



TESTIMONY OF DR. HEATHER JAMES-ZUCKERMAN
LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE, PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY
New York City Council FY26 Higher Education and Finance Committee
Executive Budget Hearing
May 15, 2025

Good afternoon, Chairs Dinowitz and Brannan and Council Members. On behalf of the 30,000 faculty and staff represented by PSC/CUNY, thank you for your continued advocacy on behalf of the City University of New York.

On Thursday, May 1 Mayor Eric Adams announced that all funding cut by his administration over the past three budget cycles would be restored. CUNY's community colleges, funded largely by the city, have lost nearly 500 full-time positions since Mayor Adams took office. The restoration amounts to \$96 million in operating money plus \$30 million for ASAP, ACE and the Brooklyn Recovery Corps at Medgar Evers College. In response, PSC President James Davis said:

"At a time when colleges and universities face unprecedented authoritarian attacks from the federal government, these baselined City budget restorations made by Mayor Adams are welcome news. CUNY's faculty, staff, students, and the communities our colleges serve are subject to intense economic and political instability right now. As PSC members have said consistently, we need steady funding and support from City Hall."

Mayor Adams's restorations put CUNY back to pre-COVID funding levels. Today, we ask that you help us do more. We ask that you help CUNY remain the people's university and invest in our City's future at a time when students are scared and struggling. We ask you to help us bridge the funding gap created by the federal government's attack on research. Yesterday, one of my colleagues at BMCC wrote to amNY about the impact of President Trump's sudden freeze on National Science Foundation grants. Her work, which examines how health

conditions impact STEM students, has been abruptly halted. Meanwhile, at Queens Community College, a program which offered stipends and tuition, as well as funds for travel to conferences, for students doing research in Natural Sciences, math and engineering was cancelled. This program allowed our City-funded community colleges to place students in labs at four-year colleges over the summer. The program had been going on for over 20 years but grant investigators were told that their work no longer aligned with administration's priorities.

CUNY moves more students into the middle class than the ivy leagues but how can we continue to do so when research that supports at-risk students in high demand fields is devalued? As you heard from CUNY during the March Preliminary Budget hearing, CUNY was issued 24 stop work orders putting \$21.7 million at risk. As of late April, the PSC is aware of over 60 cancelled grant-funded projects. Surely that number is already higher.

The number of federal grants cancelled because of the MAGA political agenda continues to increase. Every lost grant represents lost scientific progress, lost knowledge creation, and foregone economic growth. Jobs and academic progress are also at great risk. The university needs funding to bridge the gaps where it can to keep professional researchers and support staff employed and help more student researchers on track to complete their studies.

In this political moment, New York City and CUNY must be a safe haven for students. We must robustly support their educational journey so that they can persist despite fear as did the generations before them that have made countless contributions to our city and nation.

PSC Budget Requests

We applaud the Council's request to baseline funds for CUNY Reconnect with \$8.8 million to continue the program and another \$2.9 million for its expansion. CUNY Reconnect successfully brought back over 47,000 CUNY students since its pilot in 2022-2023.

We also propose:

- CUNY's request to fulfill the university's obligation to the January 2025 ratified contract.
- Additional operating support to help CUNY navigate federal government cuts to grant funding.
- An additional \$5.5 million to support an ASAP-for-all model and provide all students with academic support in CUNY's most successful and nationally recognized program. ASAP's system of full financial aid, robust wraparound services, and high-

contact advising leads to a graduation rate twice that of non-ASAP students. That's what the college experience should be for every CUNY student, and we need more funding to get us closer to that goal.

- Expansion of ACE - the senior college version of ASAP. According to CUNY, "The most recent ACE freshmen cohort admitted to John Jay College realized a four-year graduation rate of 60 percent vs. 41 percent for a matched comparison group of non-ACE students, and the first transfer cohort at Lehman College realized a two-year graduation rate of 61 percent vs. 30 percent for a matched comparison group of non-ACE students. These effects are so large that they actually reduce the average cost per graduate by about 13 percent".
- Hiring a more diverse pool of advisors and other faculty and staff to end CUNY's crisis of understaffing. Moreover we ask the Council to send a clear message to CUNY administration - restored operating money must be used for hiring. Positions taken off the books cannot stay there. The City funds nearly 75% of community colleges. Adams' cuts decimated staffing and CUNY must make rehiring a priority.
- CUNY Reconnect has been an unquestionable success bringing back 47,000 students. PSC was pleased to see the Mayor include a \$5.9 million restoration to the program. These funds should be baselined and agree with CUNY that the program receive an additional \$2.9 million for expansion.
- Replicate ASAP's successful use of free metrocards to all CUNY students. Our members regularly hear that too many students do not make it to class or risk punishment when they evade a fare because they do not have the funds available to commute to campus. CUNY and the Council have urged the City Administration to fund a MetroCard/OMNY pilot program with \$500,000 in FY26 to provide transportation benefits for 473 students in need. We encourage you to expand this program to include more students. If it is necessary to begin with a limited rollout, we support the University Student Senate suggestion to prioritize:
 - Student Parents who use the childcare centers at CUNY:
 - Current Data: 1400 childcare seats available in CUNY
 - Cost \$739,200
 - Students who are in Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI) were in the foster care system:
 - Current Data: estimate of foster care students within FYSI CUNY

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- Unlimited MetroCard for four months, cost \$79,200
 - College Discovery students:
 - Support 956 students, cost \$504,768
- Support Public Safety
 - *Increase Mental Health Access for Students.* This committee knows all too well the stress college students are facing. CUNY students often have less access to support systems than their peers while balancing the obligations of work and family. This is evident in the demand for mental health services. We support CUNY's request to hire more counselors at our community colleges that would serve more than 5,600 additional students. (\$2.8M)
 - *Increase Faculty and Staff Numbers to Accommodate Proposals Likely to Increase Enrollment.* We support the Progressive Caucus' Crisis to Care proposal that would be instrumental to helping the thousands of New Yorkers get access to mental health care. But CUNY's community colleges must be fully funded and adequately staffed to provide those services. (\$7M)
 - Finally, we ask that you fund critical programs highlighted in the People's Plan. To ensure our city does not fall back into the cycle of dysfunction, there must be a plan to make the city affordable and invest in long-term public safety solutions that focus on eliminating the obstacles and not criminalization of people in need.

Capital Budget

We support CUNY's budget request, especially their \$150 million ask to modernize the Allied Health and Natural Science buildings at Hostos.

We ask that you help us support public safety with more health professionals. CUNY is essential to building out networks of nurses, social workers, mental health counselors, addiction services and others needed to help stabilize the city's social safety net.

We strongly support CUNY's \$150 million request to modernize its Allied Health and Natural Sciences Buildings at Hostos. CUNY graduates approximately half of the city's nurses each year, CUNY has a growing medical school, and there are dozens of teaching programs across the University. We have met with members in various healthcare professional programs who have made clear that CUNY's current facilities will not meet the demand for access to clinical training needs or to the faculty and staff students need.

Conclusion

Over the past three budget cycles, this Council has taken action to ensure our great public university not only survives, but thrives. Yet there are potentially rough waters ahead as our members watch research funding pulled and students are targeted. With the support of the council, we will continue to see CUNY's enrollment continue to climb beyond pre-pandemic figures and turn back years of austerity budgets. But we still need you. Students, faculty and staff at CUNY need you to stand with us. Stand with us to defend public higher education from threats from Washington and ensure that CUNY grows, continuing to support the economy, workforce, culture, and civic life of our great city.

Thank you.



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**Testimony of Paul Seamus Ryan
Executive Director
New York City Campaign Finance Board**

**Executive Budget Hearing – Fiscal Year 2026
Committees on Finance and Governmental Operations, State & Federal Legislation
May 15, 2025**

Good afternoon Chair Brannan, Chair Restler, and members of the Committees on Finance and Governmental Operations, State & Federal Legislation. My name is Paul S. Ryan and I am the Executive Director of the New York City Campaign Finance Board (CFB), and I am joined today by Amanda Melillo, First Deputy Executive Director. Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26), which I am proud to share as the first budget developed under my leadership. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) represented the biggest year in the four-year election cycle, as it covers the November 2024 presidential election and the June 2025 citywide primary. Presidential elections are consistently the highest-turnout elections in New York City with around 60% of the electorate participating, which increases voter demand for our services. In the agency's 7-year strategic plan, adopted early in FY25 as one of my first priorities as executive director, we articulated a strategy to leverage high interest in the presidential year to spread awareness about NYC Votes, the CFB's voter education and engagement initiative, and build our audience so we could encourage New Yorkers to participate in citywide elections.

In FY25, the CFB delivered on its mission to inform New Yorkers and engage them in elections during a high-intensity, high-visibility election year. We collaborated closely with the City Council on the passage of Local Law 30 of 2017, a pivotal piece of legislation that significantly expanded and formalized our language access practice. FY25 saw the publishing of the agency's first Language Access Implementation Plan and the translation of key resources into 13 languages other than English. We set a new standard for accessibility at public events, developing internal expertise and securing vendor support to provide ASL, live captioning, in-language interpretation, and more. We further enhanced our groundbreaking youth leadership programming with an outstanding cohort of 16 Youth Ambassadors in 2024. The Partnerships team held more than 400 events in our priority neighborhoods throughout 2024. We also

scaled our outreach, sending millions of texts, kept in touch with thousands of New Yorkers regularly by email, and for the first time, we supplemented our on-the-ground outreach work with a paid canvassing operation. This outreach resulted in collecting and mailing more than 7,000 pledge cards to voters we spoke to in-person and another 15,000 pledges we collected online for the general election alone.

Looking ahead, the CFB's FY26 Executive Budget of \$109,460,239 reflects a total decrease of \$44,953,597 compared to the FY25 current modified budget of \$154,413,836. The bulk of the budget decrease comprises a decrease of \$60,400,000 in the Election Funding unit of appropriation which totals \$22,200,000 in FY26 compared to \$82,600,000 in FY25. This substantiates the cost of public funds for the general election held on November 4, 2025, and the potential for a special election in FY26. There is no primary election for covered offices scheduled to be held in FY26; the primary election held on June 24, 2025, falls in FY25.

The breakdown in each unit of appropriation is as follows: \$59,863,829 for Other Than Personal Services (OTPS) and \$27,396,410 for Personal Services (PS). Fiscal Year 2026 will continue to be shaped by our 7-year strategic plan that will target improvements across the agency to meet ambitious North Star goals for 2030, including faster audit completion, higher satisfaction among candidates and voters, increased civic participation, and stronger staff engagement. The CFB remains committed to fulfilling its charter-mandated responsibilities with transparency, efficiency, and equity.

Strategic Plan and Technology Improvements

During FY26, the implementation of the CFB's new 7-year strategic plan, which takes the agency through the 2029 citywide election cycle, will continue in earnest and translate the strategic plan goals into programmatic changes.

As I have testified already before the Council, we have an agency North Star goal of completing 90% of audits within 1 year of the election for candidates who do not request and receive extensions, with minimal increased risk. In the short-term, we've committed to a benchmark of completing 50% of audits within 1 year of the 2025 election and have commitment to starting post-election audits immediately after the June primary for candidates who are not in the general election. We are also engaging an outside consultant to help us develop a roadmap for improving the candidate experience and optimizing the audit process. This effort will support a more efficient and streamlined matching funds program.

In FY26, the CFB will continue development on updating our legacy process and technology systems. This multipronged approach begins with process mapping, leading to process improvements, and then the implementation of supportive technology. We are also addressing a high vacancy rate within our tech team. While we work to fill these roles and bring more technical capacity in-house, we continue to rely on vendors to ensure continuity and progress on critical projects.

Voter Education and Outreach for primary (FY25) and general (FY26)

Through FY26, the CFB is committed to providing comprehensive voter-facing education on the matching funds program to highlight its benefits – including the first-time public funds education mailers that began to arrive in New Yorkers' mailboxes as of just last week. Some highlights of our plans include the Voter Guide, printed and digital educational materials, and a targeted multi-media advertising campaign. The Voter Guide is mailed to all registered voters and published online for the general election. This information will be communicated in all 13 mandated citywide languages besides English. We will also have a video Voter Guide with ASL interpretation and closed captioning available on our website.

Beyond the matching funds awareness campaign, we built campaigns around ranked choice voting (RCV) education pursuant to Local Law 21, which was passed by the City Council in 2021 and runs through 2025. We also supporting the visibility of our Debate Program throughout the year with marketing and advertising.

Scaling Administrative Capacity with Agency Growth

Our increase for PS represents a headcount increase of 45 new positions, representing a 21% increase from our current headcount of 213 positions. The 45 additional positions will support work related to our technology contract portfolio, strategic plan implementation, and to support CFB general operations.

As our budget has grown to accommodate expanded mandates -- particularly around language access and other legal requirements -- we recognize the need to scale our internal infrastructure accordingly. While we have built new programmatic teams, we have not scaled our staffing levels in operations and finance in tandem. Adding staffing in these areas will provide the necessary support to carry out our mandates and contract with outside vendors who are partners in this work. To support timely production schedules and ensure compliance with legal mandates, we have begun strengthening our People Operations functions to better manage hiring, recruitment, and onboarding. We have also prioritized laying the groundwork for more specialized roles and a more robust administrative foundation to support the agency's expanding structure.

As always, our work is guided by a deep commitment to empowering New Yorkers to make a greater impact on their elections and strengthening our local democracy. We are grateful for the support of the Council in advancing these goals. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.



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**NYC Council Committee on Finance Jointly with the Committee on Higher Education and the Committee on Governmental Operations, State & Federal Legislation on
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL FISCAL YEAR 2026 EXECUTIVE BUDGET HEARING**

Testimony of Akkeem Polack, Vice Chair for Legislative Affairs, CUNY University Student Senate

May 15, 2025

My name is Akkeem Polack. I'm a student at York College and Vice Chair for Legislative Affairs of the University Student Senate, representing over 245,000 CUNY students.

I'm here to talk about something fundamental—getting to class. For too many CUNY students, public transportation has become a barrier, not a bridge. That's why we're urging the Council to include \$500,000 in the FY26 budget to fund free MetroCards and OMNY cards for all CUNY students.

We've gathered over 5,000 petition signatures from students tired of choosing between fare and their future. I've seen classmates skip meals, ask friends for swipes, or walk long distances just to make it to campus. It's not just inconvenient—it's unjust.

Data from across the CUNY system highlights the urgency:

- 275,000+ students depend on public transit for class, jobs, and internships.
- A monthly MetroCard costs \$132—that's \$1,584 a year.
- 64% worry about affording transit.
- 53% have skipped meals to pay for it.
- 71% have missed or been late to class because of fare costs.

These aren't just statistics—they reflect real setbacks, delayed graduations, and broken momentum.

This proposal is about equity. Transportation costs hit low-income, first-gen, and working students the hardest. Free transit would immediately ease pressure, improve attendance, and help more students stay on track to graduate.

We're not asking for the impossible—we're asking for investment in potential. This is a chance for the City to put its values into action.

Thank you for your time and continued support of CUNY students.





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Testimony of Daniel Reden, Chairperson, CUNY University Student Senate
NYC Council Committee on Higher Education – FY 2026 Executive-Budget Hearing
May 15, 2025

Testimony of Daniel Reden, Chairperson of the CUNY University Student Senate & CUNY Trustee

Good morning, esteemed members of the NYC Council. I am Daniel Reden, the University Student Senate Chairperson and Student Trustee for CUNY. I speak today for 245,000 students on 25 campuses. My request is the same as previous testimonies and as my colleagues here with me today: add \$500,000 for a Free MetroCard pilot to the fiscal year 2026 budget.

A MetroCard now costs \$132 per month, which is \$1,584 annually. For half of CUNY undergraduates, whose median family income is below \$30,000, that fare competes with rent, groceries, and other basic needs. A spring survey found that 64 percent of students worry about affording transit, 53 percent have skipped meals to pay the fare, and 71 percent have arrived late or missed class because they lacked a swipe. Attendance loss is often the first step toward dropping out; if we want students to graduate, we must first help them reach the classroom.

A \$500,000 appropriation could fund about 4,000 semester passes. Each pass is linked to a student ID, which lets CUNY track attendance, credit accumulation, and GPA and report outcomes to this Committee before next year's budget negotiation. This pilot addresses the most significant daily expense our students face. Even if only a fraction of those students persist and graduate because of a free swipe, the City will recoup its investment many times over through higher earnings, added tax revenue, and more stable neighborhoods.

Transit relief gives the City an instant return on investment; it is not merely a token gesture of equity. Hypothetically, let's say it costs \$125 for a single semester pass. The City gains a worker who, on average, makes \$75,000 more annually than a high school graduate if that pass keeps the student on track to graduate. That graduate generates approximately \$7,500 in new tax revenue annually, even at a modest combined City-and-State income-tax rate of about 10 percent. This represents a 60-to-1 payback in the first year alone, with compounding returns in subsequent years. In addition to providing a workforce that lives, works, and spends money in every Council district, the financial benefits of this pilot program outweigh its costs when multiplied by the thousands of students it can help retain.

I respectfully ask the Council to add \$500,000 for the Free MetroCard pilot under Higher Education Initiatives. Transit relief is the single most significant financial barrier to CUNY student success, and for thousands of students, it can mean the difference between standing



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outside the turnstile and stepping into class. Thank you for your consideration; I welcome your questions.



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NYC Council Committee on Committee on Finance Jointly with the Committee on Higher Education and the Committee on Governmental Operations, State & Federal Legislation on NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL FISCAL YEAR 2026 EXECUTIVE BUDGET HEARING

Testimony of Davia Willis, Student at CUNY John Jay College of Criminal Justice

May 15, 2025

Good afternoon, Chairpersons and Members of the Committees,

My name is Davia Willis, and I am testifying on behalf of the University Student Senate of the City University of New York (CUNY), representing over 245,000 students across 25 campuses. We thank the Council for its continued investment in public higher education and for the opportunity to provide testimony on the FY2026 Executive Budget.

I am a dual BS/MA student at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, pursuing a degree in Criminal Justice and set to graduate in Spring of 2027. I chose CUNY because it is affordable and offers a level of diversity and opportunity that made my experience as an international student breathable. CUNY has opened many doors of opportunity for me, but those opportunities have not been without challenges.

Currently, I'm completing a full-time academic load and juggling other extracurricular activities like being involved in student leadership. Because I am an international student, every expense including tuition, rent, utilities like phone bill etc., comes out of my own pocket. I commute to campus utilizing both the subway and the bus at a monthly expense of \$132. This may not be a lot of money to some, but it has proven to be a large expense for me. As an international student, I do not have access to government programs that can help students with transportation.

For many CUNY students like me, the cost of commuting isn't just inconvenient, it's a barrier. Hundreds of dollars a month on MetroCard's is money that we simply do not have. We are forced to make difficult choices between attending class or covering basic needs.

That's why I urge the City Council to fund **FREE MetroCard's for CUNY students**. Reliable and affordable transportation should never be the reason a student misses class, an internship, or a vital opportunity.

Beyond transportation, I also stand with the University Student Senate in calling for support for:

- **The CUNY CARES Project**, which addresses food insecurity, housing instability, and access to health and mental health services.





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- **Stronger career services**, to help students transition from graduation to meaningful careers.
- **Expanded disability services**, including more staff, better technology, and campus accessibility.
- And **improved IT infrastructure**, so no student is left behind due to lack of access to digital resources.

CUNY students are hardworking, determined, and resilient—but we need your help to break down the small financial barriers that can have a big impact on our success.

Thank you for your time and continued support of higher education in New York City.

The Impact of Federal Grant Terminations at CUNY
NY City Council Meeting, Committee on Finance and Committee on Higher Education
May 15, 2025

I am writing to explain the critical importance of the New York City Council supporting CUNY in the midst of widespread and arbitrary terminations of federal research funding. Almost all of the recent terminations of National Science Foundation research awards have been to education research. Given the core centrality of education to CUNY's mission, and the role that it plays as an engine of economic mobility in New York, **it is critical that New York City 1) increase funds to CUNY to provide bridge funding to research projects that have been abruptly halted in the recent chaos of federal funding terminations, and 2) provide concrete support to CUNY to appeal these terminations and pursue legal remedies as needed to ensure that federal law is followed.**

CUNY has been chronically underfunded for years, and this is one reason why researchers at CUNY rely so heavily on external funding. When that funding disappears, there are no internal resources at CUNY that researchers can rely on—the research just comes to a complete halt because of a total lack of resources. Most of this research is critically important to educating CUNY students and supporting them in their pursuit of a degree. Here I provide a few examples from my experience in the hope that they will help to illustrate this issue in concrete terms.

On May 2, 2025, the National Science Foundation (NSF) abruptly terminated our \$2.25 million research grant to study CUNY STEM majors whose academics are negatively impacted by illness, injury, disability, or physical/mental health conditions. The only information given in the termination notice was that it “no longer effectuate[s] the program goals or agency priorities”. The project is in line with current NSF guidance, goals, and priorities, so the reasons for the termination are unclear. As a faculty member at a community college, where I have no access to research time or funds outside of external funding, this is destroying my research career—one that I have spent 20 years building up into a portfolio of about \$1 million in federal funding annually coming in to CUNY. With these abrupt terminations, my ability to continue research that is critical to the success of CUNY students is disappearing literally overnight.

I have chosen to stay at a CUNY community college (despite offers from other universities to recruit me and encouragement from research colleagues to move to a better-resourced institution) because I believe deeply in our mission of educational access—the same value that has motivated my research. However, because I am at a CUNY community college, when federal grants disappear overnight, my ability to do research also disappears overnight. CUNY community colleges provide no internal research reassigned time and no funds for research—not even enough funds to attend a single national conference or buy a single book. I was able to build a thriving research program over the last 20 years despite this for two reasons: 1) prior to the pandemic, CUNY used to have many internal research grant programs, which I was able to leverage to generate pilot research data (most of these programs have since been eliminated); and 2) with the momentum generated from existing internal funding, I was able to subsequently get many large external grants. **The pandemic terminated almost all internal funding opportunities, and now federal funding terminations are removing the last source of research resources.** While I believe federal funding for education research will be a viable option again in a few years, without

supports to keep my research going in the meantime, I will not be in a position to apply for those grants by the time that they come back. For my research on CUNY students to survive, I need support in the interim—for reassigned time for research to make up for what was supposed to be funded by the terminated grant, for research assistant time, for software and other research tools, and for travel costs to attend conferences, which is critical in my field for staying up-to-date on current developments in the field and disseminating my own research findings. (Formal publication takes 2-5 years, so conferences are the only viable way of knowing what is current in the field.) **CUNY needs additional funds earmarked to reinstate cancelled internal funding opportunities and provide bridge funds and reassigned time to faculty with terminated federal grants. CUNY can't do this alone—it needs increased funding support from New York City.**

The City also needs to support CUNY in standing up to illegal funding terminations. Even though I have been told by legal experts that I have a strong legal case that my recent NSF grant termination was not in line with federal regulations, and that submitting an appeal within 30 days of the termination is necessary to preserve the right to have funding reinstated later, my college will not allow me to submit an appeal because they fear further retribution from the federal government if we submit even a neutral appeal letter describing how the terminated grant fits in with current agency goals/priorities and guidance. **CUNY needs a commitment from the City that they will support them in appealing abrupt and arbitrary grant cancellations.**

Refusing to submit appeals for terminated grants is tantamount to ending the educational research careers of faculty at CUNY who depend on these grants for their research. It also makes CUNY complicit in suppressing free speech and eliminating education research on minoritized groups, which makes up almost all of CUNY's student population. **CUNY needs support from the City and its political allies to stand up for free speech and to demand that federal grant dollars be allocated in line with existing federal law.**

What is at Stake if we do not Fight Federal Funding Terminations

The negative impacts of these federal grant terminations cannot be overemphasized. There are immediate negative impacts to students, staff and researchers employed on these grants who abruptly lose health insurance and income that they depend on to pay living expenses, including educational expenses for their children and unreimbursed medical costs. Most of the terminations at the NSF have been to educational research, which is critical to improving student outcomes and providing a quality education to all students, regardless of background or resources, which is the fundamental core of CUNY's mission.

But beyond the negative consequences for individual grants and the populations that they study, there are much larger issues at stake. **All federal funding for research and higher education is at risk of abrupt and unpredictable termination if we do not fight terminations that have already taken place.** More and more grants are being terminated in an ever-expanding net and there is no sign that this will stop.

The government started by stating that it was eliminating “DEI programs” from federal funding. But then the NSF went further and cancelled projects that were *researching* a protected group, even when no outreach activities or programs were part of the project. Research projects that

investigated questions such as what factors impact the educational outcomes of women, racial/ethnic minorities, and students with disabilities were terminated. Now, projects are being terminated that are not even researching protected groups. Our terminated NSF grant was a fundamental research grant that was not focused on a protected class. Our research collected surveys from **all** STEM majors at CUNY, looking at how illness, injury, disability, or physical/mental health conditions impacted them academically, and investigating what colleges can do to support their degree progress.

Half of CUNY STEM majors during our large-scale survey data collection indicated that they had experienced at least one of these conditions last term and that it had affected them academically—illustrating the widespread impact of this issue on STEM degree completion. Students who identified as having legal disabilities only made up 10% of our data—yet our grant was terminated anyway, with only the vague statement that it “no longer effectuate[s] the program goals or agency priorities”, even though it is in line even with current NSF broadening participation guidance. Our grant is not the only example of this expanding overreach. **This process of terminating research grants and federal funds for universities seems unlikely to stop until and unless we come together and take decisive legal action to stop it.**

The Impact of these Terminations on CUNY Students

Terminating our NSF research grant was not only a blow to science, but also a complete negation of the experiences of many CUNY students. In the 9 months that we collected data before the grant was terminated, 1,558 students responded to survey questions and 58 completed in-depth clinical interviews. The students who let us interview them for the grant-funded research each took 1-2 hours of their time to relay a broad array of personal details about themselves and their college experiences because they believed that the research would help others toward STEM degree completion. Students related a wide range of experiences, including severe injuries from car accidents, pregnancy complications, mental health disorders like anxiety or major depression, neurodiversity like autism spectrum disorder or ADHD, mobility impairments, blindness, short-term and chronic illness, and a wide variety of other conditions. Yet almost none of these students had sought formal accommodations or official support for their condition from their college.

Many students had taken informal steps to support their degree completion in the face of illness/injury or disability, but college-level factors often got in the way. Despite this, and despite delayed degree progression, these students continued to persist in their pursuit of a STEM degree, often at high personal cost and without needed support. And while the students we researched had persisted so far in their pursuit of a degree, it is not clear how many of them will be able to reach degree completion without additional supports or structural changes at the college level. There is no existing research investigating at a large scale how chronic or acute illness, injury, disability, and physical or mental health conditions impact STEM majors’ pursuit of their degree, or what colleges can do to more efficiently support them to degree completion. The remaining four years of the research were supposed to address this critical knowledge gap and answer these pressing questions for both research and practice. The answers to these questions have critical implications for CUNY students.

Many of the students that we interviewed cried during their interviews as they related the wide area of life experiences that impacted them personally and academically, but they insisted on

completing their interviews anyway because they thought that it would help other students in their shoes in the future. One older student who had a severe undiagnosed illness vomited during the interview but likewise insisted on continuing because they felt that the research was so important. But funding was abruptly terminated before we could formally analyze any of the data or write up any of the results. So, these students' stories will remain untold, and their voices will never have a chance to impact policies and structures at CUNY or other colleges around the country. The City and CUNY will have broken trust with these students if we allow this grant termination to stand without doing everything we can to oppose it.

What is Needed to Keep Educational Research on CUNY Students Going

We cannot continue this research project without funding. While I have been very fortunate in my success at securing external funding, managing a roughly \$1 million-per-year portfolio of grants as a PI prior to this termination, I am also a community college faculty member who does not have time for this level of research built into my appointment. Without external grants, I do not have the reassigned time to dedicate to this research. The research also requires extensive student recruitment, payment of research subjects, management and collection of large datasets from survey and interview responses, and time-intensive data analysis and dissemination.

This requires staff such as research assistants and project managers, whom I cannot employ without funding. The termination of this grant cut all of their salaries, as well as summer salary that researchers had been counting on to pay children's educational and medical expenses. In addition, we cannot pay research subjects to participate in the research without funding, and it is problematic to ask CUNY students (who are already extensively time-poor due to work and family responsibilities) to essentially donate their time to research—we need funding to reimburse students for the time that they spend answering surveys or being interviewed.

Even if funding is eventually restored through legal action, large research projects like this one cannot simply pause and start back up again once the funding is back. Data agreements with CUNY offices expire; new staff have to be hired and trained from scratch all over again; students who were part of the research project have moved on and new research subjects need to be found. The time and resources it would take to start up the research again after a substantial pause would set the research back at least a year or two. This is why bridge funding is so essential. CUNY needs to look for ways to provide bridge funding for research that was terminated—this is critical to ensuring that research can continue if/when funding is restored, or that at least some of the results of existing research can be brought to completion so that they can impact practice. CUNY cannot do that without additional funds from the New York City.

Termination of federal grants has squeezed researchers' time twofold: not only do they now have to sacrifice personal time outside of their paid appointment to keep research going for which federal funding has been abruptly halted, they also have to put in extra hours on their own time to write new grant proposals. The average federal funding application takes hundreds of hours to write¹, and the average successful NSF grant takes 2.3 submissions before being funded², adding

¹ <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0118494>

² <https://www.nsf.gov/funding/overview>

up to months of full-time work. CUNY doesn't provide reassigned time to write external grant proposals—researchers, especially those at community colleges, have to write external funding proposals on their own time—during evenings, holidays and weekends, on top of their normal workload.

Given that the researchers with terminated grants are proven entities who have already been able to successfully obtain external grant funding, it would be a good investment for CUNY to pay these researchers (in the form of reassigned time and summer salary) for the time that it will take them to write subsequent proposals for external funding to make up what has been lost. This is an investment in CUNY's future. **But paying for this time requires additional resources from New York City.**

Actions that New York City Can Take to Preserve Free Speech and Educational Research at CUNY


New York City needs to provide additional funding to CUNY earmarked to address recent federal grant terminations. This includes:

- Providing funds for CUNY to support research previously supported by terminated grants by:
 - providing bridge grants to researchers whose federal funding is abruptly terminated; and
 - reinstating and expanding internal research funding (most of which was eliminated during the pandemic).
- Providing funds for CUNY to pay for reassigned time and summer salary to researchers with terminated grants both:
 - to complete some part of the research that was terminated by federal agencies; and
 - to apply for new sources of external funding to support the canceled research or other related research.
- Providing political support and funds for legal counsel for CUNY to appeal terminated federal grants for all researchers who want to appeal.
- Helping CUNY to actively generate collaborations with other universities and national organizations to pursue legal action to stop the illegal termination of federal research grants. Recent NIH lawsuits have successfully achieved injunctions and are moving forward. Many legal scholars have stated that NSF grantees with terminated awards have a strong case. CUNY does not need to pursue legal action on its own—there are many other universities and professional organizations in the same boat and we need to band together to restore federal research funding. **Not taking action sends the message that we are willing to accept unprecedented and legally questionable terminations of federal funding—this will only encourage further future expanding termination of federal funds ongoing into the future, since we have already indicated our acquiescence. This will have an ever-expanding impact on CUNY students and on New York City.**

Thanks for your consideration of this testimony.

Sincerely,
Claire Wladis
Professor
Mathematics
BMCC/CUNY
Urban Education
CUNY Graduate Center

Joanne Khan-Mohammed



Dear Leaders of the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education,

As a member of the CUNY community, I'm writing to urge support and add additional money to the MetroCard/ OMNY pilot proposed in the Council's response to the Mayor's preliminary executive budget. The fight for all students to have access to free or significantly reduced-cost MetroCards has positive consequences both inside and outside of the classroom; those benefits should be expanded.

For many students, public transportation is a growing barrier to getting to class and work. The cost of a MetroCard can determine whether a student gets to class, makes it to work, or has to choose between food and transportation. CUNY was founded on the principle higher education ought to be attainable to all New Yorkers, but that mission isn't possible when students are priced-out of simply getting to campus.

The Council has urged the Administration to fund a MetroCard/ OMNY pilot program with \$500,000 in Fiscal 2026 to provide transportation benefits for 473 students in need. We encourage you to expand this program to include more students. If it is necessary to begin with a limited rollout, some suggestions from the University Student Senate include:

- Student Parents:
 - Those using the Childcare Centers at CUNY
 - Current Data: 1400 childcare seats available in CUNY
 - Cost \$739,200
- Students who were in the foster care system:
 - Students in Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI)
 - Current Data estimate of foster care students within FYSI CUNY 150
 - Unlimited MetroCard for 4 months
 - Cost \$79,200
- College discovery students:
 - Current Data 956 Students
 - Cost \$504,768

Sincerely,

Joanne Khan-Mohammed



Dear Leaders of the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education,

As a constituent of CUNY, I am writing this letter to support the MetroCard/ OMNY pilot proposed in the Council's response to the Mayor's preliminary executive budget. Having a free or cost reduced MetroCard would greatly impact our community and encourage success for our students.

Many students are not able to afford a monthly MetroCard. The current recession and increased money insecurity prevents students from being able to attend school. This creates an even bigger issue in the long run because native New Yorkers are missing out on the higher education CUNY was once funded on.

The Council has urged the Administration to fund a MetroCard/ OMNY pilot program with \$500,000 in Fiscal 2026 to provide transportation benefits for 473 students in need. I strongly urge you to consider expanding this program to include more students in hopes of success and the betterment of our community. These are some suggestions from the University Student Senate if you need to start with a limited rollout,

- Student Parents:
 - Those using the Childcare Centers at CUNY
 - Current Data: 1400 childcare seats available in CUNY
 - Cost \$739,200
- Students who were in the foster care system:
 - Students in Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI)

- Current Data estimate of foster care students within FYSI CUNY 150
 - Unlimited MetroCard for 4 months
 - Cost \$79,200
- College discovery students:
 - Current Data 956 Students
 - Cost \$504,768

Sincerely,

Nicole Lopez Cespedes.

Dear Leaders of the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education,

As a proud member of the CUNY community and a student who relies heavily on public transportation, I am writing to express my dedicated support for the proposed MetroCard/OMNY pilot program in the Council's response to the mayor's preliminary executive budget. I urge you not only to support this initiative but also to expand it to reach more students in need.

For many of us at CUNY, transportation is not just a daily expense—it is a barrier. The cost of commuting can decide whether a student makes it to class, attends work, or must choose between a meal and a MetroCard. I have personally had to plan my week around how many rides I could afford, and I know many others who have skipped classes simply because they could not afford the fare. It is disheartening that something as basic as a MetroCard stands in the way of access to higher education.

CUNY was built on the idea that higher education should be accessible to all New Yorkers, but that vision falls short when students are priced out of getting to campus. That is why I support the proposed \$500,000 pilot for Fiscal 2026—and I hope you will consider expanding it to reach more groups like student parents, former foster youth, and College Discovery students.

Your support can help remove this financial barrier and bring us one step closer to a more fair and accessible education system.

Sincerely,

Shanequa Jackson

CUNY Student

Dear Leaders of the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education,

As a member and student of the CUNY community, I'm writing on behalf of many because it matters deeply. As the fare of metro cards has been skyrocketing, many students, especially from low-income and first-generation families, often have to decide every single day if filling stomachs is more important than education. Affording these costs to make it to class and work are making it difficult, and honestly, some of us are one missed train away from failing in school.

Just like how every vote matters, a single MetroCard gives access to opportunities the American Dream promises every individual, regardless of background. Its one swipe doesn't just lead to degrees, it opens a path to education, empowerment, and chances. Something that has sadly become a privilege and luxury in many parts of the world today. But it shouldn't be unfair like this, especially because CUNY was founded on the principle higher education ought to be attainable to all New Yorkers. But that mission isn't possible when transportation expenses are the reason why students are falling behind.

We urge you to increase funds and support the MetroCard/OMNY pilot proposed in the Council's response to the Mayor's preliminary executive budget. The fight for all students to have access to free or significantly reduced-cost MetroCards has positive consequences that ripple beyond the classroom; those benefits should be expanded.

The Council has urged the Administration to fund a MetroCard/OMNY pilot program with \$500,000 in Fiscal 2026 to provide transportation benefits for 473 students in need. This is a strong and commendable start. However, more students are struggling, and we encourage you to expand this program to include more students. This is about equity and survival. If it is necessary to begin with a limited rollout, some suggestions from the University Student Senate include:

- Student Parents:
 - Those using the Childcare Centers at CUNY
 - Current Data: 1400 childcare seats available in CUNY
 - Cost \$739,200
- Students who were in the foster care system:
 - Students in Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI)
 - Current Data estimate of foster care students within FYSI CUNY 150
 - Unlimited MetroCard for 4 months
 - Cost \$79,200
- College discovery students:
 - Current Data 956 Students
 - Cost \$504,768

Supporting this cause doesn't only significantly impact students, it extends to entire families, strengthens communities, and invests in the future of NYC.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tanzila Raji

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 05/15/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Akheem Kolack

Address: Long Island

I represent: UNIV. Community Student Senate

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Paul S. Ryan, Executive Director, CFB

Address: 100 Church St, NY NY 10007

I represent: NYC Campaign Finance Board

Address: NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/15/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sasha Owen

Address: Stuyvesant High

I represent: Stuyvesant

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 05/15/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Daniel Rubin

Address: _____

I represent: CUNY - University Student Senate

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 05/15/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DAVID WILKES

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn NY

I represent: CUNY - University Student Senate

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Amanda Melillo

Address: 100 Church St, NY NY 10007

I represent: NYC Campaign Finance Board

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/15/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Constance Lesold

Address: [REDACTED] Bklyn 11225

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chico Hector Batista

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: CUNY

Address: Hector Batista @ CUNY.edu

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/15/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Univ. of Puerto Rico, Alicia M. Alvero

Address: _____

I represent: CUNY

Address: _____

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

5/15/25
**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chancellor Peter M. Rodriguez

Address: CUNY

I represent: 205 East 42nd Street NYC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/15/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: CFO, Sheela Solomon

Address: _____

I represent: CUNY

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: John Dennehy

Address: CUNY Graduate Center

I represent: PSCCUNY

Address: 25 Broadway 10004

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jen Gaboury

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn 11220

I represent: PSC CUNY

Address: 25 Broadway NYC 10004

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Heather James

Address: _____

I represent: PSC CUNY

Address: 25 Broadway NYC 10004

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