lehman College.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: At which college?

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Lehman.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Lehman-- oh, Lehman, I've heard of that. In which Council District?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: Yours.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: It's a good council district. It's a good college.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: It's a nice softball you threw us. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: While testifying at the oversight hearing in November regarding CUNY's response to the recommendations from the Lippman Report, Chancellor Matos Rodriguez stated that CUNY would require additional funding from the State and the City to be able to incorporate the feedback. Can you please update us on the status of this? Was any

funding allocated from the State or on the Mayor's Preliminary Budget for this purpose?

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR OWEN: Sascha again. Thank you, Council Member.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you.

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR OWEN: As you know, and I think the Chancellor has stated repeatedly, he welcomed the feedback from the Lippman Report, welcomed the recommendations. All our work to combat hate and discrimination is ongoing and we always want to hear from experts and others who can help us achieve the goals of making sure everyone feels safe on our campuses. We have been implementing the recommendations from the Lippman Report. We have either implemented some of-- some of them have already been implemented or they're in process of being implemented. I can highlight some of those for you now, and of course can get you more detailed information afterwards. I think I've gotten some of that to you already. But you know, one emphasis of the Lippman Report was about centralizing our policies and our complaint process. So we are doing that. we've created a center for inclusivity and equal opportunity, whose responsibility it's

going to be ensure compliance system-wide at all campuses with State, local and federal law-- ensure that policies are implemented consistently, and again, up to standards at all campuses. We also have brought in an outside consultant to do a full policy review. This was another recommendation in the report. So hopefully in the coming-- hopefully weeks or months we will have some results of that policy review. We did extensive training around Title Six in the fall. All of our Chief Diversity Officers, anyone could ever, you know, be relevant to Title Six work on campuses was trained. We created a webpage around Title Six. A guidebook was created for all of our campuses, a video guide as well, training. So we have done a lot of work to implement and those are just some of those of those highlights from the Lippman recommendations.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. Did you want-- at the hearing.

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR OWEN: Yeah, we don't have an enacted budget yet. We are seeking funding for the Center from the State, and we would welcome that from the City Council as well, but you know, we do not have an enacted budget yet.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: They did this--

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR OWEN: But we--

that's not stopping us from implementing the  
recommendations right now.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. Was  
additional funding provided or proposed in the  
Governor's State Executive Budget, or did the Mayor  
propose additional funding for this purpose in his  
preliminary budget?

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR OWEN: No.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And secondly, the  
day the hearing-- you announced you put out the RFP  
for the reporting portal.

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR OWEN: Yep.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I won't rehash all  
the issues with the old portal which, you know, as a  
result of our hearing in June of 22 implemented the  
portal. There were issues with it. You put out an  
RFP for an updated portal for reporting. Can you  
please update us on a status of that RFP?

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR OWEN: Absolutely.  
We're really excited for this new system. We think  
it's going to make a real difference in implementing  
our policies across the system. We have, you know,

issued the RFP and we are still in the procurement process, and we are-- our goal was to have something for the spring, and we're on track for that.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you.

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR OWEN: And fully implemented for the new school year.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. Fully implemented for the new school year. I would like to turn it over to Council Member Bottcher.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: How are you?

In January in her State of the State Address, Governor Kathy Hochul announced the Opportunity Promise Scholarship which would offer free community college tuition for all adult learners age 25 to 55 in New York State. Does CUNY anticipate a big influx of students if this is funded by the legislature, and if so, what are you doing to prepare for this influx of new adult learners?

SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: So, let me start and then in terms of the preparations I'll turn it over to my colleague, Alicia. So, the Governor's proposal would cover 3,500 current students at the community colleges, and we project that 1,700 more under that proposal would attend. As

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: We've been working closely with all the colleges and the chief academic officers to project out, and based on those projections-- based off of which programs each of the community college offer that are in high needs and asking them to look at their current advisor/student ratios, how many more advisors would they need because the program provides support for additional supports. It's also the textbook cost associated with that. So we're already building out projections in anticipation of hiring the additional



supports and having the infrastructure in place. Fortunately, CUNY knows how to do that well and get students the textbook costs covered, and so we'll just build upon that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Is 1,700 do we think-- is that considered a lot or high/low? It seems like if free community college is offered to all adult learners 25 to 55, that in the City of New York wouldn't you think there might be more than 1,700 new students across all the CUNY campuses?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: So, 1,700, it's based off of the original proposal which is in very specific high-demand fields. It's not all majors that are covered, and so based off of those very specific majors, 1,700 is a robust number.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: In a previous hearing we discussed CUNY's efforts to pursue public/private partnerships and potentially even dispense with some of your real estate assets to bring in income for CUNY. Can you give us an update on those efforts and any specific plans that are underway?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Yeah, thank you, Council Member. It's good to see you

again. I know you and I have had lengthy conversations about your plans in your district. I mean, we continue to, as you know, real estate and we've discussed looking at how to monetize our buildings is something that it is a priority for us, but in a way that allows us to continue stay in the core of our mission which is to provide additional space for our campuses to be able to grow their program and so forth. So, it is a balance that we're trying to strike. I think that right now we have some potential projects that are in the negotiation phase, so I'm not going to talk about them in a public setting right now, but eventually we will be having some conversations, and you and I have talked about what some of those potential projects are. The most important thing is we're going to stay focused on who we are and what I'm charged with which is to provide space for our campuses, and whatever spillover and how we sort of navigate, make sure that those resources go really to providing resources to our operation and to our budget. And right now we have at least two or three projects that are in consideration, but real estate negotiations take a long time. In your district we have on in particular,

so we're hoping that we'll be able to talk to you soon about that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you, Council Member Bottcher. Last year-- in last year's Preliminary Budget, CUNY testified that you brought in professional staff to ensure projects are completed on time, and that the completion rate had increased from 27 percent to 50 percent. What is the current completion rate for capital projects?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Last year, it was 24 percent. We've increased it to 27 percent. So we have a three percent increase, and our goal is to get to 55 percent, right? Our-- that's in the state of good repair. With regards to completion rates, since the Chancellor took office, let me give you some numbers. In 2018, we had projects of-- about 58 percent of our projects were completed on time. That jumped from 2019 to 130 percent of our projects were completed on time. It went down during the pandemic, because of, you know, there was not a lot going on, but I'm happy to report that we're sort of back on track. In 2022 we were at 133 percent. I mean, 2023 we were 180 percent, and

as of 2024 we're about 70 percent, but we still got some time to go. I think the challenge for us when it comes to capital is making sure-- in my testimony I talked a little bit about that. Making sure that our capital, our projects are aligned where the resources are available, right? Because what happens is if they're not aligned and we're waiting, and then for that alignment it creates a delay in the project. That's the first problem. Second problem, as you know, we get funding from the City Council. We have to wait for the state to provide the other half of that funding. So that also creates-- so what we've done is we've done a lot of work under our Vice Chancellor for Facility Manager. We've done a lot of work to sort of be-- work with DASNY who is the construction partner, but also we brought in a lot of work in-house to be able to take care of the smaller projects to be able to be more nimble and be able to really deliver on those projects a lot quicker, and we're seeing great results because of that. And we're-- you know, I think the challenge for us is for CUNY to get its facilities to a state of good repair. We need to spend about \$600 million-- about \$600 million a year, \$400 million on the four-year

schools, \$200 million on the two-year schools, and right now we haven't been getting those level resources. So, obviously, we hope that we can continue to advocate and get your support on making sure that we get those resources.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And to be fair, those are additional funds you have asked OMB for.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Yeah. I want to just make one clarification. The numbers that I raised for you were commitment plans.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay. And these are funds that you have requested from OMB, or have you-- for both state of good repair and new projects they've all been requested.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And they have essentially denied you your request. Is that--

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Well, I mean, we're in constant communication with OMB about-- what we've done is we really have presented to OMB how CUNY is now meeting its obligation of completing projects on time. We have the capacity. We have the ability. So, we hope that by showing OMB that we have that capacity and ability on the new

1 system we've created that we would be a lot more  
2 successful in getting additional resources. So it's a  
3 constant conversation. I think the challenge is  
4 making sure that when we have projects ready to go,  
5 that they don't get-- doesn't get pushed out to outer  
6 years, and which is one of the challenges as we  
7 stated in previous hearings that you had in you  
8 committee.  
9

10 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And just to be  
11 clear what we're-- for the public what we're talking  
12 about, we are both talking about new facilities that  
13 attract students like a nursing facility at Lehman  
14 College, Ohio baseball fields at Hostos Community  
15 College, and we are also talking about state of good  
16 repair, and that includes things like making sure  
17 students have basic and professors have basic health  
18 needs met in the classroom like not having mold,  
19 having heat in the classroom, right? That's what  
20 we're talking about when we talk about our capital.

21 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: 100  
22 percent, yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So, when the City  
24 doesn't invest in the capital needs of CUNY, they're  
25 both perpetuating a system that makes it harder to

attract students and harder to keep students. Would you agree with that?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: I think making sure that our facilities are facilities that both our faculty and staff and students could feel good about and safe is our highest priority, and that's what we advocate. We've been very lucky at the state level. We've done extremely well under Governor Hochul. We're hoping that by this new strategy that we have with OMB that we can be successful this fiscal year. But the challenge is that we are ready to meet our commitment, but we need the additional resources in order to be able to do that. And it is broken down into two buckets. The first bucket is, you know, we-- every year, our Vice Chancellor for Facility Management, he goes and he met with the presidents to understand their priorities. We then get the priorities, and see-- it's broken down into two-fold: one, it's a state of good repair, and the second part is what do you need to grow programs that effects enrollment. And I think the challenge has been is that we have a plan, but there hasn't been an alignment in terms of the

resource provided to us. I mean, that's a fair statement to make.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah. In CUNY's booklet about the five-year capital plan, it is stated that an internal rating is being developed for all CUNY campuses to evaluate the current state of each building component on every campus. I will note that at last year's hearing, you also discussed this internal rating, and it was my understanding that these sort of ratings would be public, you know, with the goal being allowing professors and students to provide feedback and input on this. When do you expect the rating to be finalized and make public?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Well, the rating has been finalized, and I'm happy to report it is live in the facility's website, and I will send that link to your office so you can have that information, but it is something that is available. It really-- as I stated in our hearing, it's a professional tool that is used by professionals to determine the lifeline of a particular system. But we heard you, and we-- the argument you made that professional students could have input into that, so that's why we have made that



available, and that information is going to be updated as we update our information in-house.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. In CUNY's booklet about the five-year capital plan, it also stated on page 101-- is that the book right there? Alright, that's a big book, don't open it. Too many pages. But on 101, half of Bronx Community College's buildings are over 80 years old and have significant infrastructure and deferred maintenance issues. How much was Bronx Community College allocated in the five-year capital plan, and is this sufficient funding?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Bronx Community College is getting roughly about \$67 million for state of good repair with a match from the State which comes up to about \$135 million. As we-- one of the projects that we undertook was to make sure that Bronx Community College had a new boiler, a new system. I'm happy to report that that project is almost completed, and a project that we're sort of very proud of. now, what we're doing at Bronx Community College is we really are trying to determine the lifeline of some of the systems so we don't have the same problems we had before, and we're

1 actually being very intentional how we're allocating  
2 the resources there. For any college in our system,  
3 it could be said that we don't have enough resources.  
4 As I stated, we need \$600 million a year, right? We  
5 have to make tough decisions on how we allocate those  
6 resources. The good news is under our new Vice  
7 Chancellor for Facility Management, we now have the  
8 ability to know every system across our 300+  
9 buildings, the lifeline of that system and be more  
10 intentional to be able to really allocate the  
11 resources there. We believe that the resources we've  
12 allocated for Bronx Community College are enough  
13 resources right now to address the critical needs.  
14 Not enough resource to deal with all the challenges  
15 they have.

17 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I will note for  
18 those of you watching at home, Bronx Community  
19 College, the home of Hall of Fame. No one else seems  
20 excited about that, but you all should be the  
21 original Hall of Fame. Google it. The 10-year--  
22 it's worth googling. It's worth searching, by the  
23 way. The 10-year Preliminary Capital Commitment Plan  
24 includes roughly \$441.2 million for the Science Park  
25 and Research Campus. Can you just go over again the

status of the redevelopment and when you expect it to be completed?

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: So, I'm happy to report-- thank the City Council. In February I believe the City Council passed a ULURP to allow that project to move forward, so we're very grateful for that. This is a great partnership between CUNY, the City and the State. We-- the project right now is set to-- we needed to make sure that we accommodated the students that are located in Brookdale. I'm happy to report that we have every student that is in the Brookdale dorm would be able to get the same price point at our state-of-the-art new facility that we have entered into a lease agreement with. So, this summer they will be-- after this semester will be moving out there. Our goal is to begin to work with the nursing school and the uses that are there at the Sparks [sic] Project to move the nursing school sometimes in the-- in December, January of this year, December of this year, January this year, move the nursing school to a new temporary location that would allow the project to begin demolition. Construction is going to start in FY 27 with construction completed in FY30. Obviously, if

my chancellor is listening, I'm going to try to move that agenda a little bit forward, because I know it's a project that he wants us to move forward, but right now that's the projected time frame.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Fantastic. Give me one moment. I would like to thank you three and everyone from CUNY for coming today, for testifying today. I also want to thank Jeff Rotis [sic] who, you know, whenever I have an issue he is the poor, poor recipient of my sometimes angry but sometimes nice text or phone call. It's a real pleasure to work with Mr. Rotis on issues related to CUNY. It's very clear to me that there are a lot of important initiatives that you'd like to move forward, both capital and expense, including ASAP, ACE programs, Reconnect, and of course all the capital commitments you have, all the needs we have on our CUNY campuses. and it seems to me that we do have an administration that seems rather uninterested in making the investments that our city needs to provide robust education for our students, the kind of education our students deserve, an education system we are proud of, but we're proud of it in spite of all the challenges laid before us by an administration that wants to cut

1 funding to our school system. and I find it  
2 incredible that every day professors, professional  
3 staff, chancellors and vice chancellors work every  
4 day despite the immense fiscal challenges laid ahead  
5 of them, do the work that they can to make sure our  
6 students get the best education they can so they can  
7 reinvest that education right back into our city. I  
8 once again want to thank everyone from CUNY being  
9 here. We'll take a short break and then call up  
10 members of the community for public testimony.

11  
12 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR ALVERO: Thank  
13 you.

14 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Thank  
15 you.

16 [break]

17 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: We will be resuming  
18 in one minute.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Can everybody settle  
20 down and find your seat. We're getting ready to  
21 continue. Everybody settle down and find your seat.  
22 We are getting ready to continue.

23 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. I'd  
24 also like to thank the Sergeant at Arms, the  
25 Sergeants at Arms for all their help in making sure

these committee hearings go smoothly. Have our first-  
- we'll now begin the public testimony. Remind  
members of the public that that is a formal  
government proceeding and that decorum shall be  
observed at all times. As such, members of the  
public shall remain silent at all times. The witness  
table is reserved for people who wish to testify. No  
video recording or photography is allowed from the  
witness table. Further, members of the public may  
not present audio or video recordings as testimony,  
but may submit transcripts of such recordings to the  
Sergeant at Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.  
If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fill  
out an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms and  
wait to be recognized. When recognized, you will  
have two minutes to speak at today's-- on today's  
hearing topic, CUNY's Preliminary Budget. If you  
have a written statement or additional written  
testimony you wish to submit for the record, please  
provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant at  
Arms. I will now call the first panel. James Davis,  
the President of PSC CUNY and Madison Pinckney New  
York Lawyers for the Public Trust-- Interest. As a  
reminder, please state your name before your

testimony for the record, and your testimony is limited to two minutes. Thank you.

JAMES DAVIS: And thank you to the Council Members. On behalf of the 30,000 faculty and professional staff at the City University of New York that PSC represents, we do want to thank you for your continued advocacy on behalf of CUNY and know that the Council's consistent support has helped to stem the tide in difficult economic conditions. I also want to thank you for anticipated funding for our recently ratified collective bargaining agreement. These investments are helping CUNY to serve its growing student body. You heard from the previous panel about the enrollment increases. As I've said in previous hearings, CUNY no longer faces an enrollment crisis so much as a crisis in student retention and understaffing. Students stay enrolled when they have the support they need from faculty and staff and to continue to support our students and their upward mobility. In a city workforce, CUNY's community colleges need your continued investment. I can't speak about the Preliminary Budget without first addressing the federal assault on agencies and services that are now taking place, including many

programs on which our members and our students rely.

You referred earlier to the cuts in the federal

Department of Education. The Trump administration

seems determined to use higher education as a wedge

to divide Americans on a multitude of issues. Life-

saving medical studies are grinding to a halt, and

universities are targeted for draconian cuts. Thin

pre-texts have been used to justify these efforts

which are really an attack on knowledge itself and on

the project to create an educated citizenry. Our

students also have a target on their backs. Nearly

one in three CUNY students were born in another

country and some are undocumented, and unfortunately,

the overtures that the Mayor has made to ICE seeking

entry into sensitive locations has intensified the

anxiety.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I'm going to--

JAMES DAVIS: [interposing] You have my--

you have my written testimony.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Have your

testimony, yes.

JAMES DAVIS: and I'd be glad to amplify

on our recommendations for the city budget in its

enacted form.



CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. Ms. Pinckney? Please state your name for the record.

MADISON PINCKNEY: Hi, my name's Madison Pinckney and I'm a legal fellow in the Disability Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest. Thank you, Chair Dinowitz and the members of the Council, for the opportunity to testify today. In 2024, NYLPI created a Higher Education Accessibility Campaign to help advocate for students with disabilities who face discrimination when they're going through higher education, and unfortunately, we found that our services are very needed. We've received numerous reports from students across CUNY campuses who've been denied reasonable accommodations or have professors who refuse to implement those accommodations and also experience hostile attitudes when working with disability service offices. Because of these issues, we asked NYLPI-- NYLPI asked the Council to use its resources to investigate this discrimination. In FY26 CUNY requested \$2.1 million to support its students with disabilities services, stating that this funding will support increases in staffing at disability service offices and created a professional

development program to train these staff, and NYLPI supports this funding request to the extent that the funding goes towards these goals to help improve some of the issues that I've highlighted. Finally, students with learning disabilities and ADHD often report to us that they're unable to receive accommodations because CUNY requests an evaluation that can cost upwards of \$10,000, and this leaves these students without accommodations for their disabilities. NYLPI urges the Council to allocate funding so that CUNY campuses can offer these evaluations at no or low cost to students. Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify, and I'm happy to expand on any of these further.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. I would note as we discussed during the hearing with CUNY, Local Law 18 of 2023 does include the requirement that DOE have the ability to share evaluation data with CUNY and any institution of higher education. I would certainly like to talk to you more about that. I first want to go back to President Davis and talk about your perspective on the budget, what your view is of the budgetary needs for CUNY, for its students and its faculty.

JAMES DAVIS: Thank you. Our request is that the City increase its operating funding this year by \$140 million, and I want to breakdown why that is, what the rationale is, and I think based on the previous panel, you can anticipate some of the areas of need. One, the PEG cuts have impacted all the community colleges severely. \$95 million on a recurring basis leaves way too many staff vacancies and a lot of unmet needs. The painful thing is that, you know, as the previous dialogue indicated, there are so many programs that do this work really well-- ACE, ASAP, CUNY Reconnect has brought back 47,000 students, and we don't have the kind of graduation rates at CUNY that are meeting national averages and that we should feel proud of at this point, right? The four-year graduation rates-- the graduation rate from our four-year senior colleges is only 62 percent after six years, and at our associate's degree granting two-year colleges, the three-year graduation rate is only 23 percent. So, we know the programs, and Council Member Dinowitz, you're aware of them. We know the programs that worked, and I appreciated your question specifically about what would it take to scale up a program like ASAP or ACE for all. For

example, our calculation is that \$35.5 million in addition would make ASAP for All a reality in the CUNY community college system. So, you know, I won't get into the capital side, but--

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [interposing] I just want to [inaudible]

JAMES DAVIS: clearly on the operating side--

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: When you say ASAP for All, you include part-time students?

JAMES DAVIS: I believe so, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay. Please continue.

JAMES DAVIS: My colleagues in the administration also spoke about the capital side, and I'll just shorthand this because I know you're familiar with these dynamics already, but with the decades of deferred maintenance, University is only now being able to climb back to a place where, you know, I think that Executive Vice Chancellor Batista said it would take \$600 million per year to bring CUNY back into-- buildings into a state of good repair. So, look, I mean, you put it well. You know, CUNY has been and can be the crown jewel of

public higher education really in the country, but in order to do that we need both the operating funding, including and especially the restorations from those PEGs over the past few years and the capital investments.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. And I have like a financial question for Ms. Pinckney. You've-- talk a little more about your work. You've sued CUNY over whether or not they provided reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities.

MADISON PINCKNEY: We have not sued any-- a university, but we do get reports from students and then advocate for those students and some-- often it's with CUNY universities.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Have they reported to you about their new program that's supposed to sort of centralize--

MADISON PINCKNEY: [interposing] CUNY Accommodate?

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: CUNY Accommodate? Yes.

MADISON PINCKNEY: I have not spoken with them about it.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay. Again, no surprise to anyone that is certainly issue that is of deep importance not just to me but I think to so many of our students, making sure every student has the right to succeed, and when you look at students with disabilities who are too often left behind, I think that work's incredibly important. I want to thank both of you for your testimony today. I look forward to working with both of you to make sure all of our students and our faculty are getting the support that they deserve. Thank you. I'd like to call the next panel. Akkeem Polack, Davia Willis, Samantha Mantya [sp?], and Dainma Martinez. We're going to start from my right, your left. Please state your name for the record, and you may begin testifying for two minutes. Thank you.

SAMANTHA VENTURA: Samantha Ventura. I'm from Bronx Community College.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I'm sorry, can you say-- can you start one more time?

SAMANTHA VENTURA: Samantha Ventura. I'm a student at Bronx Community College. I'm an Early Education major. I'm here to testify for USS, the University Student Senate. We're fighting for free

metro cards, disability services, and expanding academic advisement. I, myself, have taken unnecessary classes which pushed me back a lot. I also live with a few disabilities. I've gotten help from Bronx Community College. I've gotten free psychiatric care. I've gotten counseling. I have a social worker. I have a whole team. More, I have faculty members at Bronx Community College who really helped me, but we need this for all students. I'm not sure if I'm lucky or blessed, but this is something all students need, and this is why we're here.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you.

DAINMA MARTINEZ: Good afternoon, Council Members. My name is Dainma Martinez. I am a Forensic Science major student, and I am also the SGA President, Student Government President of Hostos Community College, and the University Student Senate Vice Chair for Community Colleges. I'm honored to testify today on behalf of my fellow students regarding the devastating impact of the proposed budget cuts to CUNY community colleges. CUNY's often referred as the People's University and for good reasons. It provides countless first-generation low-income and minority students like myself with access

to higher education, economic mobility and a path to a better future, but Mayor Adams proposed \$95.5 million in cuts to CUNY community colleges, including a \$10 million cut from Hostos alone. These cuts would result in larger classes, fewer courses offering and a reduction in essential student services like academic advising, mental health support, and career counseling. Many of us rely on these resources to navigate in college while juggling jobs, family responsibility, and financial hardships. I am a first-generation, disabled, BIPOC college student and I am also a student leader and someone who faces many struggles in the CUNY. I know firsthand how critical programs like tutoring centers, emergency grants, and food pantries are to student success, as well as slashing funds. We're forced to make impossible choices, choosing between attending school and working extra shifts. At Hostos Community College, a college that serves a predominantly Black and Latinx student body, these cuts are more than just numbers. They're a direct attack on the success of historically marginalized communities. Many of my peers already systemic barriers to education, and these budget reductions



will only widen the gap between opportunities and access. New York City cannot afford to balance its budget at the expense of its students. Investing in CUNY is an investment in the future of the city. We're not asking for a favor. We're demanding that you uphold CUNY promises of accessibility and high-quality education.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. I love the words you used by the way, investment, because that's what this is. These aren't expenditures. These are investments. So thank you for saying that.

DAVIA WILLIS: Good afternoon, Council Members. My name is Davia Willis and I'm Criminal Justice major at John Jay College of Criminal Justice with plans to graduate in spring of 27. I chose to attend CUNY because of diverse opportunities and as a first-generation college student my career goals are to be a lawyer and a politician, erecting my own firm and being elected to serve those I represent. My experience at CUNY has been a mixture of challenges and opportunities, and one significant challenge I have faced is financial constraints of which one is the logistical difficulties associated with commutes. Currently, I commute to campus using both the subway

and the bus which amounts to \$132 per month. I'm an international student and given that I must be responsible for my living, academic and housing expenses, this adds greatly to the monthly expenditure. Not everyone is an international student, but everyone has a variety of expenses and in some way inconvenienced by the added cost of transportation. Many students are forced to skip classes, limit extracurricular opportunities and turn down internships because they cannot afford to travel. To address these issues, I urge the legislature to fund free metro cards for CUNY students, ensuring free fares that students would reduce financial barriers to education, improve access to academic and professional opportunities, and promote retention and graduation rates. As students we should not have to choose between quality education and the ability to afford transportation needed to access it. I strongly encourage the legislature to invest in equitable transit solutions that supports students' success. Thank you for your time and consideration.

AKKEEM POLACK: One second. Good day everyone. I am Akkeem Polack and I am a student at

1 York College. I also serve as the Student Government  
2 President as well as the Vice Chair for Legislative  
3 Affairs with the University Student Center. And like  
4 my fellow colleagues here, I chose CUNY because of  
5 the reputation of providing working-class people with  
6 an affordable and quality education. It has a global  
7 reputation for being that vehicles of socioeconomic  
8 class mobility. While it's full of opportunities,  
9 many of our students still struggle with financial  
10 and structural barriers that threaten our success.  
11 One of the most pressing challenges facing CUNY  
12 students today is the sharp rising cost of living.  
13 This of course is not only a New York City issue. We  
14 see rents, homes, cars, groceries skyrocketing-- the  
15 price of eggs-- and other things as a result of the  
16 COVID pandemic. One thing that makes New York City  
17 different is that we have the largest and probably  
18 even most reliable system of public transit.  
19 However, we need relief as CUNY students. Many of  
20 us, we travel long distances, sometimes up to two  
21 hours a day just to get to class. It's not optional.  
22 It's a necessity. However, with the increase in  
23 fares, commuting to class has been an unbearable  
24 burden for thousands of students. That's why the USS  
25

1 along with all CUNY students are calling for free  
2 metro cards for CUNY students, because we believe  
3 that access to transportation is access to education.  
4 A student who cannot afford a metro card or Omni card  
5 cannot attend class. A student who cannot afford to  
6 travel cannot take an internship, participate in  
7 research, or even engage in civic life. Without  
8 reliable and affordable transportation students are  
9 forced to make impossible choices. Do I go to class  
10 today, or do I save the swipe for work so I can  
11 afford rent? That's why we're really calling for  
12 free metro cards for all CUNY students. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. I first  
15 want to thank you all for being advocates. I think  
16 it's challenging, particularly when you're talking  
17 about things like social/emotional health and things  
18 you need. So I want to thank you for doing that and  
19 for setting an example for other students that you  
20 can do it. And I want to point out, I don't think I  
21 heard any of you speak about academic needs. I think  
22 each of you spoke about all of the things outside of  
23 your academics that you need in order to just go to  
24 school and be healthy in school and attend,  
25 recognizing that school, that university is about so

much more than what happens inside the four walls of the classroom, that it's about supporting the whole student. Akkeem-- Akkeem, I just want to get your thoughts on that a little bit?

AKKEEM POLACK: Alright, so you touched on the academic needs. It's just like further down, because you know, since fiscal year 2021 CUNY has faced \$94.1 million in the budget reductions through the PEGs, the Program to eliminate the Gap, and a 15 percent decline in city funding which will go to \$95.4 million in FY 2025, and this has led to a reduction in instructional and students services, including academic advisement. We find that just interacting with CUNY students everywhere, one of the major barriers has to do with poor academic advisement, you know. Just one person on the panel [inaudible] speaking to me today as well, it affected their graduation time because they weren't advised in time. So that's-- it's still there. Academic advisement is still one of the things we're pushing for. CUNY has included it in its budget request to both the City and the State, and that's something we're getting behind because we need improvement in that area so people can graduate on time.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I don't know if you know if it's explicit, the program you two spoke about, was that CUNY Cares? Do they make explicit of that-- that you were sort of part of that program?

SAMANTHA VENTURA: So, at my school, we have an Office of Personal Counseling. They have a partnership with Northwell Hospital. Through them I was able to get all the care I need. There is CUNY Cares on my campus which is something that all schools should have.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay. And is that-- that sort of in-- you wanted to add something. Is that integrated into the services that you're receiving? Okay.

DAINMA MARTINEZ: So, CUNY Cares, we are a big part of a number for CUNY Cares. Personally, I can also testify for CUNY Cares. It's something that should be implemented into all campuses. It's something that should be implemented in general to fund-- to have funding source. As a great example, I almost lost my home. I almost lost not being able to pay my rent because of knowing that I had to choose either working harder towards school and/or even going to work. I-- when-- I took care of my family.

I took care of my mother and my father from-- since I was a young child technically, and once my father passed away and I had to be the sole provider for my mother, CUNY Cares was able to provide me with the social services I needed. They also provided knowing that we needed HRA. We needed food stamps. We needed just help in general that I cannot take on on myself. You would think that as somebody who is 25 can do things by themselves, not in this society. We cannot do things alone. At the end of the day and the world, when I first stepped into college, I thought I could do it alone, and that didn't work out right. So having CUNY Cares, having advisement that gives us the motivation to continue to strive. You speak about why does certain things seem that with the graduation rates, ASAP, things like that. It's not the program. we have to look inside of the program, inside of advisement, because why do have certain advisors telling students take these certain classes when you don't see anywhere in your degree works, you don't see it anywhere happening, and that is holding students back. That is not allowing students to graduate or be able to feel successful, because now they're thinking is it me.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah. During CUNY's testimony I asked them about metrics for the success of CUNY Cares, and I think often we think of metrics of how many more students graduated, how many more students attended classes, how is GPA impacted, but as CUNY collects data, I sure hope that some of their data includes how many students stayed in their homes because of this, how many students were able to sign up for Fair Fares, how many students were able to get access to SNAP and other benefits, because those are also critically important metrics to know how successful a program is, because we're more than just about graduation rates. CUNY is more than just about graduation rates. It's about the entire student. I want to thank this panel, everyone on this panel for your testimony today. I will call the next panel which is Tanisha Fields and Daniel Reden. Okay, Ms. Fields, you may begin, and please state your name for the record.

TAHISHA FIELDS: My name is Tahisha Fields. Good afternoon members of the New York City Council Committee for Higher Education. My name is Tahisha Fields and I am a student at Baruch College majoring in Mental Health Counseling with plans to



graduate in May 2025. I chose CUNY because it offers the most affordable graduate schools and diverse education opportunities compared to the private institutions, making it accessible for students, graduate students like me. As a non-traditional older student, my career goals are to become a fully-licensed mental health counselor and pursue my PHD in Social Work. My time at CUNY has been both rewarding and challenging while completing my degree. I am also in my final year of clinical internship which due to the state regulations is unpaid. That financial strain is exacerbated by my fulltime academic load and my time consuming commute both from my internship and to my fulltime classes. I am deeply involved in the student government, as I am the President of the Baruch College Graduate Student Assembly, and I'm also the Vice Chair of Fiscal Affairs for CUNY University Student Senate. However, balancing these responsibilities and studies leave me with little time for my part-time job which I am only to do maybe once or twice a week, further compounding my financial challenges. CUNY has always been a beacon of affordable education. I've gotten my undergrad from Baruch College, but rising costs particularly in

transportation becomes a significant barrier for students' success. As a commuter, I along with my other fellow students, spend hundreds of dollars monthly just to access education. The expense limits my opportunities in participating in internships, fellowships and going to my job that I will have to decide. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. You may begin. Please state your name for the record.

DANIEL REDEN: Good afternoon, Chair Dinowitz and esteemed members of the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education. My name is Daniel Reden and I have the honor of serving as the Chairperson of the University Student Senate and as a Student Trustee on the City University of New York's Board of Trustees. Today, I stand before you representing over 230,000 CUNY students across our 25 campuses, students who despite facing numerous challenges are unwavering in their pursuit of higher education. I want to thank you all for your time and your commitment to the students of CUNY, and I also urge the committee to fully fund CUNY as it's an investment, as you mentioned earlier, not just an institution, but the very future of New York City.

As my colleague said before me, transportation costs present a significant barrier to student success. Many CUNY students struggle to afford commuting expenses leading to missed classes and lower graduation rates. And to address this, University Student Senate has proposed a Student Commuter Grant Pilot Program which is included in the CUNY City budget request for \$500,000. This initiative aims to provide metro cards to students based on their program affiliations, thereby alleviating financial stress and promoting equity-- equitable access to education. The proposed 2025 People's Budget also recommends extending free or reduced-cost metro cards in the amount of \$75.5 million for all CUNY students, highlighting the critical need for transportation equity. A city-funded partnership between CUNY and the MTA would reduce fare evasion which disproportionately impacts low-income students and improve graduation rates by ensuring students can attend class and strengthen our workforce by supporting students' success and eventual graduation. CUNY has made progress in reducing the structural deficit of our campuses, but our campuses, specifically older schools and community colleges,

are also in alarming disrepair. Students contend daily with leaky ceilings, mold, elevator and escalators that make facilities non-accessible to all. These conditions are more than just inconveniences, they're barriers to learning and potential threats to health. Such environments are antithetical to academic excellence and compromise the safety and wellbeing of our community. Students should feel proud of the school that they go to, how it looks, how it feels, and from my perspective, which is a good one, it's not the overall sentiment. So, thank you guys for your time, and I look forward to answering your questions.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. You ended by saying students should feel proud of the school they go to. You both listed a number of deficits currently in the budget and how CUNY operates, and yet you're still attending CUNY. Can you talk more about that? Like, despite all those challenges, you remain at CUNY.

TAHISHA FIELDS: Well, for me, Baruch was one of the most affordable and not only top mental health counseling programs compared to Fordham and NYU. So we're still getting the same academic

process. I chose and looked through all the schools I wanted to go to. So it was either Baruch or Brooklyn, and it's a lot of money to do fulltime in mental health counseling, but it was still most affordable compared to the private schools. So that was one of my factors. Also, I feel like CUNY is more inclusive to making sure that you're a community and that you are thriving to do what you need to do in the school and have success and also have alumni come back and help you, and that was one of my other reasons of why I attended CUNY. I think the free metro card program will be helpful, especially for a graduate student who you have other compounding issues that are going on and you're going back to get another degree. It's really hard. Do you stay at work, go home from work and then also go to class? That's another fare on top of that even if you have like other things compounded on it. So, CUNY is affordable, but I think alleviating about the transportation might be helpful.

DANIEL REDEN: Yeah, and our colleges are the incubator of the future generation, right? We have future Council Members, future doctors, engineers, and the care of the future is ours, right?

1 And so we believe in CUNY. We believe in the  
2 mission. We believe in the access it provides to  
3 higher economic status for the people who go here who  
4 don't have access or wouldn't otherwise have that if  
5 it weren't for CUNY. And it's in our right, it's our  
6 responsibility to stay at home and fix what we have  
7 at home.

9 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah, I think 21  
10 Council Members attended CUNY. I think our Public  
11 Advocate and Mayor attended CUNY. So, all but maybe  
12 one of us are interested in reinvesting in CUNY. You  
13 don't have to guess which one is-- seems to not want  
14 to reinvest in CUNY. I want to thank this panel for  
15 your testimony today.

16 DANIEL REDEN: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: This is our final  
18 in-person panel: Christopher Leon Johnson, Sharon  
19 Brown. I will say John Jara, and then I will be  
20 corrected when they testify. Okay, please state your  
21 name for the record, and you may begin when ready.

22 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yes, my name  
23 is Christopher Leon Johnson. First, I want to say to  
24 free Mahmoud Khalil. I know this is Columbia related  
25 and Barnard related, so it's not-- nothing to do with

CUNY, but the reason I want to bring this up, because we all know that there's two organizations that are affiliated with CUNY which is called Within Our Lifetime and Students for Justice in Palestine, SJP, or CUNY for Palestine on Twitter and X and Instagram CUNY for Palestine. If this could happen to Mahmoud Khalil, this could happen to anybody that is part of CUNY for Palestine, and Within Our Lifetime, too. Myself, I support Israel. I support Israel 100 percent. Israel have the right to exist, but the same time that nobody should be getting their freedom of speech oppressed and their freedom of speech being arrested for saying what they want to say about Israel or Palestine. If you support Palestine, you support Israel, you shouldn't be getting arrested by the FBI or by any government agency because of that. I know that there's a few Council Members in the Progressive Caucus that are calling for his release, but some are the biggest hypocrites because they weaponized the City Council Sergeant at Arms to remove anybody that don't say what they want to hear, like Council Member Yusef Salaam and Council Member Sandy Nurse.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I'm sorry--

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: [interposing]  
It's on topic. It's on topic.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: That's fine. This  
is the budget hearing.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: I know it's  
budget hearing, but--

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [interposing] Thank  
you. I want to make sure we're staying on topic.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: No, no, it's  
on topic. But at the same time, I'm calling for more  
funding into CUNY to make sure that CUNY stays  
funded, despite the fact that SJP and Within Our  
Lifetime is inside CUNY. It's America. They have the  
right to say what they want to say, just as the same  
time the Jewish organizations have the right to say  
what they got to say about defending Israel. No  
school should be defunded. No school should be  
threatened with their budget be cut, because they say  
something about Palestine, supporting Palestine or  
they support Hamas, or they support the JDL or they  
support Jewish-related causes. Nobody should be--  
their budget funding cut. So that's all I got to  
say. Thank you. Free Mahmoud Khalil. Free Mahmoud  
Khalil. Thank you.



CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you.

JOHN JARA: Good afternoon, Chair Eric Dinowitz and members of the City Council Committee on Higher Education. Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today. My name is John Jara. I am a student at LaGuardia Community College. I am also serving as President for Student Government and also Vice Chair for International Student Affairs at USS. In my role in student government, I have the privilege to hear the voices of my fellow students. Many of us are struggling with reduced resources that are critical to our success. At LaGuardia alone we've experienced over \$4 million in funding losses which has led to fewer academic advisors and mental health counselors, diminished library hours and cuts to crucial transfer services. Some of our campus facilities have also suffered affecting public safety and essential maintenance. Through my conversations with students I have come to understand the importance of support for those experiencing financial hardships. The CUNY Cares program has been a critical resource for many, providing assistance in emergencies, and it's essential that we boost funding for this program so every student including those

raising families have access to the help they need.

Additionally, many students have shared their concerns about the rising cost of transportation.

For some, getting to campus is not just a daily commute, it's a significant barrier to their education. I've heard from students who spend a large portion of their limited budget on transit fares which could otherwise go towards essentials like textbooks or groceries. That's why I'm advocating for the USS proposal for free metro cards.

To address this challenge effectively, I urge the Council to consider restoring CUNY's funding to pre-2021 levels. We need immediate public safety enhancements, increased support for academic services, special mental health resources, and a robust IT infrastructure. Investing in the CUNY Cares program and ensuring the free metro card initiative is included in the budget. It'll go a long way in creating a more equitable educational environment.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Thank you, Mr. Jara.

JOHN JARA: Thank you for your time.

SHARON BROWN: hello, I'm Sharon Brown.

Before I start-- release the hostages. Let Yahweh's people go. Defend Israel. Happy Purim to the Jewish community. Okay, the standard budgeting is needed for staff and materials for learning proper maps of Israel, fighting anti-Semitism. It needs to be done at the college level, prayer, Bibles, American flags, Jewish flags, the different thing that we need, the 10 Commandments. They need to teach this at the college level. Apparently, it has been missing at the younger level, and the colleges need not to be included in the funding that are anti-Semitic. So when people go to colleges, this is where they're largely learning a lot of the anti-Semitic behavior. As the gentleman was talking about, Mahmoud Khalil. These people learn some of these things at the college. They didn't go in like that. Many of the teachers need to be removed. The funding needs to be removed from the schools if they are implementing anti-Semitic practices. We need to fund the schools that are showing the truth of what's out there, real education. The map should display Israel. We need to purchase maps. It should be funded that we get Bibles in school that have maps in them that show the

1 distribution of land that is in the Bible that shows  
2 the 10 Commandments, the law. People who are going  
3 to law school should be learning the 10 Commandments.  
4 We need to have a program where we're teaching this  
5 to the children. We need electronic tablets in  
6 schools. We don't need to take phones and tablets  
7 out of the school. There are school shootings.  
8 There's anti-Semitism. There are things happening on  
9 college campuses, schools that children need phones  
10 to contact parents, etcetera.

12 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you for your  
13 testimony. Mr. Jara, you named a number-- thank you  
14 for coming today both of you. You mentioned a number  
15 of things. I have a question for you. Yeah, man. I  
16 don't think the microphone will reach you if you're  
17 standing up. You mentioned a number of things that  
18 are important. how would you prioritize them,  
19 meaning if you could pick just one program or one  
20 element of our budget that needs the most investment,  
21 that will make the most impactful change to you and  
22 your classmates, what would that one program or  
23 change be?

24 JOHN JARA: CUNY Cares and free metro  
25 cards.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: CUNY Cares and free metro cards, good, alright. And as we heard earlier, CUNY Cares and free metro cards, it's like you all have the same talking points. We're together. I think I have them too as a Bronx Council Member also. CUNY Cares, looking forward to that being expanded. But again, highlighting that our schools, our universities or colleges are about all the supports around us that happen outside the classroom. I want to thank you both for your testimony today.

JOHN JARA: Thank you. [inaudible]

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: If-- this concludes our in-person portion of the public testimony. We have no one signed up to testify remotely. Okay. If there is anyone else present in the room who has not had the opportunity to testify, but wishes to do so, please raise your hand. Thank you. I want to thank every-- I want to thank CUNY, of course, everyone who's come to testify today about the importance of funding CUNY and why we need to fight so hard to make sure that CUNY is funded and receives the investment it deserves. It's not about funding or investing in an institution. It's about investing in our future, the people who are going to

be coming back or staying in our communities, making it better, raising a family, sending their kids to school in our communities. It is critical that we fund these programs, that we fund CUNY, and year after year it is a fight, and it's strange because it is a fight to fund things that have a great return on investment. I've said it once, I'll say it a thousand times, these are not expenditures. We're not throwing money away at an institution. We're making smart, proven investments, investments in our students and investments in our future that have return on investments that you would dream of in any stock market, not to mention the social benefits to our students in our society. So I want to thank you all for coming, and I want to thank you all for your continued work at CUNY and work with us to make sure CUNY gets the funding it deserves. This hearing is adjourned.

[gavel]

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

127

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

128



C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date April 11, 2025