



Testimony
Of
Linda Tigani, MSW
Chair & Executive Director
NYC Commission on Racial Equity (NYC CORE)

Before the

New York City Council
Committee on Higher Education

On
Wednesday, June 17, 2026

Oversight Hearing: Racial Equity at CUNY

Good afternoon, Chair Joseph, and members of the Higher Education Committee. My name is Linda Tigani, and I have the honor of serving as the Chair and Executive Director of the NYC Commission on Racial Equity (NYC CORE). I am testifying today as both a government leader and a CUNY alum. Before I get started, I want to thank the students, and CUNY professionals that are here today to testify to their experience of race and racism and extend my deep appreciation for their bravery to stand up for justice for themselves, and future scholars and faculty.

NYC CORE is the product of a 2022 ballot measure introduced to redress longstanding racial disparities in power, access, and opportunity enabled and perpetuated—whether by design, implementation, or impact—through City laws, regulations, policies, and practices. To accomplish this goal, New Yorkers called for a body to be established for the purpose of holding government accountable for advancing racial equity and increasing community voice in government decision making. Alongside NYC CORE, voters affirmed that every city entity must produce a public racial equity plan that outlines the institutions racial equity goals, strategies, and indicators covering all areas of work. However, the recent release of the City’s Preliminary Racial Equity Plan is missing a critical plan – The City University of New York.

As a city, the voters have affirmed that racial equity at CUNY and every NYC government institution is mandatory. We have declared ourselves to be a multiracial democracy, which requires that we continue to tell the truth about race and racism in all media programming—such as CUNY TV- and ensure that our scholars and faculty are given the necessary opportunity, access, and power to effect change in their lives and their community with the skills and knowledge gleaned from the classroom.

Our students and faculty have a significant challenge ahead, one that CUNY is morally and legally obligated to confront and win. Across our nation, higher education leaders are removing and refusing to hire Black programmatic and academic leadership, Black faculty, and institute Black curriculum. The U.S. Department of Education, proudly boasts that over 300 colleges and universities have eliminated Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI), removed offices, fired personal,



and removed public messaging. To be clear, racial equity is not DEI, but it is a critical component to the unified front of resources and supports needed to end longstanding racial inequities in education.

Public reporting shows that news outlets such as *The Washington Post*, *Teen Vogue*, CBS, and NBC—have fired senior Black producers, journalists, and editors, and dismantled teams or desks specifically reporting on race and issues facing Black Americans. Remaining staff are left under threat of losing their job if they don't change the interviewer or apply a lens that is palpable to white america. Black media professionals should not be forced to choose between keeping their lights on and telling the truth about the racist challenges Black communities face daily. Without honest reporting, without the arts driving change, we know that the court cases mentioned above, and local states civil rights would never have been affirmed.

Enrollment, hiring, and programmatic work at CUNY all are riddled with longstanding racial inequities. Beginning with enrollment, Black and Brown students, and students with low and/or limited income are increasingly diverted to underfunded community colleges. In the Brough with one of the largest concentrations of Black New Yorkers –Brooklyn- CUNY Brooklyn College, approximately 3,000 Black students are enrolled out of the approximate 14,000 students in attendance. Black full-time professors are approximately 6.5 percent, which is reported lower than other Borough based CUNY Colleges. The City University System employees 40,000 people with less than 5,000 identifying as Black.

When Black voices are removed from the workforce, either by denial of an executive appointment, passed over from promotion, failure to execute a diverse and expansive search for the best applicant, or released from their duties, then we remove the voices of those who built this city, built CUNY, and created the necessary conditions in our city, and country for racial and social justice to exist. We undermine the work of **Brown v. Board of Education (1954)** ending school segregation, **Cooper v. Aaron (1958)** declaring that schools officials could not delay school

desegregation plans to appease white supremacists, and **Grutter v. Bollinger (2003)** reaffirming that universities have a compelling interest in a diverse student body. These court cases are some but not all examples of the long fight to end racism in education.

People power, which include students, parents, faculty, and staff, drive racial and social justice in the court room and the classroom. Court cases come to fruition because leaders take a stand. In order words, personnel drives policy. This is particularly important in the case of CUNY TV.

CUNY TV, the City's educational public multimedia station, has an opportunity to rise to the occasion and increase support of highly experienced Black media producers, or choose to bend to the whim of racist federal government policy working to erase Black voice, story, and truth. In order to be a true educational public multimedia station, CUNY TV must be included in a CUNY racial equity plan – and comply with local law. Hire, and uplift extraordinary pool of Black scholars, producers, journalists, filmmakers, and media executives. Most importantly, ensure that CUNY executives create workplace culture where Black professionals are not merely presented but are empowered to tell the truth and effectuate change.

In order to meet this standard, CUNY TV must be able to also account for the hiring of current officials such as **Chiqui Cartagena, the Executive Director of CUNY TV.**

1. Search Process

- Was a national, regional, or local search conducted?
- Was an external search firm retained? If so, what were the firm's equity and diversity benchmarks?
- How was the position advertised, and through which professional networks or affinity-based organizations was it promoted?

2. Applicant Pool Demographics

- What was the total number of applicants?
- What was the racial and ethnic composition of the applicant pool?
- What was the racial and ethnic composition of the semi-finalists and finalists?
- Were diversity benchmarks established at the outset of the search?

3. Selection and Oversight

- Who served on the interview panel?
- What anti-bias safeguards were implemented during screening and interviews?



- Were equity criteria formally incorporated into the evaluation rubric?

Racial equity plans, as mandated by law, offer a vehicle for all agencies-including CUNY- to transparently name longstanding racial inequities, create a plan of action, receive input from community, and implement true change that improves the conditions for students and faculty. When we take our racial equity mandates seriously, NYC is then able to implement cost saving innovation that ensures that everyone in NYC thrives, and our city becomes the multiracial democracy we voted for in 2022.



**Testimony of Dr. Larry D. Johnson, Jr., President
New York City Council Higher Education Committee
Oversight Hearing — Racial Equity at CUNY**

Good afternoon, Chair and members of the committee. I am Dr. Larry D. Johnson, Jr., the seventh president of Bronx Community College.

It is an honor to lead this historic educational pillar and continue my service within CUNY as a national advocate for community colleges and student success. Throughout my career, from Georgia Piedmont Technical College to Broward College, St. Louis Community College, Phoenix College, and CUNY's Guttman Community College, I have focused on transforming access into achievement.

That commitment guides my leadership through *The Bronx Renaissance 2031*, a new strategic vision centered on student success, workforce preparation, partnership, and inclusive opportunity. Under this vision, we are building a renaissance rooted in access, belonging, and the belief that the West Bronx deserves public institutions prepared to meet the promise of this generation.

Bronx Community College as an Access Institution

Bronx Community College's racial diversity and access story is central to our mission, enrollment identity, and value to New York City. Located in University Heights, BCC serves a community where race, income, language, immigration, family responsibility, and educational opportunity intersect.

The Bronx is among the nation's most vibrant and culturally rich communities. It is also navigating poverty, housing insecurity, food insecurity, health disparities, limited digital access, and uneven economic opportunity. In this context, our mission is local and urgent.

In Fall 2025, Bronx Community College enrolled 7,345 students. Our student body was 48% Hispanic, 42% Black, 5% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 5% White. Seventy percent are Bronx residents, 67% are Pell Grant recipients, 63% are first-generation college students, 64% have non-U.S. ancestry, and 33% are non-native English speakers.

Enrollment Recovery and Student Opportunity

Like many community colleges, BCC experienced enrollment declines following the pandemic. Our headcount declined 19% to 6,787 students between Fall 2020 and Fall 2024. Since then, BCC has begun to reverse that trend. In Fall 2025, we enrolled 7,345 students, an 8% increase and an important sign of institutional recovery.

We have strengthened recruitment and enrollment strategies through a more data-informed, student-centered approach focused on application-to-registration conversion, onboarding, financial aid completion, and advising. We have expanded recruitment across the Bronx; deepened partnerships with high schools, early college programs, and community organizations; and invested in high-demand, career-aligned programs in nursing, allied health sciences, engineering, and technology.



Our goal is not simply enrollment recovery; it is connecting more Bronx residents to college access, career pathways, transfer opportunities, and long-term economic mobility.

Meeting Basic Needs as a Student Success Strategy

At BCC, we recognize that student success does not begin and end in the classroom. Hunger, housing insecurity, childcare responsibilities, mental health needs, financial instability, transportation barriers, and limited technology access all affect whether students enroll, persist, and complete.

Through our Access Resource Center, BCC provides a one-stop connection point for benefits screening, SNAP, food pantry services, housing options, transportation referrals, legal and financial consultations, tax preparation, fair hearing assistance, and other government resources.

The **Bronco Food Pantry** serves up to **2,000 families each month**, and the **Snack Cart Program** serves up to **150 students per day**, recognizing a simple truth: students cannot fully focus if they are hungry.

Our Office of Personal Counseling provides comprehensive mental health support, including individual, group, and family counseling. Our trained clinicians hold more than 150 sessions per month, helping students address anxiety, depression, loneliness, and stress.

Our Early Childhood Center strengthens access for student parents. As of Spring 2026, it served 43 preschoolers and 18 infants and toddlers. By supporting student parents, we support retention, graduation, and intergenerational opportunity.

BCC is also a pilot campus for **CUNY CARES**, a three-year Bronx-based initiative supported by the New York City Council that connects students to health care, mental health treatment, food, housing assistance, SNAP, Medicaid, and other public benefits through trained student advocates and navigators.

Academic Pathways to Equity and Mobility

BCC's academic portfolio is one of our most important equity assets. We offer programs that prepare students for career advancement across fields essential to New York City's future, especially in a borough where many residents seek credentials, skills, and pathways that increase household income.

Healthcare is one of the Bronx's largest employment sectors, and the need for trained professionals continues to grow. At BCC, more than 1,070 students are enrolled in nursing and allied health programs, including nursing, radiologic technology, medical laboratory technology, nuclear medicine, and medical office assistant programs.

Through clinical partnerships with Montefiore Medical Center, Jacobi Medical Center, New York-Presbyterian, and Montefiore Wakefield, our students gain hands-on experience and prepare to enter the workforce directly. Graduates enter careers that provide economic stability, with wages that support families and strengthen the Bronx economy.



Beyond healthcare, programs in Cybersecurity and Networking, Computer Science, Automotive Technology, Engineering, Business Administration, Education, Criminal Justice, Digital Arts, Liberal Arts and Sciences, and other fields connect students from historically underserved communities to sectors with real demand. The goal is earning power, stability, and mobility.

Structured Support from Access to Completion

Students should not have to navigate college through guesswork, disconnected offices, or unclear handoffs. Advising, structured pathways, and academic planning aligned with career planning make access real.

BCC's student-success ecosystem includes many holistic, structured student-success and access programs. In Fall 2025, BCC enrolled students in ASAP, College Discovery, College Now, the Early College Initiative, CLIP, CUNY Start, English Start, Future Now, and Math Start. These programs help students build early momentum, access proactive advising, receive academic preparation, and know someone at the College is helping them move forward.

A Diverse Workforce Serving a Diverse Community

Our commitment to diversity also extends to the faculty and staff who serve our students. This past academic year, BCC employed 1,444 faculty and staff, with approximately 78% identifying as Ethnicity Other than White. Our workforce included 126 Asian employees, 444 Black employees, 517 Hispanic employees, 318 White employees, and 39 employees identified as other minority groups.

This diversity expands our perspectives and strengthens our ability to meet students' holistic needs.

Responding to Today's Community Challenges, Investing in the Bronx's Future

Bronx Community College is one of New York City's most important access institutions. **But access alone is not enough.** We will continue strengthening advising, student services, academic pathways, financial support, belonging, workforce preparation, and career outcomes so that the students we enroll are the students we retain, graduate, transfer, and launch into careers — **careers that are vital not only to the Bronx, but to the future of New York City.**

As a CUNY community college, we remain both student-centered and community-centered. That means meeting students' basic needs, expanding high-demand academic and workforce programs, strengthening pathways to completion, and ensuring that more Bronx residents can access the opportunities that lead to economic mobility.

Our diverse faculty and staff are partners in this work. Together, we are helping students do more than walk across the graduation stage. We are helping them walk through open doors of opportunity — for themselves, for their families, for tomorrow's workforce, and for the future of the Bronx and our vibrant New York City.

Thank you.

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

New York City Council Committee of Higher Education

Testimony of Akkeem Polack, Chairperson of the CUNY University Student Senate & CUNY Trustee

June 17, 2026

Good evening Chairs and members of the Committee.

My name is Akkeem Polack, and I serve as the Chairperson of the CUNY University Student Senate and as a CUNY Trustee on the Board, representing more than 240,000 students across 26 campuses. CUNY has long been one of New York City's greatest engines of opportunity for working class families, immigrants, first generation students, and communities that have historically faced barriers to higher education. As one of the most diverse public university systems in the nation, CUNY plays a critical role in advancing racial equity by creating pathways to educational and economic mobility for students from every background.

The University Student Senate appreciates CUNY's continued commitment to advancing racial equity through initiatives such as the Black, Race and Ethnic Studies Initiative (BRESI). Efforts like these have expanded opportunities for student research, internships, faculty scholarship, and curriculum development while helping foster a more inclusive academic environment across the University. At the same time, racial equity must extend beyond representation in the classroom. It must also address the barriers that prevent students from fully participating in college life and achieving their academic goals. Many CUNY students continue to face challenges such as transportation costs, food insecurity, housing instability, and financial hardship. These barriers disproportionately affect students from historically underserved communities and can impact persistence, retention, and graduation outcomes.

One area where we can make meaningful progress is transportation access. The University Student Senate has proposed a Student Commuter OMNY Pilot Program to help address the financial burden of commuting for students with the greatest need. USS requested \$700,000 in the New York City budget and an additional \$700,000 in the State budget, for a total investment of \$1.4 million. The pilot would provide targeted transportation assistance to students with disabilities, student parents, students formerly in foster care, low income community college students, and international students facing hardship. Transportation is more than a transit issue. It is an equity issue. When students cannot afford to get to campus, they are less likely to access classes, academic support services, internships, student leadership opportunities, and other experiences that contribute to success. Closing equity gaps requires us to address not only what happens inside the classroom, but also the obstacles students face getting there.

The University Student Senate also supports continued investment in CUNY CARES, which addresses food insecurity, housing instability, healthcare access, and mental health needs, as well as CUNY Beyond: College to Career Success, which expands paid internships and career readiness opportunities. These investments help ensure that students from all backgrounds have the support necessary to thrive.

Advancing racial equity at CUNY requires a holistic approach. It means creating inclusive learning environments, investing in programs that celebrate and support diverse communities, and removing the financial barriers that prevent students from fully participating in higher education. Together, these efforts move us closer to a university where every student has an equitable opportunity to succeed.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify..



Dr. Anthony Browne
Department of Africana, Puerto Rican and Latino Studies
Hunter College, CUNY
New York City Council
Higher Education Committee on the State of Black CUNY
Wednesday, June 17, 2026

Good afternoon, I thank Councilwoman Joseph and her staff and the committee on Higher Education for the opportunity to present today. I will focus my remarks on how structural discrimination is increasingly excluding Black students from CUNY's most selective CUNY colleges. I suggest you review our recent report on the *State of Black CUNY* which offers data and recommendations.

Recent context

Since the early 2000's, political decision-making resulted in an overhaul of CUNY whereby its most selective colleges significantly raised admission standards and enrolled fewer freshmen from New York City public high schools. The impact was the creation of a bifurcated system; whereby CUNY's most prestigious colleges increasingly admitted more Asian and white freshmen, while Black and Latinx students were disproportionately forced to enroll in community colleges. More recently, after the 2008 recession, applications surged as CUNY's affordable tuition rates began drawing more middle-class families. That same year, CUNY increased its math SAT requirement. By 2012, the tougher admissions policy had a major impact on the number of Black public high school students enrolled as freshmen as their numbers dropped by 42 percent.

Over the past two decades, due to more stringent admissions standards, particularly the increasing SAT requirements at CUNY's most selective colleges, decreased public funding, and higher tuition have changed the demographics of these institutions. While these changes increased CUNY's national rankings, they came at the expense of declining enrollment rates of Black, Puerto Rican and Dominican students.

Currently across CUNY, 26% of its students are Black. But at the more selective CUNY colleges, the Black student population tends to be significantly lower. At several of these senior colleges, the Black student percentage is less than 14%.

African Americans and Latinx students are least likely to complete a bachelor's degree within 6 years at CUNY. Their under-representation is an example of how structural discrimination continues to limit opportunity.

Increasing the number of Black students at Macaulay Honors College.

Macaulay Honors College offers high-achieving students an enriched academic experience that is *tuition free*. Macaulay students have access to grants for study abroad programs, paid living expenses during internships or research projects. While Black students comprise some 24% of CUNY's senior colleges, they are significantly underrepresented accounting for approximately 7% of Macaulay's student body. Macaulay should better reflect CUNY's student body.

In conclusion, we collectively have a responsibility to implement policy changes that repair the harm of the past 26 years that has systematically excluded thousands of Black and Latinx students from CUNY's selective senior colleges. We all can agree that CUNY is an important ladder of upward mobility into the middle class. However, for a recent generation of Black students, the rungs of that ladder have been increasingly difficult to surmount. We must confront the injurious impact of structural discrimination that exacerbates racial inequality. We can balance access and excellence, but it will require intentionality and investment.

My name is Jillian Abbott and I am an adjunct in the English Department at York College, CUNY.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Donald Trump has not come after CUNY. Why? Because the current chancellor, appointed in his first term has already gutted undergraduate education, and replaced it with a series of private graduate schools that most CUNY graduates could never qualify for.

- Daily at CUNY I see corruption, cronyism, exploitation, abuse, directed at adjuncts who do the core work of a public university - teach the next generation to thrive and keep our city competitive.
- In undergraduate there are two CUNY's. The one that works for the 30% of students who actually graduate. The other that fleeces the 70% of students who take Pell grants or loans, then drop out, their lost money keeping the parties going in the admin WING.
- the learning environment at York College where the overwhelming majority are students —of color—and where

funding is among the lowest per capita, is beyond fragile. The money you give CUNY is used to hire 6-figure admins who troll homeless shelters for vulnerable NYers to trick into enrolling in courses they can never pass.

- A student came to me asking for help. He couldn't write a proper paragraph, yet he'd been tricked into enrolling in 5 courses. I had him come to my office and practice writing. He came every time. By semester's end he could write a college level English paper. I'd set him up for success. But the trolls pressured him into enrolling in 5 courses again.
- For those at a distance, full time faculty and administrators, he and 70 % of the students are subhuman revenue streams, for teaching adjuncts, they are human beings with hopes and dreams. I'll lose my job for giving this testimony, they're already flipping me from 8 am to 8pm classes, I'm 67 with arthritis and had to wade through snow in the dark depths of winter to keep my job. That's the consequence of speaking truth to power at CUNY.
- This semester my students and I were locked out of my classroom for almost half an hour - twice. The first time only 6 of 25 students remained.

- You don't have to spend one more cent on CUNY. I'm begging you to restructure it. Abolish 2/3 of the executive positions, and at least 1/3 of high-level administrative jobs. Divert all that money saved, including Hochul's \$4M to York for a nonsense pedagogical study, to employ those adjuncts who have taught successfully for 5 years in full-time position.
- Pedagogical studies repeatedly show, pay teaching faculty enough to spend more time with students and the student outcomes improves. Stop throwing money at repeated studies and start implementing.
- There will be push back. The dark money vested interests won't give up without a fight. Departments will fight appointing us. As a senior faculty member put it - you know too much.
- If you find the courage to do this, CUNY will be what it once was - an engineer of economic mobility. If the teaching faculty - the most important faculty in a public institution, have the resources we need to do our jobs, we can educate every student that enrolls to their full potential.

Good afternoon Chairwoman Joseph, Councilmembers, CUNY administrators, and guests,

My name is Rulisa Galloway-Perry, and currently I am the Department Deputy for Administrative Affairs in the Department of Africana Studies and Higher Education Officer at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. When I first arrived at John Jay College, I was a student in 1987 and thirty-nine years later I am still here. The average student starting college has never had to make important decisions that would impact their future.

Students need the support, mentorship, and advisement of faculty and staff that look like me. If it was not for the Black faculty and staff members of John Jay, such as Drs. Roger Witherspoon, Basil Wilson, Jannette Domingo, Rubie Malone, Bobbye Trout, Hank Smith, James Malone, and George Best advising and mentoring me along my journey which allowed me to start working as a college work study student and rising as far as the Chief of Staff in the Office of the President, I would not be here today in front of you. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of the roles that black faculty, administrators, and staff play at CUNY in shaping our future leaders of today. The institutional experience produced by CUNY alums who then become staff at CUNY allows our students to receive a smoother navigation of the college

experience and focus on graduating and starting their journeys in the workforce.

Black staff members often experience professional job insecurity and inequity and difficulty finding upward mobility within CUNY. They are often concentrated at the lowest end of the administrative organizational chart. Since the pandemic, CUNY has lost a lot of black staff through retirement and more lucrative job opportunities outside of CUNY in different employment fields. This has also created a bottleneck in vacancies being filled and additional workload on staff. We acknowledge that enrollment is down, but that should not affect filling vacancies as CUNY has been understaffed for many years.

The lack of black staff who are trained to recruit, admit, advise, and engage more students does not allow our students to receive the appropriate personal touches they need from faculty and staff who look like them to be successful during their academic journey. The additional cuts to our support staff (specifically college assistants) over the years has increased the workload of the Higher Education Officer series throughout CUNY as we are absorbing the workload of other contractual titles that have been cut due to attrition and budget deficits throughout the CUNY colleges.

In closing, I have spent many years moving up the ranks of John Jay in different positions because of the black faculty and staff that mentored me over the years, and if I had to do it all over again I would do it the same way. Thank you for this opportunity for you to witness what a CUNY education means and looks like to this institution. We must invest in the people of New York City and CUNY must continue to invest in its population and communities that they serve to ensure that our students receive the appropriate education they are entitled to and become taxpayers and stewards of this great city we love.

Testimony to City Council: Racial Equity in CUNY
Opening Statement by Dr. Brenda M. Greene, Professor Emerita
Medgar Evers College

Good Afternoon Council Members and Colleagues,

Thank you Honorable Rita Joseph for calling this hearing on Racial Equity in CUNY.

I am Dr. Brenda M. Greene, Professor Emerita and Founder and Executive Director Emerita of the Center for Black Literature of Medgar Evers College. I am also a founding member of the CUNY Association of Black Faculty and Staff. This opening statement is on behalf of the Association.

Informed by rich and enduring Black intellectual traditions, the mission of the “CUNY Association of Black Faculty and Staff” is to support and advance the academic, professional, and civic development of Black students, faculty, staff, and alumni across the City University of New York and to serve as a resource for their recruitment, retention, success, and growth. A core goal of the Association is to preserve and promote Black, African American and Africana Studies departments and programs.

Our members formed the Association in 2018 after a pivotal New York City Council Meeting on Black Studies at CUNY called by the Honorable Inez Barron, a former and unforgettable New York City Councilmember.

Ongoing fulfillment of our mission and goals has become increasingly urgent as institutions and individuals throughout the nation face aggressive efforts to dismantle and delegitimize the educational, constitutional, and social advancement of people of African descent and our profound contributions to America’s democratic, cultural, and educational traditions. The Association’s goal to ensure and sustain racial equity in CUNY is particularly timely. Attacks on Black and Latino studies, diversity, immigrants, and academic freedom in public and private educational institutions across this nation are expanding.

A commitment to “diverse communities” is institutionalized and required both in the CUNY Mission and in New York State Education Law Article 125, Section 6201. Black Studies Programs and Departments, and Black students, staff, and faculty play an essential role in CUNY’s efforts to fulfill its legal and ethical commitment to diversity. As we work with CUNY to honor its commitment to diversity, this Association asserts that Black faculty, staff and students, both within and beyond Black Studies Programs and Departments, play an essential role in serving the intellectual, academic, sociocultural, and professional needs of all members of the CUNY community and in fulfilling the mission, goals, vision, and potential of the City University of New York.

This association is invested in sustaining that legacy by preserving and promoting Black intellectual and democracy-advancing social justice traditions. It is dedicated to engaging and serving the communities to which CUNY campuses and members of CUNY communities are proudly connected and committed.

June 17, 2026

Good afternoon,

My name is Donna Hill. I serve as Executive Director of the Center for Black Literature and as an Associate Professor in the Department of English and World Languages at Medgar Evers College. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about the critical role that CUNY's Centers and Institutes play in advancing the University's mission and serving the people of New York City.

Across the CUNY system, Centers and Institutes function as hubs of innovation, scholarship, community engagement, and workforce development. They were established to create opportunities for faculty and students to engage in research, internships, employment, professional development, public programming, and community partnerships that extend learning beyond the classroom.

Collectively, these Centers and Institutes address some of the most pressing issues facing our city and nation. Their work spans a broad range of disciplines and interests, including aging, public health, applied sciences, transportation systems, environmental sustainability, ethnic and cultural studies, literature, the performing arts, technology, urban affairs, law and social justice, and economic development. Through conferences, workshops, fellowships, research initiatives, cultural programming, and public engagement, they serve not only students, faculty, and staff, but also residents, educators, policymakers, and community organizations throughout New York City.

Despite their broad impact, many Centers and Institutes operate with remarkably limited resources. Most are staffed by only a small number of dedicated professionals who are responsible for program development, grant administration, fiscal management, partnership cultivation, fundraising, communications, and day-to-day operations. These teams consistently produce outcomes that far exceed the resources available to them.

In many ways, Centers and Institutes represent one of CUNY's greatest returns on investment. They attract external funding, establish strategic partnerships, create experiential learning opportunities, support faculty research, provide pathways to employment, and strengthen CUNY's visibility and reputation. Yet many are expected to sustain themselves financially through grants, private donations, and fundraising efforts, often without the institutional support afforded to other essential components of the University.

At a time when institutions of higher education nationwide are confronting budget reductions, declining grant opportunities, program consolidations, and increased demands for measurable public impact, the work of CUNY's Centers and Institutes has become even more vital. As departments face increasing pressures, Centers and Institutes help fill critical gaps by providing resources, expertise, programming, and community connections that support both academic and civic missions.

It is important to recognize that while many Centers and Institutes were established as distinct entities within individual colleges, they are not peripheral to the University. They are integral to CUNY's ecosystem. They enhance student success, expand research opportunities, strengthen community engagement, and serve as bridges between the University and the communities it was created to serve.

The Centers and Institutes comprise an interconnected network of intellectual, cultural, and civic resources that help define CUNY's identity as a public university committed to access, excellence, and public service. They are not ancillary programs; they are essential infrastructure. Centers and Institutes often serve as the public face of the University. For many community members, nonprofit partners, schools, and cultural organizations, their first interaction with CUNY is through a Center or Institute.

As CUNY plans for the future, equitable and sustained financial and administrative support for its Centers and Institutes must be part of that vision. Investment in these entities is an investment in student opportunity, faculty innovation, community partnership, and the continued relevance of public higher education.

With meaningful support, CUNY's Centers and Institutes will not merely survive; they will thrive. They will continue to generate scholarship, foster creativity, build partnerships, and serve as pillars of excellence that strengthen both the University and the city it serves.

CUNY needs its Centers and Institutes, and the Centers and Institutes need CUNY's commitment.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



**Testimony of the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY
Felicia Wharton, Treasurer, Doctoral Lecturer in Mathematics at
Brooklyn Educational Opportunity Center administered by City Tech
New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
Oversight - Racial Equity at CUNY
June 17, 2026**

Good afternoon, I'm Felicia Wharton, a Doctoral Lecturer in Mathematics at the Brooklyn Educational Opportunity Center administered by City Tech, and PSC Treasurer, testifying on behalf of the 30,000 faculty and staff of Professional Staff Congress/CUNY.

Thank you very much, Chair Joseph and members of the Committee on Higher Education, for the opportunity to speak with you today.

I am going to be direct. After reviewing three years of hiring data from 2022-2024, the picture that emerged is that there is a racial inequity problem at the City University of New York. As such, I will identify five areas, among many, where action should be taken:

1. **CUNY needs more full-time faculty to properly serve our students.** A 2021 study by the University Faculty Senate, found that white students, concentrated at SUNY, have significantly greater access to full-time faculty than Black and Brown students, who are concentrated at CUNY. I will submit a copy of this report with my testimony today.

2. **CUNY salaries have eroded significantly across decades of under-funding and our workload is greater than at comparable institutions.** There exists a limited pool of Black and Brown faculty in university professions, in part because of the educational debt one may be required to take on and lower pay compared to other professions. **We are frequently unable to compete to attract and retain Black and Brown faculty at CUNY, where faculty work more and are paid less than our public peers.** From 2022 to 2024, Black faculty representation at CUNY went from 15.0% to 15.1%. A gain of 0.1% in three years. This is not progress. This is stagnation, and it is unacceptable.
3. **CUNY students should have access to faculty who look like them, to whom they relate, and who function as role models.** Faculty from different racial and ethnic backgrounds bring intellectual diversity to the classroom. When Black and Brown students at CUNY do not see Black and Brown faculty in the classrooms, they are receiving a message that they are not full members of the community. We need to attract and retain more Black and Brown faculty and professional staff in key areas such as mental health counseling and advising immigrant students. CUNY should also focus strongly on the retention of faculty of color. We are losing ground. From the data, some CUNY colleges have lost Black and Brown Faculty. For example, at my home campus, City Tech, in 2022, 13.6% Black Faculty compared to 2024, 11%, a change of 2.6%. Hostos Community College also lost Hispanic faculty members. CUNY is losing faculty through attrition.

4. **There are long-term staff shortages and vacancies among Higher Education Officers and College Lab Technicians – the professional staff that keeps CUNY running. As such, many are overworked.** Some are expected to do the labor that should be assigned to two or three full-time employees. CUNY has lost experienced, excellent employees because of workload and fiscal austerity. According to CUNY's 2025 Staff Facts report, more than a quarter of the non-teaching instructional staff in these titles are Black; more than 70% are people of color.
5. **Faculty of color experience what's called "cultural taxation" – a greater service burden placed upon us to perform Diversity Work.** These faculty members serve on many more committees than others early in the tenure process, based on culture or identity. And we serve, even if they are spread thin, as we support the mission and vision of the university and the students we serve. This expectation is never stated when one is recruited or during the hiring process. This becomes overwhelming and taxing over time. Studies have shown the impact of that extraordinary service can hamper promotion, research, and a healthy work-life balance. Faculty of color are often expected to speak in moments of crisis and conflict, which can place a larger burden on their mental health. In the PSC/CUNY's last round of bargaining, the union advanced a demand won by the union representing faculty and staff in the California State University system. Those faculty of color may now apply for occasional release time, a reduction in their teaching load, tied to performing Diversity Work. The PSC may advance this proposal again when we return to the bargaining table next year.

CUNY has a diversity problem, and the time for incrementalism is over. Our students deserve better. CUNY can and should do better. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Statement of Concern by the directors of the Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge (SEEK) Program at the City University of New York (CUNY)

June 17, 2026

Dear Members of the New York City Council's Committee on Higher Education,

We are concerned about the apparent consistent decrease in visibility and support for SEEK. For almost 60 years, SEEK has served nearly 500 thousand students. Programs, such as ASAP, provide students with support in financial, social, and academic advising. These programs are modeled on SEEK, yet SEEK enrollment lacks intentional pipelines and clear guidelines that reflect the legislative mandate that considers students' life patterns of historical economic disadvantage and educational gaps that predate their admission to college. Therefore, the growth of these programs is not taking place, as no strategic growth plan for SEEK exists at CUNY despite the current and growing need of this population in New York State. Without the understanding of these realities, the recruitment, retention, and persistence of Black students in CUNY will continue to be stagnant.

- We recommend that CUNY update its 30-year-old guidelines for SEEK to remove institutional barriers to admission, improve persistence and graduation of this population, to one that reflects and addresses the current needs of today's students.
- We recommend that CUNY build upon the access to a population that SEEK serves, which is unique to any program in CUNY, an inadmissible population that carries significant impact to NYS, as chronically under-resourced and Out-of-school Out-of-work (OSOW) youth, who currently present a significant social cost to the state.
- We recommend that the staffing structure in SEEK, at a minimum, reflects that of other supportive programs like ASAP, Macaulay, etc.
- We recommend campus fiscal accountability across all SEEK programs and the requirement of a timeline for the allocation of funds to campuses for operations and strategic planning prior to the start of the fiscal year.
- Furthermore, we recommend an increased public relations campaign (buses, subways and social media) and the development of pipelines to SEEK from NYC middle and high schools to raise greater awareness and improve enrollment in these programs

My name is Dr. Teresa Hurst. I have served as the Director of the Baruch College Counseling Center for 9 years and in the mental health field for over 25 years. I also serve as the Co-Chair of CUNY's Council of Counseling Center Directors. The Counseling Centers across CUNY provide much needed mental health services to both undergraduate and graduate students.

I am writing to advocate for the CUNY students who need mental health care while attending CUNY but cannot get the help they need due to a shortage of staff in the CUNY Counseling Centers. I am also writing this testimony for the CUNY students who died by suicide who were never able to finish their degrees. Often, the voices of our most at-risk students are not heard or the voices of the family members who are left after losing their loved ones. I am writing on behalf of the student who jumped off a roof. I am writing for the student who was found dead in the East River. I'm writing for the student found dead in one of the CUNY residence halls. Of the students who come into the Baruch College Counseling Center for help, around 30% of them report having thoughts of suicide over the past two weeks and 80% report histories of trauma. All of this interferes with college completion. And I am writing this testimony for them.

I imagine most of you on this Committee have been impacted by depression, suicide or drug addiction, either yourself or someone you love. I, too, was profoundly impacted by these things in my family. And I am standing here today as someone who was the first in my family to go to college and as someone who was able to earn a doctoral degree in clinical psychology because I got free counseling support while I earned my undergraduate degree.

I am writing this testimony today to ask you for your help in advocating for mental health funding at the CUNY Counseling Centers. All of us in the CUNY community are in the middle of a mental health crisis and we will continue to see students dropping out of CUNY due to unmet mental health needs and we will continue to lose CUNY students to suicide whose lives are tragically cut too short. The CUNY Counseling Centers have not been able to get the financial support we need for a sufficient number of full-time permanent counselors to help our students succeed. We are drowning in the counseling centers with anxious, depressed and suicidal CUNY students. So, I am pleading for your help.

Thank you so much for your time.

Teresa Hurst, PhD, Director, Baruch College Counseling Center/CUNY



"The education of free people is the hope of humanity."

These inspiring words, which have been a part of the mission and ideals of The City University of New York (CUNY) continue to challenge us and to hold us accountable for presenting a well-rounded education no matter an individual's background or means. State Education Law, Article 125, Section 6201 details our commitment to how we govern and lead.

As the Chair of the reestablished Black Studies Department at The City College of New York, I am here to speak regarding support for Black Studies in the CUNY system. The City College Motto, which translates as **“Look back. Look here. Look forward.”** provides an ideal pathway for this dialogue to lead to **substantive action.**

First — Look Back

Whether one considers the student activists who were a part of the freedom struggle of the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam war, or of Black Lives Matter, over and over again our students hold a mirror to ourselves and show us how we can stand with the marginalized — they have been standing for something larger than themselves for decades.

On the campus of CCNY in 1969 a group of courageous students issued what we now know as The Five Demands, which is also the name of the documentary on PBS that details their heroism. Many of these students were coming out of SEEK, which Education Law, Article 125, Section 6201, also states “SEEK and College Discovery programs must not be diminished as a result of greater state financial responsibility for the operation of the city and state of New York.” CUNY has a beautiful and

courageous history of supporting and uplifting systems that provide greater access for the marginalized.

Second – Look Here

The CCNY Black Studies Department, like many across the 26 CUNY campuses, is community engaged and honors the diaspora via an experiential and globally inspired curriculum. Black Studies is an academic and activist discipline that provides an intellectual space where students can gain interdisciplinary knowledge of the world while developing as engaged scholar activists.

Third and Finally – Look Forward

The current CUNY Strategic Plan, CUNY Lifting New York: 2023-2030 Strategic Roadmap details our commitment to several goals.

Goal #1: Be a National Leader in Providing Access to Higher Education for Diverse Populations of Students

Black Studies is the embodiment of this goal and should be supported and expanded with resources and finances.

Goal #2: Improve our ability to boost student outcomes and eliminate academic equity gaps with innovative curriculum and support for our world-class staff and faculty

Investment in Black Studies would allow for the direct meeting of this second goal.

Goal #3: Advance Our Community Through Comprehensive Research, Engagement and Service

As our national champion NY Knicks have shown us, diversity and inclusion are our superpowers. We have the ability to continue comprehensive research, engagement, and service in a discipline that allows for an engagement with the whole.

We are three years into the CUNY Strategic Plan, and we have approximately four years to accomplish these goals and to move towards greater alignment with our own ideals and vision for what this institution that is beautifully made up of 26 colleges can ultimately be. But, we must not wait, we must not tarry in taking action towards accomplishing these goals. To meet the needs of our students, our city, our state, and the ideals of a country founded 250 years ago – we must act now. We must fund and provide resources to recruit and retain qualified faculty and staff. We must invest in interdisciplinary education, and we must make sure that we do not make our mission and values an afterthought in our funding plans.

[Jervette R. Ward, Ph.D. \(she/her\)](#)

Chair & Associate Professor

The Black Studies Department, CCNY

jervette@ccny.cuny.edu

www.ccny.cuny.edu/blackstudies

Testimony of Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost Alicia Alvero
The City University of New York
New York City Council Higher Education Committee
Oversight Hearing - Racial Equity at CUNY
June 17, 2026

Good afternoon, Chair Joseph and members of the committee. I am Alicia Alvero, Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost of CUNY. I am pleased to be joined today by Larry D. Johnson Jr., president of Bronx Community College.

Thank you for convening today's hearing on racial equity at CUNY. Few questions are more central to our university's purpose or more consequential for the future of our city. As the first Latina to serve as the University's executive vice chancellor and university provost, I'm intimately aware of why representation matters. I'm a first-generation American, a first-generation college student, and the daughter of Cuban refugees. I started as a faculty member at Queens College in 2003 and have dedicated my career to making the University more equitable.

The consequential work we are doing together sends an important message to our campus community and city: namely, that the principles of access and inclusion are crucial drivers of success for all New Yorkers. Discussions like the one we are having today provide important forums to focus attention on racial equity and other issues that pursue justice for the underserved.

CUNY students mirror New York City's rich diversity: 78 percent of our population are students of color. Serving them equitably is what our university exists to do.

CUNY's mission has always been rooted in equity, access, opportunity and academic excellence. Diversity is not separate from those commitments — it is essential to them. In fact, it is both a moral and legal obligation. New York State Education Law Section 6201, which established CUNY as a unified system in 1961, explicitly calls for a university that reflects the diverse communities that comprise the people of the city and state of New York.

Who We Serve

As one of the most diverse university systems in the country, CUNY serves nearly 247,000 students across 26 campuses and degree levels. In Fall 2025, the student body was 22.7 percent Asian or Pacific Islander, 27.5 percent Black, 27.6 percent Hispanic, and 21.9 White.

To fulfill our academic mission, we strive to ensure that our faculty reflects a comparable breadth of perspectives — in identity, in lived experience and intellectual approach.

A diverse faculty strengthens the university in specific, measurable ways. It broadens the questions we ask and the knowledge we produce. It deepens the student educational experience, allowing students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum and in their mentors. It strengthens pedagogy and mentorship in a system where

students bring a wide range of perspectives into the classroom. And it ensures that our programs evolve alongside the society our students will enter.

Diversity, in this sense, is not an initiative. It is a core component of the University's quality and strength.

Faculty Diversity — And How It Compares Nationally

The question of faculty diversity is one of the most persistent challenges in American higher education. A *Chronicle of Higher Education* analysis published this month, and drawing on federal data from 2024, found that more than seven out of 10 faculty members nationwide were white. Minority faculty, the report found, represent approximately 28 percent of all faculty.

CUNY significantly exceeds that national average, with 45 percent of our nearly 19,000 faculty members coming from minority groups in Fall 2025. This includes 15 percent who are Asian, 15 percent who are Black or African American and 13 percent who are Hispanic.

While CUNY's faculty diversity far exceeds the national average, we know our work is ongoing, and we are committed to broadening opportunity across the university.

Over the past five years, a majority of new full-time faculty hires at our senior and community colleges have come from minority groups, reaching 61 percent in 2024-25. In that year, 21 percent of hires were Black or African American — the highest rate in five years — while 27 percent were Asian and 9 percent were Hispanic.

Staff and Leadership

CUNY's non-teaching workforce is also highly diverse. More than two-thirds of our staff are members of minority groups: 17 percent are Asian, 24 percent are Black and 26 percent are Hispanic.

And the diversification of CUNY's senior leadership has accelerated since 2019, when Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez became chancellor. Since then, minority-group representation among our 26 presidents and deans has grown to 62 percent — including 27 percent who are Black and 27 percent who are Hispanic. At CUNY Central, 50 percent of the Chancellery belong to a minority group.

Building Diversity and Excellence

The numbers tell part of the story. The programs tell the rest — and the most important thing to understand about CUNY's approach is that we are strengthening academic fields in ways that expand opportunity, support excellence, and better serve our diverse students and city.

The clearest example is our investment in Black, Race, and Ethnic Studies.

In 2020, CUNY received a multimillion-dollar grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to develop and expand initiatives advancing social and racial justice. At the center of that work is the \$3 million Black, Race and Ethnic Studies Initiative — BRESI

— which awarded \$1.8 million in competitive grants for 126 projects during the 2022-23 academic year.

In 2024, the Mellon Foundation extended this commitment with a new \$5 million grant through fiscal year 2028, focused on two things: launching New York State's first Ph.D. and M.A. programs in Black, Race and Ethnic Studies at the Graduate Center, and a cluster-hire initiative bringing four new faculty positions in this field over the next three years.

The cluster-hiring model across multiple campuses allows us to build CUNY's strength in the field, foster collaboration in research and teaching, and create a sustainable foundation for future academic growth.

The BRES Initiative is not a stand-alone program. It is a system-wide academic effort designed to advance racial and social justice through curriculum, research and graduate education, and to support faculty-led work in curriculum and community engagement while building a pipeline of scholars working on issues central to New York City and beyond.

Broader Student-Facing Programs

Our commitment to equity extends well beyond faculty hiring to the many longstanding, proven programs that serve hundreds of thousands of CUNY students — with a particular focus on our commitment to racial equity.

- **ASAP** — our Accelerated Study in Associate Programs — serves nearly a third of all incoming community college freshmen, with an even higher share among Black and Hispanic students.
- **SEEK and College Discovery** were founded more than 60 years ago specifically to expand access. These programs continue to provide academic and financial support to thousands of students facing systemic barriers to higher education.
- **College Now and Early College** programs served more than 30,000 students in 2024-25, of whom 35 percent were Hispanic and 24 percent were Black.
- **CUNY Reconnect**, our initiative for adult learners and students returning to complete their degrees, has served more than 71,000 students since its launch in 2022. In its first two years, more than two-thirds of enrollees identified as Black or Hispanic.

Closing

We are proud of our diversity at CUNY and remain committed to continuing our work with focus, clarity and purpose — building a stronger, more dynamic academic institution that reflects the breadth of New York City and serves its students with excellence.

I look forward to your questions.

###

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

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: June 17, 2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tia Poguetle

Address: 25 Broadway, NY, NY 10004

I represent: Young Invincibles

Address: 25 Broadway NY, NY 10004

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Name: Dionne Bennett

Address: _____

I represent: Black Faculty + Staff Assoc in

Address: CUNY

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Date: 6/17/26

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Name: Alicia Alvero

Address: City

I represent: University Vice Chancellor

Address: _____

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Name: Larry Johnson

Address: _____

I represent: President at Bronx Community college

Address: _____

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Name: DONNA Hill

Address: 320 Vacker St.

I represent: Medgar Evers College

Address: _____

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Name: DR. ANTHONY BROWN

Address: _____

I represent: CUMY ASSOCIATION OF BLACK FACULTY
AND STAFF

Address: _____

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Name: Dr. Brenda Greene

Address: _____

I represent: CUNY Association of Black Faculty & Staff

Address: _____

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Name: Randall Clarke

Address: _____

I represent: CUNY Black Faculty Staff Association

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Name: Rulisa Galloway-ferry

Address: HB

I represent: Cuny Black Faculty+Staff Association

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Date: 17 June 2026

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Name: Felicia Wharton

Address: 25 Bway

I represent: PSC / CLNY

Address: _____

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Date: 06/17/19

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Name: Linda Tigani

Address: 22 Arcide St 6th New York

I represent: NYC CORE

Address: _____

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Date: 06/17/2026

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Name: Robert Echevarria

Address: _____

I represent: Undergraduate Student Gov of Brooklyn College

Address: _____

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Name: AKkeem Polack

Address: _____

I represent: USS CUNY

Address: BMW Building

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Date: 06/17/26

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Name: Lisa Nishimura

Address: 25 Broadway, New York, NY 10004

I represent: Young Invincibles

Address: _____

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Date: 6/17/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sean Miller

Address: Astoria NY

I represent: Young Invincibles

Address: 25 Broadway, 11th Fl, New York NY

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Anne Chamberlain

Address: CUNY - 395 Hudson St

I represent: City Univ of NY

Address: 205 E 42nd St.

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Date: 10/17/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christopher Leon Johns

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: STU

Address: _____

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