

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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Monday, March 18, 2024  
Start: 1:03 P.M.  
Recess: 3:30 P.M.

HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Eric Dinowitz, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

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

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING: Restler

## COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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

Wendy Hensel,  
Executive Vice Chancellor and University  
Provost, The City University of New York (CUNY)

Héctor Batista,  
Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Operating  
Officer, The City University of New York (CUNY)

Sherif Soliman,  
Senior Vice Chancellor for Budget & Finance and  
Chief Financial Officer, The City University of  
New York (CUNY)

Dr. James Davis,  
President Professional Staff Congress/CUNY

Dorian Block,  
Senior Editor at Center for an Urban Future-  
Testifying on behalf of Editorial and Policy  
Director, Eli Dvorkin at Center for an Urban  
Future

Megan Ahearn,  
Program Director for New  
York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG)

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

Monique Thomas,  
Student at the City University of New York (CUNY)

Brenda Vargas,  
Director of College Discovery at Kingsborough  
Community College

## COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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

Cynthia Suarez-Espinal,  
Director of College Discovery at Bronx Community  
College

Gustavo Garcia-Flores,  
Student Advocate, Student at the City University  
of New York (CUNY)

Emely Campoverde,  
Student at the City University of New York  
(CUNY)

Kadillatou Sillah,  
Student at the City University of New York  
(CUNY), President of The CUNY Coalition for  
Students with Disabilities

1  
2 SERGEANT LYNCH: This is a microphone check for  
3 the Committee on Higher Education recorded by Layla  
4 Lynch on March 18, 2024 in the Committee Room.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good afternoon, and welcome to  
6 New York City Preliminary Budget Hearing on Higher  
7 Education. At this time, can everybody please silence  
8 your cell phones?

9 If you wish to testify, please come up to the  
10 Sergeant at Arms desk to fill out a testimony slip.

11 At this time, and going forward, no one is to  
12 approached the dais. I repeat no one is to approach  
13 the dais.

14 Chair, we are ready to begin.

15 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [GAVEL SOUND] [GAVELING IN]

16 Good afternoon everyone, I'm Council Member Eric  
17 Dinowitz, Chair of The Committee on Higher Education  
18 and proud CUNY alum. Welcome to today's hearing on  
19 the City's Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Budget for the  
20 City University of New York.

21 CUNY's Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Budget totals \$1.3  
22 billion, which includes nearly \$900 million in  
23 personal services funding to support 6,024 full-time  
24 positions and \$370.3 million and other than personal  
25 services. The budget is \$188.6 million less when

1 compared to fiscal 2024 Adopted Budget of \$1.4  
2 billion, the difference is mainly the result of the  
3 expiring federal stimulus funding of \$112.4 million  
4 in FY25.  
5

6 While CUNY's overall headcount has not  
7 drastically changed over the last several fiscal  
8 years, it is expected that as more students return to  
9 the classrooms, the number of pedagogical staff will  
10 likely increase in the future and thereby require the  
11 infusion of additional resources to support the  
12 increase.

13 In Fiscal 25 CUNY anticipates generating \$415  
14 million from tuition and fees, close to \$273 million  
15 from state grants, and \$13 million from non-  
16 governmental grants.

17 The Preliminary Plan does not include any new  
18 needs for CUNY. However, budget actions increased its  
19 budget by \$4.7 million in Fiscal 24 and decreased it  
20 by \$17.6 million in Fiscal 25 compared to the  
21 November plan.

22 The importance of CUNY to the economic mobility  
23 of thousands of its students, and the City by  
24 extension, is clear. At today's hearing, we will  
25 examine its budget to ensure that the institution and

1  
2 the students it serves receive adequate funding and  
3 resources to thrive.

4 We would like to focus on several topics  
5 including the funding changes included in the  
6 Preliminary Plan, the impact of the loss of federal  
7 stimulus funds going forward, and spending on capital  
8 projects. In addition, we will review CUNY's  
9 vacancies to ensure that they have not impacted  
10 operations and programs.

11 We will hear from CUNY critical programs like  
12 CUNY Reconnect, ASAP, Ace, and MetroCards to ensure  
13 that they can continue to be available for all  
14 students.

15 Lastly, we hope to hear from the University on  
16 the impact of the Council funded initiative on its  
17 initiatives, on its operation, and on student  
18 services this fiscal year.

19 Before we begin, I'd like to thank everyone who  
20 has joined us today and acknowledge Council Member  
21 Marte and Council Member Brewer who are here with us.

22 I want to thank our committee staff for their  
23 work including, including Carolina Gil, Florentine  
24 Kabore, Regina Paul, Sahar Moazami, and my Budget  
25 Legislation Director, Adam Staropoli.

And before we hear from you, I will swear you in.

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Please raise your right hand. Wendy Hensel, Héctor Batista, and Sherif Soliman do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this committee, and to respond honestly to council member questions?

PANEL: (AFFIRMS)

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you.

Before beginning your testimony, please state your name for the record.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: Good afternoon, Chair Dinowitz, and other members of the City Council Higher Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to be here this afternoon. I'm Wendy Hensel, Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost for the City University of New York. I'm joined today by CUNY's Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer, Hector Batista, and CUNY's Senior Vice Chancellor for Budget and Finance and Chief Financial Officer, Sharif Solomon.

I want to Speaker Adrian Adams and the entire City Council for your steadfast commitment to CUNY,

1  
2 our mission, our programs, and most importantly, our  
3 students.

4 Over the past two years your support, and that of  
5 Governor Kathy Hochul, and the State Senate and  
6 Assembly, have been critical to the important  
7 contributions CUNY has made to New York City's  
8 rebound from the pandemic.

9 CUNY is embedded within the lifeblood of New York  
10 City. More than 80 percent of our 50,000 annual  
11 graduates stay here diversifying every sector of the  
12 City's workforce and contributing to every aspect of  
13 economic and civic life.

14 CUNY alumni in New York account for about \$70  
15 billion in annual earnings. That's close to 5 percent  
16 of the state's GDP. When you consider their increased  
17 future earnings and tax revenues that they produce,  
18 each taxpayer dollar invested in CUNY returns a  
19 benefit of at least \$15 to New York State. To quote  
20 an editorial in The Daily News last spring, "Every  
21 dollar in is a dollar that is magnified and keeps New  
22 York's economy humming along."

23 Our campuses also active anchor institutions  
24 across this great city. Throughout 2023, our outreach  
25 programs and initiatives directly engaged 50,000



1 community members through educational workshops,  
2 health clinics, cultural events, and volunteer  
3 activities. We have strong partnerships with the New  
4 York City Public schools, businesses and industry,  
5 and nonprofits that address community needs like job  
6 training programs, literacy campaigns, and  
7 environmental conservation efforts.  
8

9 We are deeply committed to our role as an of  
10 engine social mobility and are building a strategy to  
11 make our university even more impactful as an agent  
12 of change and economic engine for this state in the  
13 City.

14 Last June, we unveiled an ambitious strategic  
15 roadmap called CUNY Liftin New York, a detailed plan  
16 for bolstering the already profound impact that our  
17 university makes in the lives of our students, their  
18 families, communities, and on the city region and  
19 state.

20 Both our roadmap and our Fiscal 2025 budget  
21 requests focus on four goals. They are:

22 One, be a national leader in providing access to  
23 higher education for diverse populations of students.

24 Two, improve our ability to exceed predicted  
25 student outcomes, and eliminate academic equity gaps

1 with innovative curriculum and support for our  
2 worldclass staff and faculty.

3  
4 Three, advance our community through  
5 comprehensive research, engagement and service.

6 And four, modernize the CUNY system.

7 We've experienced many recent successes already  
8 advancing this strategy including fixing long-term  
9 flaws in our transfer system by ensuring that  
10 students who go from a CUNY community college to a  
11 senior college receive full credit for the first two  
12 years of classes taken within the major, saving them  
13 an estimated average of at least \$1,220 in tuition  
14 and significant time toward graduation; launching a  
15 \$10 million initiative to get CUNY students more paid  
16 internships that are embedded in their degree  
17 programs; and providing new internship opportunities  
18 to 4,000 students; adding 115 fully online high-  
19 quality degree programs across the University this  
20 last year to provide access to working adults and  
21 those who need flexibility in order to obtain a  
22 college degree; securing \$638 million and external  
23 research funding - a record amount- this last fiscal  
24 year; and working on wide ranging transformational  
25 capital projects that advance CUNY's core educational

1 mission, including the recent completion of the state  
2 of the art \$95 million Nursing Education, Research  
3 and Practice Center at Lehman College; and finally  
4 confronting hate and taking steps to combat  
5 antisemitism in all of its forms on every front  
6 including, partnering with Hillel International;  
7 launching a portal for community members to report  
8 incidents of hate and discrimination; initiating a  
9 campaign to promote students and employees right to  
10 request religious accommodations; forming in advisory  
11 council on Jewish life; building a new Diversity,  
12 Equity And Inclusion Hub on our website; and  
13 distributing \$1.3 million in State and City Council  
14 funding to the colleges for trainings, events,  
15 activities that address, religious, racial, and  
16 ethnic bigotry.

18 While our accomplishments with your support have  
19 been laudable, our continued progress in lifting New  
20 York is challenged by the \$94 million in PEGs that  
21 have been imposed on the University and are now set  
22 to be baselined. We have worked tirelessly to  
23 mitigate the harm from these PEGs and preserve our  
24 academic mission and reputation as a leading  
25 university. However, the negative effects of the PEGs

1  
2 for our students, our academic programs, and our  
3 colleges are now widespread and unavoidable.

4 My colleagues with me today will discuss the  
5 specific impacts on personnel and operations across  
6 the colleges. I'd like to give you just a few  
7 examples of how our key academic programs are being  
8 affected.

9 We've reduced City funding to support our K-16  
10 programs with the New York City Public Schools. Tutor  
11 Corps, which supports STEM teachers in middle in high  
12 school classrooms by providing one-on-one tutoring  
13 now serves half as many students as result losing  
14 \$1.1 million in the last two fiscal years. As a  
15 reminder, when PEGs are implemented, CUNY not only  
16 loses its direct funding from the City, but we also  
17 lose program funding from our City partners who are  
18 managing their own reductions from the PEGs. The  
19 FY24 baseline funding for our accelerated study in  
20 the Associates Program or ASAP, remain stable and we  
21 thank you for that support. However, our Accelerate  
22 Complete and Engage, or Ace program, which serves  
23 2,000 bachelor degree student seeking-students per  
24 year at a cost of \$7.1 million is not included in the  
25 Mayors Preliminary Budget. Our ACE program achieves a

1  
2 4-year graduation of 60 percent versus 41 percent for  
3 a matched cohort, reducing the actual cost for  
4 graduates by 13 percent after accounting for the  
5 \$2,500 per student investment. Because these funds  
6 must be sought each year and are not baselined, it is  
7 difficult to manage vacancies, which are often paused  
8 pending the next budget cycle, resulting in higher  
9 advisement caseloads and fewer students admitted to  
10 the program.

11 CUNY also lost \$2 million per year in funding to  
12 support developmental education last year slated to  
13 meet the needs of those who enter CUNY unready to  
14 take college level math and English without  
15 additional support.

16 The decline in funding affects the amount of  
17 corequisite support available, and may jeopardize the  
18 critical progress we have made to ensure that our  
19 underprepared students have a clear pathway toward  
20 college level coursework.

21 Finally, we have paused some of our professional  
22 development programs for these faculty who have  
23 experience challenges and teaching in the wake of the  
24 pandemic, especially in English and math  
25 developmental courses.

1                   As these handful of examples reflect the PEGs  
2  
3                   have led to reductions in instructional and student  
4                   services staff that directly affects student progress  
5                   to degree completion and higher earning ability.  
6                   Reduced staffing has affected academic advisement,  
7                   counseling, library staffing and hours, career  
8                   services, and student financial aid offices, among  
9                   others. These effects are now magnified by the fact  
10                  that many students who are now enrolling with us have  
11                  significant learning delays and intense needs because  
12                  of the pandemic and require more support than ever.

13                 Chairperson Dinowitz, and members of the  
14                 Committee, the University community deeply  
15                 appreciates your continued commitment to a high-  
16                 quality community CUNY education, this concludes my  
17                 testimony, and Héctor Batista Executive Vice  
18                 Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer will continue  
19                 with his testimony.

20                 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Thank you,  
21                 Wendy.

22                 I echo my colleague and thank Speaker Adams,  
23                 Chair Dinowitz, your colleagues at Higher Education  
24                 Committee, and member of the City Council for  
25                 consistently recognizing the value of CUNY. Your

1  
2 commitment to ensuring our resiliency is greatly  
3 appreciated. Also wanted acknowledge CUNY trustee and  
4 Chair of the Board of Finance and Administration, and  
5 former City Council Member Henry Berger who has  
6 joined us here today.

7       You heard from our Provost about our student  
8 demographics. Let me begin this testimony today with  
9 a sense of our faculty and staff demographics and the  
10 gains this administration has made in diversity,  
11 equity, and inclusion. We have seen an increase in  
12 women and minority employees across many of our  
13 faculty and staff classification. According to a  
14 three-year Workforce Demographic Report, three-year  
15 trend of the full-time instructional staff shows the  
16 increase in the percentage of female and minority  
17 faculty. The three-year trend shows an increase the  
18 percentage of minorities, faculty HEO Series ECB  
19 titles, and reflects an increase in the percentage of  
20 women in faculty titles. Employee ranks of professors  
21 have increased in percentage of minorities and women  
22 by 9.7, and 8.3 respectively. Growth in Non-  
23 Professoriate in titles as Lecturers and Instructors  
24 is most evident in total minorities with an increase  
25 of 211 faculty members of 38.3 percent. While we are

1 proud of these gains, we are facing difficult  
2 financial challenges. Our obligations are exceeding  
3 our available resources, so we are faced with a  
4 structural deficit. The primary factors contributing  
5 to this structural deficits are enrollment declines  
6 and unfunded mandatory costs that the University has  
7 had to absorb. As we seek your support in this budget  
8 cycle, it is important to begin by summarizing the  
9 steps that we have taken and continue to take address  
10 the structural deficit.  
11

12 University-wide, we're taking steps such as  
13 instituting and hiring freeze, applying across-the-  
14 board saving targets for this year fiscal year and  
15 the last and the previous one. We are working with  
16 the colleges that are exhibiting physical distress to  
17 achieve additional savings reductions through  
18 expenses reductions and opportunities to generate  
19 revenues. Our actions, combined with additional State  
20 aid, has led to our structural deficit to be reduced  
21 by more than half since two years ago from \$232  
22 million FY22 to \$107 million according to our latest  
23 projection in this current fiscal year. Our  
24 strategies to continue to reduce the structural  
25 deficit do not only include college level of actions.



1  
2 We also implemented various statewide shared services  
3 strategies to achieve additional savings and  
4 streamline operations. Among these strategies is  
5 centralizing IT functions to benefit the economy of  
6 scale, pursuing more effective deployment of  
7 maintenance and repair teams to the campuses, and to  
8 consolidate contracts to negotiate better pricing.

9 Our efforts are not limited to expense  
10 reductions. We also focused revenues that will help  
11 us stabilize the University. We continue to implement  
12 enrollment and retention strategies to ensure that  
13 students succeed on their educational journeys, and  
14 those efforts have led to an uptick in enrollment  
15 that has helped increase revenues to the University.  
16 Although there is an enrollment uptick, and it is  
17 really welcomed, it's not enough to counter to nearly  
18 15 percent decrease in enrollment compared to pre-  
19 pandemic. But we have a comprehensive plan to tackle  
20 these structural deficits and achieve fiscal  
21 stability for the University, the plan is strained by  
22 the effects of several rounds of baseline PEGs.

23 It was welcomed news to hear of the cancellation  
24 of a third PEG, but let me put the PEGs into some  
25 perspective. The baseline PEGs of Fiscal Year 2024,

1 that now totals \$94.1 million and is estimated to  
2 grow to \$95.5 million in Fiscal Year 2025 will  
3 continue to prevent CUNY from progressing. To put  
4 this into prospective, the culminating PEGs of \$94.1  
5 million is 15 percent of the entire City contribution  
6 to the operating budget.  
7

8 CUNY is an organization of people, so naturally  
9 much of the operating budget, about 85 percent, is  
10 dedicated to personal services. Community colleges  
11 are down about 400 positions or about 7 percent  
12 compared to headcount levels of Fiscal Year 2021. Let  
13 me provide a few examples of the impact of personal  
14 reductions. At the Borough of Manhattan Community  
15 College we have 73 vacant positions, they include  
16 faculty, student support services, building and  
17 grounds professionals, and instructional and  
18 administration support personnel. These vacancies  
19 have caused student delays in academic navigation,  
20 which relates to student retention and success.

21 At Kingsborough Community College, we have a  
22 total of 51 full-time positions that are currently  
23 vacant- they include faculty, lab technicians,  
24 financial aid personnel, bursas, registrar, and  
25

1  
2 custodial service. Additionally, academic tutoring  
3 and academic lab hours have been cut back.

4 At Hostos Community College, 77 positions have  
5 been cut. In the Student and Development Management  
6 Division, there has been no replacement of vacant  
7 positions in student support service areas -  
8 Financial Aid, Admissions and Advisement there are  
9 10 faculty lines that are vacant. The IT Department  
10 has suffered, creating a real challenge from a cyber  
11 security prospective. The impact of these reductions,  
12 coupled with the programmatic impact, outlined by  
13 University Provost Hensel, demonstrates how these  
14 PEGs have directly affected student progress to  
15 degree completion and higher earning ability. But I  
16 would also like to highlight another aspect of the  
17 PEGs that cannot be overlooked - facility conditions  
18 that are critical to overall campus environment.

19 Facility conditions are an important part of the  
20 student progress, recruitment and retention, but also  
21 CUNY's ability to attract and retain high-quality  
22 faculty and staff. So, we are working hard on a  
23 dynamic master planning exercise to bring CUNY  
24 critical buildings systems to a state of good repair.  
25 As part of that work, we are completing a University-

1 wide Facility Condition Assessment that will give a  
2 more precise, University-wide evaluation of CUNY's  
3 maintenance standing on a building-by-building level  
4 on the conditions of our facilities. It will allow us  
5 even more efficient allocation of limited maintenance  
6 funding. But planning alone will not suffice so long  
7 as the PEGs prevent us from maintaining the required  
8 level of facility staff.  
9

10 Now, I would like to turn to the Capital Budget.  
11 CUNY is home to 300 buildings across New York City,  
12 encompassing 29 million square feet of classrooms,  
13 labs, theaters, athletic facilities, and more. These  
14 spaces are vital for our students, faculty, and the  
15 communities we serve. We are seeking \$333.1 million  
16 in capital support. These funds will allow us to  
17 preserve the University's infrastructure, recapture  
18 the spaces that are under-utilized, improve our  
19 technology, and meet our energy conservation goals.  
20 The funds will ensure that we continue to serve the  
21 region with graduates trained for high demand  
22 positions in the sciences, technology, mathematics,  
23 teaching, and nursing.

24 In conclusion, we respectfully request that you  
25 restore the PEGs to enable us to continue to move

1  
2 CUNY forward. We know we are an engine of social  
3 mobility, and all of our students should be able to take  
4 advantage of that.

5 The downstream results of less investment in CUNY  
6 will have a cumulative negative impact on the City  
7 economy. Of course, real investment in CUNY will  
8 bring us closer to a broader goal that we  
9 collectively share of improving the lives of  
10 students, their families, and communities across the  
11 City.

12 We look forward to working with you to deliver a  
13 strong future for CUNY. Thank you again, and we look  
14 forward to your questions.

15 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you, I would like to  
16 note that we have been joined by Council Member  
17 Bottcher and Council Member Restler.

18 I think that last thing you said is absolutely  
19 true, CUNY is the best investment that we can make in  
20 our city. And the cuts appear, by your testimony, to  
21 be devastating to all of the programs that work.

22 I want to first ask you about Director Jiha's  
23 statement at the budget hearing we had a couple weeks  
24 ago, because I asked about CUNY. Uh, he said a number  
25 of things... I just want to read you one thing he

1  
2 said. I asked about the cuts to CUNY and about the  
3 cut to programs, and what he said was, "With respect  
4 to CUNY in general, the changes, we were very careful  
5 in terms of where we found the resources from CUNY's  
6 budget. If you talk to them...", which I am, "they  
7 will tell you the same thing. Basically what we did  
8 was look mostly in the area of fringe benefits and do  
9 re-estimates of some of the assumptions that were  
10 made in that area. We try to avoid touching programs  
11 as best we can..." does that sound accurate from your  
12 assessment running CUNY? Does that sound accurate?

13 (CROSS-TALK)

14 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: (INAUDIBLE)

15 Chair, there absolutely is an impact to the programs.  
16 And there were fringe benefits taken in the November  
17 plan, and there were fringe benefits taken in the  
18 prior fiscal year. But why are there fringe benefit  
19 cushions to begin with it? It's because of the  
20 sustained reduction in heads throughout the community  
21 colleges due to the PEGs.

22 So when you look at the testimony that both  
23 Provost Hensel and CO Batista gave, in the programs  
24 they were certainly cuts, but in just the heads,  
25 which basically over 400 since Fiscal Year 2021,

1 full-time heads, those translate into reductions in  
2 all kinds of campus operations - hours to libraries,  
3 counseling services, etc. So they're absolutely is a  
4 real impact in the PEGs. I think you heard of a few  
5 of the community colleges and the impact that you saw  
6 there. Certainly each of the other community colleges  
7 - the other four that weren't mentioned in the  
8 examples in the testimony certainly have had similar  
9 impacts with those reductions. So that is why we  
10 appreciate, of course, the support of the Council,  
11 and respectfully request that those PEGs are restored  
12 because they have a real impact on campus operations.

14 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: And let me  
15 add a couple of things. I mean, I think that, as you  
16 know, CUNY buildings are 50 years and older. And as  
17 we try to navigate making sure that our facilities  
18 are in a state of good repair, these cuts have really  
19 had a real impact on our custodial, on our  
20 maintenance staff to be able to sort of address some  
21 things that one day it's a leaky faucet, the next it  
22 becomes a larger problem. So, trying to address that,  
23 these cuts have really had an impact on our  
24 facilities and how we (INAUDIBLE) there's the  
25 student's side of the house, but then it's also on

1  
2 the facilities side of the house that has really  
3 created a real problem for us.

4 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So, the Budget Director was  
5 wrong? I mean, have you been speaking to the  
6 Administration? Did they misread an email? I mean  
7 it's hard to understand the big difference between  
8 what your testimony is, that programs will be cut -  
9 no doubt, and the testimony the Budget Director gave,  
10 which is that it's really just fringe. And you're  
11 elaborating that it's... that fringe was from other  
12 PEGs (INAUDIBLE) you did have to lower the headcount.

13 So what is the divide here, what's going on?

14 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: So, Chair, there  
15 certainly are conversations that go on all the time  
16 with OMB. I do think that ,you know, again it's  
17 what's behind the fringe cushion that you may see  
18 there? And it's really because of the sustained  
19 reduction in heads. So there is a conversation that  
20 continues to go on, but I really do think that when  
21 you look at the ,you know, on the ground at the  
22 campuses, what you hear from the presidents, what you  
23 hear from the executive set, what you hear from the  
24 faculty, is that there is significant broad range of  
25 reduction in services that simply did not exist prior



1  
2 to \$94 million of baseline PEGs that that the  
3 community colleges have had to sustain.

4 So we continue to speak with OMB. It's an ongoing  
5 dialogue, and we will continue to clarify the impact  
6 really of what's being felt at the campus level.

7 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: One more, because he did  
8 state that he did not think programs were cut or  
9 eliminated and if conditions improve, they'll do an  
10 assessment to partially or fully restore. And I guess  
11 the good news is that the economy is doing better and  
12 revenue is up since the preliminary budget. So that's  
13 good news for I think CUNY, given the Director's  
14 testimony.

15 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Yes, absolutely,  
16 and we certainly, number one we welcome the fact that  
17 the third round of PEGs for the Executive Plan were  
18 cancelled. We did note that the Budget Director's  
19 testimony certainly did have a nod towards if  
20 conditions improve that it will be reevaluated. And  
21 our contention is, and we always say this of course,  
22 that CUNY is really an investment. It's an investment  
23 in the city of New York. It's an investment in the  
24 state of New York. And by restoring these PEGs, our  
25 goal is hopefully not to just get back to right zero.

1  
2 Right? Our goal is to really make this an investment  
3 in the myriad of programs that really have proven  
4 success for New Yorkers.

5 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And I would say the cost of  
6 providing students with remedial education I think  
7 is, uh, speaks to the failure of our public school  
8 system and the need to invest more in making sure  
9 students graduate college-ready.

10 You mentioned a \$107 million structural deficit?  
11 The structural... \$107 million? Is that right? And  
12 are all of the... The remaining stimulus funds is  
13 going be spent during 2024?

14 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Correct, yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So, that's your structural  
16 (INAUDIBLE) If new labor contracts are settled but  
17 unfunded at the state level, can talk about the  
18 impact there?

19 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Sure, absolutely.  
20 Thank you for the question, Chair.

21 So first on the stimulus funds, we at CUNY were  
22 not unlike the city of New York, the state of New  
23 York, the MTA also received one time emergency  
24 federal stimulus dollars. So we're extremely grateful  
25 for that. Our usage of that was accordance to federal

1 guidelines, some for institutional expenses, like  
2 pandemic related expenses, some for lost revenue,  
3 some for student financial emergency grants. So,  
4 really the one time stimulus has been... has enabled  
5 us to continue to fill holes by the structural  
6 deficit that we've seen from enrollment declines,  
7 from unfunded mandatory costs that the university has  
8 had to absorb. So, yes, we are pursuing, and  
9 certainly part of our priority at the state level to  
10 make sure that our new contracts with our talented  
11 and dedicated workforce and faculty could be settled  
12 and could be funded for the senior colleges.

14 It is noted that if that's not funded, the  
15 deficit could climb to its highest at \$300 million.  
16 So, certainly we're working on that, and we're  
17 certainly encouraged by what we're seeing in the  
18 Governor's Budget, but also with the one house  
19 budgets that the legislator put out.

20 So, we are encouraged, but certainly the end of  
21 the federal stimulus dollars, because we're going to  
22 exhaust them this fiscal year. What does FY25 look  
23 like? We have a strategic plan. I think you heard a  
24 little bit about that from COO Batista and his  
25 testimony, in terms of shared services and other

1  
2 saving strategies, but also continuing to double down  
3 on enrollment and retention - all the things that can  
4 bring revenue to the University. So, we do have a  
5 plan, but certainly we need to see how this budget  
6 cycle plays out. And, of course, we look forward to  
7 your continued support.

8 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you.

9 I want to touch on the headcount and then get to  
10 my colleagues for questions.

11 At the beginning of this year, CUNY had some non-  
12 reappointments of faculty. For example, in January  
13 Queens College did not reappoint 26 full-time  
14 substitute lecturers, your college has, since mid-  
15 December, not reappointed an estimated 75 part-time  
16 adjuncts and several non-teaching staff positions.  
17 Were these non-reappointments to result of the  
18 structural deficits or expiring federal funds you  
19 mentioned?

20 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Sure, so in the  
21 case of... We have colleges of high financial  
22 concern, and we set forward an objective criteria for  
23 which colleges fall into that... (CROSS-TALK)

24 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And give me some colleges?  
25 Give me some examples of what those criteria are.

1  
2 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Sure, the  
3 criteria is number one, if you're projected to have a  
4 cash deficit in this fiscal year, which is 3 and a  
5 half months away, you certainly would be of high  
6 financial concern - or if you met two of the  
7 following three criteria: Number one is your  
8 structural deficit is 5 percent or more of your  
9 resources, number two is that you don't have enough  
10 of remaining stimulus funds or reserves to carry you  
11 out for three years, and number three is your  
12 enrollment trend doesn't match up with the revenue  
13 that you need to be able to counteract the structural  
14 deficit and achieve balance.

15 So, those are the criteria that we have. Two  
16 community colleges fall into the college of high  
17 financial concern, BMCC and Kingsborough Community  
18 College, Queens and York, as you noted, are two of  
19 the senior colleges that are included, and so part of  
20 what that means to be of high financial concern is  
21 that we work with you to establish deficit reduction  
22 targets and hiring restrictions. There's additional  
23 state money that will flow to help them on the  
24 revenue side, and really be able to put them in a  
25 path towards fiscal stability. And then at that point

1  
2 the "designation" will be lifted. And, so, in Queens,  
3 as you noted, there were some expense reduction  
4 actions that were taken. The campuses have a great  
5 deal of flexibility in how they achieve their savings  
6 targets. But, we continue to work with them, monitor  
7 their financial plans, and continue on strategies to  
8 increase revenue, so it's not only on the expense  
9 reduction side.

10 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. I have more  
11 questions about headcounts, but I do want to get to  
12 my colleagues who have questions. I will start with  
13 Council Member Brewer.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. On  
15 the community colleges I know that students are  
16 really concerned about academic advisors. So, I  
17 wanted to know the total budget. And just ,you know,  
18 I know you talked about it, but what are you going to  
19 do about that particular group of very, very needed  
20 individuals - academic advisors - at the community  
21 college level?

22 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: So, there is...  
23 Our advisors are done in different ways on different  
24 campuses. The ACE and ASAP have specific dedicated  
25 advisors that, uh, those levels have been maintained

1  
2 as part of the program, but we have heard from a  
3 number of community colleges there their other  
4 advisors for the general population, that they have  
5 held vacancies in some of those positions. And, so,  
6 of course, advising is key to student success in  
7 graduating and progress towards academic goals.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Do you know how many  
9 vacancies there are and what the budget is? Or could  
10 you get back to us if you don't?

11 PANEL: (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I have to say that the  
13 students talk about it all the time - and the lack  
14 of.

15 ASAP is ,you know, I know it's funded, but you  
16 could always use more. So, it is okay to say it's  
17 funded. I heard you say that. But, I would preface  
18 that, and John would kill you if you didn't, John  
19 Velasco (sp?), that you need more. It's not just...  
20 Just say it's funded, but you need more.

21 So, what's this with ACE? It's not baselined? Is  
22 there some way to get it baselined? I assume ASAP is  
23 not baselined either, is it?

24 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: ASAP is  
25 baselined.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, so you would you get  
3 ACE baselined?

4 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: Well, we hope  
5 you will consider baselining it. We created it at...  
6 out of the pilot that we started with philanthropic  
7 dollars. And as you heard, the results have been  
8 pretty amazing. Lehman College, for example, had a 60  
9 percent graduation rate over a 40 percent cohort. So,  
10 a tremendous return on investment for that program.  
11 However, we don't have any baselined dollars for  
12 that. We will... We are committed to continue serving  
13 students that we accepted, uh, whether or not we have  
14 continued funding just as part of our promise to  
15 those students, and we will have to figure out how to  
16 do that and probably make cuts to the program. But,  
17 we are precluded from taking really any new students  
18 or least any appreciable number of new students if  
19 that money is not restored to the budget.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. There is some  
21 concern... I am a big fan of John Jay, it's in my  
22 district, I've been working with them for, I don't  
23 know, hundreds of years, but I have a question. Who  
24 sets the colleges' enrollment targets, and what makes  
25 it a college of concern? And can you confirm that the



1 expected midyear cuts could be \$4.5 million?

2 Obviously that would be a major impact. Apparently  
3 that was presented to the staff in December for their  
4 projected deficit. Can you update us on that  
5 information?  
6

7 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Absolutely, so,  
8 John Jay, uh, is as a college of high financial  
9 concern, because they meet two of the three criteria  
10 that I mentioned before. So, notably, the structural  
11 deficit is five percent of more of their resources,  
12 and their enrollment trend is not sufficient to be  
13 able to counteract their revenue needs.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: What's their enrollment  
15 now? It has been 15 or 20 in the past... 20,000...  
16 (CROSS-TALK)

17 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Yes, the snapshot  
18 I think was trending negative last we checked about,  
19 I believe, like, two percent. And, so, you know, I  
20 think that what we are trying to... And, Council  
21 Member, you noted that there were deficit reduction  
22 targets, and you noted, and absolutely, that is part  
23 of what the savings that they have to achieve, one of  
24 the deficit reduction targets for FY24, uh, is \$4.5  
25 million. And, look, we are working with the colleges

1  
2 to try to identify opportunities. John Jay was one of  
3 the colleges as well that received recently approved,  
4 unallocated state aid dollars. And, so, that was  
5 distributed to the college to help with their budget.  
6 And, also, as part of that strategy, any college that  
7 is expected to end the fiscal year, three-and-a-half  
8 months away, with a cash deficit, some of those state  
9 operating dollars could also help to be able to  
10 balance. So, you get your first installment if you  
11 will, based on your fulltime equivalent headcount,  
12 and if you still have a cash deficit, we are there to  
13 help to be able to balance. But, it is about a two  
14 year strategy to be able to achieve fiscal stability.  
15 And, so, this list is not a permanent list. It is not  
16 a static list. It is a dynamic list. Once we know  
17 that you no longer meet that criteria, you will no  
18 longer be considered a college high financial  
19 concern. On the hiring, this last point, part of it  
20 is hiring restrictions that we have. It is basically  
21 a two for one. And, so, we do have exempt positions.  
22 Anything that affects public safety or health or  
23 revenue generating. So, we are currently working with  
24 (TIMER CHIMES) John Jay to be able to go through the  
25

1 list that they have and see if we can have some  
2 critical hirers that (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

3 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It would seem to me...  
4 that's a school were forensics, which is a real hot  
5 topic right now... has a priority, and one of the few  
6 colleges in the world if not the country. What does  
7 CUNY do to help advertise that kind of information so  
8 that more students would be attracted? Because this  
9 is a very popular focus -forensics.

10 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Yeah, just  
11 speaking generally in terms of there is whole  
12 strategy part of which we use one time state funds  
13 for - for transformative initiatives to do all kinds  
14 of marketing to be able to have the colleges out  
15 there and really showcase all of the great programs  
16 that they have. And, so, that is part of it, that  
17 just speaking in general and not on the forensics,  
18 but we do help with that to basically make colleges  
19 more attractive... (CROSS-TALK)

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: One other question. The  
21 Governor has tons of AI money going to Buffalo SUNY,  
22 SUNY Buffalo, do we... Are we getting any of that AI  
23 money here in the city of New York? Because all the  
24 news press say it should be going to colleges.  
25

1 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: We would have  
2 to get back to on you that (INAUDIBLE)...

3 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: We know we have  
4 the \$75 million gift recently from the Simon's  
5 Foundation, so there is private philanthropy that is  
6 coming into CUNY, but I don't know specifically...  
7 (CROSS-TALK)

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Campus... Which campus?

9 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: To CUNY  
10 Central... (CROSS-TALK)

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Through CUNY Central...

12 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: To develop a  
13 master's program in computational science, and also  
14 then to look through different areas... We are  
15 beginning to strategic plan in AI that involves using  
16 analytics specifically for advising - that's one of  
17 the areas you just asked about. So that even with  
18 higher caseloads, there can be a higher level of  
19 touch with routine matters dealt with through AI. So,  
20 we are deeply engaged, but I'm not sure the specific  
21 amount that is coming for that purpose.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Council Member Restler?  
24  
25

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you so much, Chair  
3 Dinowitz.

4 So much, we are fortunate to have a Speaker and  
5 Chair who are so committed so CUNY. I just firstly  
6 just want to commend the Provost and COO and all the  
7 CUNY leadership team for your exceptionally astute  
8 decision to bring on the new CFO. Sherif as is one of  
9 the most talented public servants that I've worked  
10 with, and we are really lucky to have him at CUNY. So  
11 congratulations and thank you Sherif for your ongoing  
12 service of the people in New York City.

13 Firstly, could you all just break down for me...  
14 As we all know the city of New York is primarily  
15 responsible for funding the operating expenses at our  
16 community colleges. Compared to when Mayor Adams came  
17 into office... and the FY25 budget, could you layout  
18 the anticipated reduction that we are facing over  
19 these three years in reduction, in cuts to funding  
20 for community colleges from the city of New York?

21 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Sure, and thank,  
22 of course, for the question, Council Member, and for  
23 compliment, of course.

24 I think just in... generally speaking, I think  
25 it's really, uh, what really illustrates the change

1  
2 has been the baseline PEGs of \$94 million of what it  
3 adds up to FY24 - \$45 million of which was imposed on  
4 the past two rounds in Fiscal Year 2024 and

5 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And \$94 million out of a  
6 total of?

7 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Out of a total of  
8 about \$550 (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

9 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: (INAUDIBLE)

10 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: So, we are  
11 talking about roughly... (CROSS-TALK)

12 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: 18 percent?

13 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: 15 percent...  
14 well, yes, if you count some other, uh, some other  
15 support ,you know, from the City. It's about 15  
16 percent, and that is what COO Batista said in his  
17 testimony.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: So, to confirm, a 15  
19 percent cut in funding for the operating expenses for  
20 our community colleges...

21 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Yes...

22 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Since Mayor Adams came  
23 into office? A CUNY graduate who said he was going to  
24 be champion for CUNY, has been decimating the budget  
25 of our community colleges. We know how... Well, let

1  
2 me actually continue... And in your... In the FY25  
3 budget, we are looking at a 48 percent cut year over  
4 year to the OTPS at our community colleges, is that  
5 right?

6 (PAUSE)

7 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Could you breakdown, 48  
8 percent cut in everything but staff, that's... What  
9 are we losing? Could you... I mean, have you  
10 anticipated... If Mayor's cuts were to be fully  
11 implemented, these devastating draconian cuts that  
12 would decimate our community colleges, could you give  
13 a high level breakdown of what we would be losing at  
14 our community colleges next year if he were  
15 successful?

16 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Yes, so, I think  
17 you heard a lot about the... Well, first, CUNY's  
18 budget is 85 percent personal services. We are an  
19 organization of people, and we cannot exist without  
20 the talented and dedicated faculty and staff to be  
21 able to run. So... (CROSS-TALK)

22 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Absolutely, but it is  
23 worth noting, since our pre pandemic high, we are 11  
24 percent down in headcounts at CUNY as well. So, we  
25 can't run without people, it is mostly a people

1 driven operation, but we are losing people of the  
2 Mayor's painful and draconian cuts. But, as you were  
3 saying?  
4

5 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Absolutely in  
6 terms of the impact on CUNY. And I think that when  
7 you really look at the impact, you heard it in the  
8 testimony, uh, and you heard ,you know, of a few  
9 college examples. I just want to round that out with  
10 a few additional... (CROSS-TALK)

11 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Please...

12 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: college examples.  
13 So, number one, you have LaGuardia Community College,  
14 there you have 54 positions that are vacant, impacted  
15 everything from instructional to student support  
16 services, career services, student financial aid  
17 officers, et cetera.

18 Moving to Queensborough, Queensborough has 53  
19 positions vacant. And that includes every position  
20 from faculty, from financial aid, from academic  
21 resource centers to help students access benefits,  
22 which is certainly a priority for CUNY, a priority  
23 for the Council.

24 Bronx Community College is down 137 positions.  
25 So, all of these areas begin to be impacted clearly



1  
2 by the PEGs. And ,you know, again, back to the fringe  
3 savings piece, right? The less heads, the leads  
4 support you need for fridge benefits, and that is  
5 where we are seeing sort of the claw back in some of  
6 these PEG rounds. But when you really peel back and  
7 look at what is happening at the campus level, a real  
8 significant impact.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And I am similarly  
10 concerned about the cuts to the Capital Plan. If I  
11 recall from my notes correctly, we are looking at a  
12 24 percent cut in (TIMER CHIMES) funding to the  
13 Capital Plan. We all know as the Chief Operating  
14 Officer testified, that our conditions on the CUNY  
15 campuses are deteriorating rapidly. I see it when I  
16 go visit City Tech in my district. Could you... Are  
17 you concerned about our ability to maximize use of  
18 all our classrooms, for professors to have save  
19 places to gather, for us to be able to continue to  
20 fully have a fully functional CUNY campus system with  
21 such extreme cuts to the Capital Plan?

22 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Thank you,  
23 Council Member. Yes, we are concerned. I mean, I  
24 think... I think as I stated in my testimony, as we  
25 begin to cut ,you know, the staff that actually

1 maintains the facilities and makes sure that the  
2 classrooms... We are already challenged by deferring  
3 maintenance and the state of some of our facilities.  
4 And we have been really focused... This  
5 administration has really been focused on really  
6 focusing in on bringing our facilities to a state of  
7 good repair. But these cuts are having a negative  
8 impact in trying to get our facilities there. So, it  
9 is extremely challenging to make sure that we  
10 continue to maintain them. I mean, the good news that  
11 we have from our perspective is we now have the  
12 ability to determine, campus by campus, the state of  
13 each of our facilities. You know, the boiler at  
14 LaGuardia, and building #4 and so forth. So, we could  
15 at least do more targeted effort to try to  
16 intervene in those... So, we just got a lifeline of  
17 five - six months, we are able to intervene a lot  
18 more quickly to be able to try to allocate the  
19 limited resources that we have. But as we continue to  
20 have our capital budget pushed back, and we are not  
21 able to really realize those resources, it creates  
22 more complications for the facilities. And it is  
23 extremely challenging to your... (CROSS-TALK)

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Mr. Chair, could I do one  
3 more? Thank you.

4 I think we have all seen clearly that the Mayor's  
5 cuts to the CUNY operating budget and the cuts to the  
6 capital plan are wildly unnecessary. And he has begun  
7 the process of restoring many of the draconian and  
8 painful cuts that he's implemented in just the past  
9 few months. I just have to say, from early childhood  
10 up through CUNY, the cuts to education are  
11 indefensible. And I am hopeful that this city council  
12 is going to do everything in its power to restore not  
13 just the cuts from November, but the cuts that we  
14 have seen over multiple years from Eric Adams.

15 What I just want to ask is, beyond fighting with  
16 you on these restorations to operating budget and the  
17 Capital Plan, what else can we do to better champion  
18 and support CUNY at this time?

19 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: Well certainly  
20 one of the answers... I just wanted to add to your  
21 early question, you talked about the state of the  
22 capital, the buildings. It is difficult to recruit if  
23 there is even peeling paint and things look like they  
24 are not being taken care of. So, the distinction  
25 between the world class institution and the feeling

1  
2 of the buildings that you enter, that has had a  
3 significant impact on our students' feeling of  
4 community. And it is a particularly challenging time  
5 after the pandemic, both in terms of getting people  
6 to come in, but also to revive that really vibrant  
7 campus life that we know is intimately tied to  
8 graduation rates and retention. So, that holistic  
9 perspective that... And just to add to the question  
10 of the OTPS, one of the things that is there is  
11 faculty development, and faculty conferences, and  
12 being able to train for AI as these new technologies  
13 come on board. So, understanding that, a cut to a  
14 program is single thing, but the totality of the cuts  
15 is terribly damaging in terms of our ability to  
16 maintain the energy and the vigor that the students  
17 deserve on the campuses.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I couldn't agree with you  
19 more. You know, six... I often come back to the  
20 recent College Net Report that found six of the 20  
21 colleges in the entire country who are most  
22 successful at achieving social mobility for their  
23 students are CUNY schools. CUNY is the place that  
24 helps transform New Yorkers who are living in poverty  
25 into people with good... to families that have life

1                                   COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION                                   45  
2   sustaining jobs. And ,you know, Chair Dinowitz and I  
3   have talked about quite a bit, when you look at what  
4   is happening in the economic recovery in New York  
5   City, it is disproportionately low wage jobs that are  
6   coming back, much more so than the country as a  
7   whole. We need to be investing in the middle skills  
8   jobs that CUNY helps our graduates realize to help  
9   bring the economy back. So, these cuts may be  
10   pennywise, but they are pound foolish, and they are  
11   devastating to the future of New York City. And we  
12   will do everything we can to help support you all.  
13   Thank you.

14                   EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: Thank you.

15                   CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you, Council Member  
16   Restler.

17                   Council Member Marte?

18                   COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Thank you, Council Member  
19   Restler for those questions. Those are all on the  
20   money.

21                   I sent a letter recently to the Chancellor in  
22   regards to BMCC to get more details on the budget  
23   cuts in regards to BMCC in my district. And it stated  
24   that even though the college has met new student  
25   target, it has fallen short on continuing student

1 retention about 4 percent down year over year.

2 However, many of the budget cuts that we do see in  
3 the PEGs are for the staffing that are student facing  
4 that we keep students in the school. And, so we know  
5 you've done a good job at recruiting, but what's the  
6 priority and the plan to rehire those to make sure  
7 that once you have a student in they can continue at  
8 these institutions?  
9

10 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: Yes, it is  
11 something that I think about every day. It is one  
12 thing to bring a student in, but it's our moral  
13 obligation to keep them there and reach them through  
14 to graduation. And, so we are doing a number of  
15 things as you might imagine. Uh, in terms of... I  
16 know some concerns are course offerings that I have  
17 heard. Course offerings have stayed robust,  
18 relatively robust, because we have lost more students  
19 than we have lost faculty at this point in time. And  
20 that is true of BMCC as well. And we are working hard  
21 on class sizes and core scheduling to ensure that  
22 students continue through to graduation with the  
23 courses that they need to do that by infusing some of  
24 the processes that were using with your technology,  
25

1  
2 artificial intelligence, et cetera to reach a higher  
3 a level with, frankly, lower, expenditures.

4 But, overall, we are... in fact at BMCC, we are  
5 partnering with the National Institute for Student  
6 Success, and they just completed a look at every  
7 aspect of BMCC's operation as a relates to students  
8 to identify what barriers are in place from the  
9 moment of matriculation to the time they leave our  
10 doors with employment. So we are engaging in the  
11 conversation now specifically as relates to BMCC of  
12 how to eradicate those barriers and move those  
13 students toward graduation.

14 But, candidly, as we said, you cannot make up for  
15 the loss of headcount in student facing services like  
16 advisement. It's impossible. Those are critically  
17 important to student success, and we will continue to  
18 do our best, but it is a challenge.

19 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you, Council Member  
20 Marte.

21 Council Member Bottcher?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Good afternoon, Council  
23 Member Restler commended you for hiring Mr. Soliman,  
24 I want to commend you for hiring Jeff Rodus,

1  
2 (LAUGHTER) our friend and former colleague who is  
3 going to be such an asset to us and to CUNY.

4 I want to ask about capital funding. Many council  
5 members, including myself, over the years allocate  
6 discretionary money to CUNY including capital money,  
7 and it's been a point of frustration over the years  
8 to see a delay in those funds getting spent on CUNY  
9 campuses in our respective districts.

10 COO Batista, we've spoken about this, and you  
11 shared with me some of the systemic issues at OMB in  
12 getting this money approved, and you even shared with  
13 us some details about projects just getting pushed  
14 into the out years, fully funded Certificates of  
15 Proceed, getting pushed into the out years. And this  
16 is during a time of great needs with deferred  
17 maintenance on the campuses.

18 I'd love for you to share with my colleagues what  
19 these issues are and how we can help. Because there's  
20 no reason why fully funded projects shouldn't be  
21 happening right away, why they should be pushed out  
22 into the out years.

23 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Well, thank  
24 you, Council Member, it is good to see you again.



1  
2 Let me start out by saying this administration  
3 under our chancellor has really fully focused on  
4 really looking at our facilities and this whole  
5 notion of the state of good repair. And I will say  
6 that a lot, because I think the idea was that CUNY  
7 had a reputation of not completing projects on time.  
8 And part of it was challenged by the fact that we  
9 rely on (INAUDIBLE) and other entities. So, we have  
10 done a lot to really begin to control our own destiny  
11 and really bring in the kind of professional staff  
12 that we needed to be able to really tackle completing  
13 projects on time. Now that we have... And by the way,  
14 that has really shown results. We have improved our  
15 completion rate from when we came into office of 20-  
16 something percent into 50 percent in terms of  
17 completion rate. But, that's not enough. And the  
18 challenge that we are having right now is that, like  
19 last year, you allocated resources to the University,  
20 and those resources were pushed. Those capital  
21 dollars were pushed to 2033. So, it's hard to plan to  
22 do a project if those projects down the years. It  
23 gets worse than that. We have projects that are ready  
24 to be certified and the Comptroller's Office - ready  
25 to complete, ready to be satisfied, and then we get

1 those projects that are being delayed and pushed to  
2 outer years. So, it's this battle where we get these  
3 great resources from the Council and then we are  
4 battling to try to get those projects over the finish  
5 line. And we have done our part ,you know, to really  
6 bring the professional staff that we need to be able  
7 to move those projects forward. And frankly, we are  
8 about to have, and have had conversations at the  
9 highest level with the Office Of Management And  
10 Budget. I am attending a meeting to try to figure out  
11 how we can do better there. Because, frankly, it is  
12 extremely challenging to get these very hard  
13 resources that we get from the Council and our  
14 elected officials and not be able to use those  
15 resources in a timely manner.  
16

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: I think it's a scandal  
18 to have capital money allocated in FY24, and have  
19 that pushed that out to FY33 at a time when students  
20 are going to schools with all of the capital needs  
21 that we have been hearing - wires dangling from the  
22 ceiling, it is just not acceptable.

23 I would like to be helpful, and I know my  
24 colleagues would like to be helpful in figuring this  
25 out, so perhaps as a followup to this hearing, we

1  
2 could meet about this and discuss what we can do, how  
3 we can help you advocate with the Administration to  
4 get these projects, these shovels in the ground.

5 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: We welcome  
6 that help, thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I think last month I was at  
8 a very exciting ribbon cutting for the nursing  
9 school... for the nursing building that you  
10 mentioned in your testimony. And I think it really  
11 spoke to, Wendy, when you were speaking about the  
12 excitement and the draw. And it was state of the art  
13 equipment there, and it was... And that's what our  
14 students deserve. They deserve state of the art  
15 equipment. I know for my former students, having a  
16 place ,you know, something to shoot for in our local  
17 colleges, where they don't have to leave it they want  
18 to come (INAUDIBLE) they stay in the Bronx to go to  
19 school, and ideally stay in the Bronx to work.

20 So, some of those projects are these great grand  
21 openings of nursing buildings. Other projects are as  
22 was mentioned dangling wires from the ceiling. In the  
23 CUNY's preliminary FY24-28 Capital Commitment Plan  
24 includes \$738.6 million for various capital projects.  
25 So, if you could separate out for us, how much of the

1  
2 Capital Commitment Plan is for improving structural  
3 deficiencies, and how much for actual investment in  
4 buildings like a nursing building that does exactly  
5 what you want to do Wendy?

6 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: So is your  
7 question how much of those resources are going to a  
8 new building or how... (CROSS-TALK)

9 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: New investments versus  
10 fixing up the things that already exist.

11 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Okay, let me  
12 first take on the buildings first. The way it really  
13 works for us is that we get funding from the City  
14 first, and then we have to wait nine months until the  
15 next fiscal year to get funding from the state. And  
16 we cannot put a project forward until we have funding  
17 that matches the total project cost. So, in a lot of  
18 cases the nursing program, uh, the nursing school  
19 that you mentioned was one of those examples where a  
20 project that we had to seek funding multiple years in  
21 order to get it done, and that creates all sorts of  
22 delays - you have pricing, you have all kinds of  
23 challenges. Of the number you mentioned, I say that  
24 about half of that, half of those recourses of that  
25 funding is going towards new buildings, potential new

1  
2 buildings ,you know, so then we could go to the state  
3 to get matching... And the other, I would say  
4 probably a little bit more than half is going towards  
5 the state of good repair - fixing boilers, bathrooms,  
6 and windows, and dealing with those kind of  
7 facilities. Because, frankly, uh, it is... It is  
8 something that we need and the challenges that we  
9 have with our antient infrastructure, we are... As  
10 you remember, last year we had a lengthy conversation  
11 about one school in particular, right? And the  
12 challenge connected to that boiler. So, now we are  
13 really targeting and trying to be more focused. We  
14 know a lot more about the system, so we are trying to  
15 be a little bit more targeted with that funding.

16 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: What do you mean? So, what  
17 do you mean about more targeted? What does that look  
18 like?

19 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: So, we have a  
20 sense of building by building, uh, the state of our  
21 facilities. Either we have an ability to know if we  
22 need to replace it or repair. We have an ability to  
23 know what actions we have to take when before we  
24 didn't know. We also know the lifeline of a  
25 particular system ,you know, the boiler at Bronx

1  
2 community college, we will know that lifeline is  
3 about six months or whatever, so we are able to  
4 allocate resources or advocate for resources to be  
5 able to do an intervention before we have the  
6 problems that we had -that we have no heat and  
7 students are now with a system that is not really  
8 working.

9 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And you have private  
10 foundation money, for instance the \$75 million from  
11 the Simon's foundation was mentioned. I think some of  
12 that was capital improvements in terms of hardware?

13 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: \$25 million is  
14 part of the Empire AI project that Governor Hochul  
15 has been discussing. The specific parameters of the  
16 rest of the money have not been clearly laid out at  
17 this point, but, of course, the hope is to... I don't  
18 know if you have better information...

19 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Yes, on the  
20 Simon Fund there are capital dollars allocated for  
21 technology that is needed for this project, an  
22 investment in technology that is needed for this  
23 project to move forward. So there is... Then we have  
24 to do, in the facilities where we are going to house  
25 this particular project, we are going to have to do

1  
2 some renovation to the air conditioning system to be  
3 able to take this very sophisticated technology  
4 system that we are bringing on board. So we have to  
5 put new air conditioning system in and so forth. I  
6 think this facility is located at City College.

7 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I think scandal, Council  
8 Member Bottcher, was the appropriate word for the way  
9 you described capital.

10 I want to pause in these questions, we have  
11 Council Member Feliz joining us via Zoom, and I would  
12 like to recognize him for his questions.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Thank you so much. For  
14 some reason I cannot turn my video on. Maybe we can  
15 check in with the IT team. Actually that's fine, I  
16 will do it without video.

17 But, hello, everybody, Council Member Oswald  
18 Feliz, I want to thank you, Chair Dinowitz, for this  
19 hearing. I also want to thank... Actually it is  
20 allowing me to start the video now, there we go...

21 Hello, everybody. Thank you everyone at CUNY for  
22 all the work that you do. CUNY obviously has a well-  
23 documented track record of helping students and  
24 families of all backgrounds move up the economic  
25 ladder helping them achieve opportunities. I just

1  
2 want to thank all of you. I know everyone at CUNY  
3 works very hard to make that a reality.

4 A few questions, we need to need to make sure  
5 that CUNY has the teachers needed, we also need to  
6 make sure that our students have access to the  
7 educational spaces that are modern, modern classrooms  
8 that they deserve. I am a graduate proudly a graduate  
9 of many CUNY institutions, including Bronx Community  
10 College, and Colston Hall at BCC, Bronx Community  
11 College. A good example of a building that it hasn't  
12 received a capital renovation in who knows how many  
13 decades.

14 So a few questions, sorry if some colleagues  
15 already asked some of them. But, a few questions, how  
16 many pending capital projects do you currently have?  
17 Pending capital projects related to either  
18 construction new buildings or major renovations of  
19 new buildings... of current buildings.

20 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: We have about  
21 800.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: About 800? Approximately  
23 how many of those relate to renovation of current  
24 buildings? I guess overwhelmed, right?



1 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: I'm sorry, I  
2 didn't hear your question. Say that again?

3 COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: About how many of those 800  
4 relate to a renovation of current buildings.

5 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: I would say  
6 more than half of those are renovations- the  
7 facilities... (CROSS-TALK)

8 COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Okay. And approximately how  
9 many of those 800 are fully funded?

10 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: I would have  
11 to get back to you on that. I believe that most of  
12 them are fully funded, but I would have to get back  
13 to you on that.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Okay, are there any  
15 projects in the Bronx that stand out, in Bronx  
16 Community College, Lehman, Hostos Community College?

17 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: I am sure  
18 there are, but I can get you the list of those.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Okay. And would you say the  
20 PEGs have affected the timeline for completion for  
21 these projects?

22 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: I think that  
23 what we are alluding to is the pushing back of the  
24 capital dollars to outer years, when we have projects  
25

1  
2 that are ready to be certified by the Comptroller is  
3 what is causing some of those delays.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Alight. How drastic have  
5 these projects been affected, the timelines to  
6 completion? Are we talking about a year, 24 months,  
7 36 months? More...

8 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: I think it  
9 varies, it varies by project. But, I could get you  
10 sort of a detailed list of that.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Yes, if you could forward  
12 that information after the hearing that would be  
13 great. Thank you so much, I don't have any more  
14 questions.

15 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you, Council Member  
16 Feliz.

17 I want to ask about one specific capital project.  
18 In the Preliminary Plan the CUNY's Capital Plan is  
19 \$227.8 million, it is nearly 24 percent less than the  
20 adopted plan issued last September. The single  
21 largest project pushed out of the five-year plan is  
22 the \$475.9 million CUNY Science Park and Research  
23 Center in Kips Bay. Can you explain why the project  
24 was delayed, and was the decision made by CUNY or  
25 OMB?

1 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: As far as we  
2 know, Council Member, that project is not delayed. I  
3 mean, I think, as you know... Well, let me... The  
4 project is half funded by the State and half funded  
5 by the City. The \$475 million is from the State. We  
6 already are sort of moving forward with that. I think  
7 where we are right now is we are in the process of  
8 negotiating an MOU with the City, the Economic  
9 Development Corporation, as we negotiate that MOU, it  
10 will allow us to begin to spend some of those  
11 resources. As far as the City budget, I leave that to  
12 the Economic Development Corporation, but we have not  
13 heard anything that this project is being delayed. As  
14 a matter of fact, we are constantly having meetings  
15 connected to this project. So, I have not heard  
16 anything there. We are still on target to decamp this  
17 space, to move out of the space in 2025, and  
18 construction to begin close to that. They are in the  
19 process of hiring an architect right now. We have  
20 just competed the master plan, so, as far as I know  
21 the project is on target. Actually we are pushing it  
22 to get it done more quickly.  
23  
24  
25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: That's good to hear. So  
3 (INAUDIBLE) phase in the capital plan - five year  
4 capital plan?

5 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: I don't know  
6 about the City's... I would have to go back and look  
7 it. I think I'm answering.. As far as I know, I think  
8 the project is on time. The State allocation is in  
9 our budget. We have resources that were allocated. I  
10 think the way we have sort of talked about this  
11 project is beginning to use some of the State funding  
12 first and then City funding will come in later. But,  
13 as far as I know, we have hired architects, the  
14 designs are going to begin on this project, and  
15 everything is moving along fine as far as we know.

16 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you.

17 I want to go back to, uh, over the contracts,  
18 let's talk contracts for one second. CUNY's Fiscal  
19 2025 Contract Budget totals \$26 million for 77  
20 contracts. I just want to talk about... focus on two  
21 of them. One, is there any of these... Bronx  
22 Community College, it was reported that they don't  
23 have dining services. They have a nice cafeteria, no  
24 contract.

1  
2 So any of those in FY25 related to Bronx, I'm  
3 sorry Hostos, I believe, or Bronx Community College  
4 dining services. I think they are both having issues  
5 actually.

6 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Yes, uhm, let  
7 me sort of give you a two part answer to this  
8 question. Every campus at CUNY, we have some sort of  
9 food service to be able to address... I think the  
10 pandemic has created some challenges for the  
11 University. Because some of these companies don't  
12 have the volume to be able to really make the  
13 resources, the money that they need in order to  
14 really maintain the business. As far as the Bronx  
15 Community College and Hostos, and LaGuardia, there is  
16 a joint RFP that is going onto the market this month  
17 for food service for those three colleges. We are  
18 trying to really pull colleges together to be able to  
19 attract a company so that they can have the kind of  
20 volume that they need in order to make the returns on  
21 the investment. But we have tried through grab-and-  
22 go, through different mechanisms to be able have some  
23 sort of food services... (CROSS-TALK)

24 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Vending machines?  
25

1 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: at the  
2 colleges. But it is not really ideal, but we are  
3 obviously trying to make sure that each of the  
4 colleges have something in the meantime. In those  
5 particular colleges where they don't have a food  
6 service, we are pulling resources to be able to do  
7 one RFP.

8 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And is that... Have you  
9 budgeted for that? Is that one of the contracts for  
10 FY25? Are you... (CROSS-TALK)

11 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: No, it's not a  
12 budget kind of a situation. It is more of a revenue  
13 generating... Because it is going out to the  
14 marketplace and we are going to be recruiting a  
15 vendor to come in and provide those services.

16 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And when you do the  
17 contracts for Cafeteria, are there certain hours the  
18 cafeteria is slated to be open?

19 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Well, the  
20 ideal situation is that the cafeteria is open when  
21 the students are there so we can provide the kind of  
22 services that they need.

23 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Let me... Students are  
24 there late into the evening. And I will speak  
25

1 specifically, this month, some of the concerns that I  
2 have gotten, it's Ramadan, and many students, Muslim  
3 students, are fasting throughout the day. And the one  
4 thing we want to make sure that they have access as  
5 the sun sets, is food. And when I'm talking about the  
6 hours, in part, specifically, during those hours,  
7 during the evening hours, these students have access  
8 to food or will in the next contract... (CROSS-TALK)

9 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: No, I hear  
10 you. Each contract works with the local college to  
11 accommodate whatever they need. So, whatever the  
12 hours that they need in order to cooperate, that is  
13 really sort of the way the contract works. So...

14 (CROSS-TALK)

15 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Although I would expect as  
16 CUNY Central, you would provide guidance to the local  
17 colleges, right, to work with the local community?

18 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Yes, the  
19 contracts are not centrally let contracts. They are  
20 individual college contracts. What we do at Central  
21 is try to provide the way to procure those contracts  
22 (INAUDIBLE) to allow them to be able to go out and  
23 receive more bids centrally across the city. But most  
24

1  
2 of those contracts individually run by the individual  
3 college.

4 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: No, I understand... Well,  
5 in this case, the three colleges. And I understand  
6 they are individually run, what I'm asking is to  
7 improve campus life, to help recruit, to support the  
8 energy and vigor students deserve, are you... I'm  
9 just quoting... Are you providing guidance and  
10 support to the individual colleges, or are you hoping  
11 that they make the right choices and provide the  
12 right guidance... (CROSS-TALK)

13 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: No, no, no  
14 we... Sorry, we are providing support to those  
15 individual colleges. About three years ago, the  
16 University tried to get a systemwide food service  
17 contract. Because of the pandemic... We procured a  
18 contract with a company called CulinArt, and the  
19 contract, because of the pandemic, had failed. So,  
20 now we are trying a different approach and trying to  
21 do much smaller contracts and provide guidance to  
22 those colleges to help them make sure that they get  
23 the right kind of food vendor contract that allows  
24 for... To be able to provide food service to the  
25 different population of students that we are



1  
2 servicing within that college ,you know, to make sure  
3 that we are accommodating the different kind of food  
4 needs there. So, we are providing as much guidance as  
5 we can.

6 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: The RFP is released, you  
7 said, this month or next month?

8 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: This month.

9 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And what's the timeline on  
10 that?

11 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Probably about  
12 90 days to get ,you know, bids back, and then they  
13 review those. So, hopefully by next count, by the  
14 next school year we will be able to have full running  
15 food vendor contract at those three schools.

16 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Well, I hope when it comes  
17 to food, just like everything else, we recognize  
18 different students, different ages, different  
19 backgrounds have different hours. And it's not like  
20 when I was at school and the cafeteria was only open  
21 during certain hours. I hope that it is reflective  
22 of, as you recognized, the diverse student body that  
23 we have here in New York City.

24 The current FY24 spending on daycare for children  
25 is not \$926,975 and it's \$710,000 in FY25. So how

1  
2 many slots in daycare do you have allocated in this  
3 current budget? And do you have a waiting list?

4 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: So, in FY24 we  
5 had a budget of \$4.7 million, \$3.3 million came from  
6 the state and \$1.5 million, thank you, from the city.  
7 And we hope that that budget will remain level. We  
8 have 700 seats, about somewhere between 650 and 700  
9 seats at any given time. And there are 17 childcare  
10 centers across, and there are always waiting lists,  
11 but they primarily serving our students as opposed to  
12 community members and faculty members.

13 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: How long is the wait list?

14 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: That I do not  
15 know, but I can find that out for you.

16 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And do you predict with the  
17 current budget that you will have to cut seats?

18 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: No, we not  
19 projecting any changes to childcare based on the  
20 budget. And one thing that we have implemented is  
21 that to significant assistance with students to go to  
22 different childcare centers on different campuses  
23 that have availability - sometimes somebody's house  
24 is closer to one versus the other. So, it's really...

1  
2 We look at the seats across what's available in the  
3 different boroughs.

4 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I love the colleges. I love  
5 the faculty, I love students, but I think my favorite  
6 to do is to visit your child care centers and read  
7 with the kids. That's one of my favorite activities.

8 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: Except you will  
9 go home with a virus. (LAUGHTER) with little  
10 children.

11 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Council  
12 Member, can I come back to the SPARC project (Science  
13 Park and Research Campus), and I want to give you an  
14 update, because I just information.

15 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So did we!

16 (LAUGHTER)

17 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: It's in ULURP  
18 right now, the project is in ULURP. And the design  
19 development agreement has been entered into ULURP and  
20 it's a public scope, and it happened today. And EDC  
21 is working on a CP right now.

22 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I have here that a \$150  
23 million from 2024-2028 has been pushed out to FY29 -  
24 \$150 million of those dollars. So, how does that  
25 align with what you are sharing right now?

1 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Well, it is  
2 part of a larger project. So, I don't know, which -  
3 if they are pushing back the CUNY funds or if they  
4 are pushing back... Is it City funds?

5 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: City funds.

6 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Again, we just  
7 entered into a ULURP, and I have not heard anything  
8 connected to the capital budget.

9 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: I'm just going to  
10 say that it's our information at the SPARC Project  
11 will be exempt from any additional pushes for the  
12 executive capital. And when you look September to  
13 January there were actually parts of the project that  
14 were accelerated. So, clearly I think we need to  
15 compare notes and figure out exactly what is  
16 happening. But, we have been told that it will be  
17 exempt from any additional push exercises.

18 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay, we will compare  
19 notes, but until then I want to turn it over to  
20 Council Member Brewer.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. I always ask  
22 this question as part of that project, there's still  
23 a hole in the ground near MSK (Memorial Sloan  
24 Kettering Cancer Center) what happened to that hole in  
25

1  
2 the ground? Who... do you own it? Does OMB own it?  
3 Does EDC own it? What are they doing with it?

4 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: As you know  
5 Council Member, that project was tied in to our  
6 overall MOU (memorandum of understanding) that was  
7 signed with the City many, many years ago. So, we are  
8 unbundling that MOU, and ultimately that MOU, which  
9 we recently took to our board, that has to go to the  
10 EDC board, the city of New York, the site of the so-  
11 called hole in the ground, and CUNY will give up its  
12 right on that, and what we will get is we will get  
13 the SPARC project.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But, don't you lose a lot  
15 of money in that? Because that hole in the ground is  
16 going to be worth quite a bit.

17 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: I think that  
18 ultimately we believe that this project will better  
19 serve CUNY, we will get almost a billion dollars'  
20 worth of investment both from the City and the State  
21 to allow us to build a state of the art nursing  
22 facility for our Hunter Campus, be able to move the  
23 School of Public Health there, and a couple of other  
24 CUNY medical related uses. And an additional 100,000  
25 square feet of lab space for Hunter for the Hunter

1 campus. So, we think that it is a win-win for CUNY.

2 And as part of that deal, a project that has been

3 sort of... has not moved for almost a decade, because

4 of lack of funding, we believe that we actually get a

5 lot of more... (CROSS-TALK)

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It's a controversial topic

7 as you know. So, I am not sure that I agree with

8 that, but, okay.

9 Guttman, what's happening with the north building

10 and Guttman. I know that right now the north building

11 is well-used for legal services for asylum seekers.

12 But, what is going to happen with Guttman in that

13 building? Is there any progress on that?

14 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Yes, Council

15 Member, we had an RFP out in the community to try to

16 see what the sort of best use for that project, sort

17 of a P3 (public private partnerships) kind of

18 initiative. We are still evaluating those proposals

19 to determine what is in the best interests of CUNY.

20 With regard to Guttman, we are trying to determine

21 sort of where... does it make sense for Guttman to be

22 there, or does it make sense for Guttman to be in

23 another location? Because, ultimately, what we want

24 to make sure is that college has the ability to

1  
2 continue to grow in terms of its students. So, we  
3 want to make sure that we are not... we are making a  
4 decision that allows that college to continue to  
5 grow. But, I think that very soon we are going to  
6 have a good sense of what is going happen (INAUDIBLE)

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, but that's a state  
8 site, right? That's owned by the State?

9 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: It is.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, so then it could be  
11 affordable housing? If I have any say over it, I want  
12 to make sure it has affordable housing either above a  
13 university purpose or not. But, I know in the past  
14 ,you know, everybody wants to make money, so they end  
15 up with high income, but the Governor has a lot money  
16 now to pay for "affordable housing on State sites"  
17 quote-unquote. So, there's a state site. The best  
18 schools. Why not make it affordable housing? Are you  
19 thinking about that?

20 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Council  
21 Member, we are not in the housing business, so we...  
22 (CROSS-TALK)

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know, but... (CROSS-  
24 TALK)

1 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: We are going  
2 to continue to... (CROSS-TALK)

3 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I mean, your students...  
4 (CROSS-TALK)

5 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: to look for  
6 sites... (CROSS-TALK)

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Your students and your  
8 faculty need housing. It's not just you... (CROSS-  
9 TALK)

10 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: I understand,  
11 and I hear you, and I think what we are going to do  
12 is continue to look for opportunities to better serve  
13 the University where we could continue to do our  
14 mission. If one of our projects has a housing  
15 component to it, so be it, but right now our main  
16 focus is to try to see how we could continue to  
17 monetize or look at our facilities to be able to  
18 really use it for our mission. And really that is  
19 really the focus.  
20

21 With regard to the housing piece, we will leave  
22 it to those developers, whoever it is who is going to  
23 bid on this project going forward, and I am sure, as  
24 I have known you for many years, that you will be a  
25



1  
2 voice that will be heard when it comes to this, but I  
3 will leave that up to you.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: The hole in the ground,  
6 Council Member Brewer's favorite subject.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It is. Somethings wrong  
8 with (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

9 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: or least favorite, I don't  
10 know how to describe it.

11 I am going to go to Council Member Bottcher in a  
12 second.

13 I do want to touch on one issue that you raised  
14 in your testimony about confronting hate. As you  
15 know, two years ago, we held hearing in this  
16 committee related to antisemitism. Since that point,  
17 you've made some investments in Bridge Building,  
18 you've made investments in a centralized portal, and  
19 you've created, as per your testimony, Diversity,  
20 Equity and Inclusion HUB on the website. A number of  
21 steps have been taken, and at the same time, there is  
22 still a problem with bigotry. And we have seen,  
23 especially since October 7, a rise in antisemitism  
24 and Islamophobia. There have been a number of events  
25

1  
2 on CUNY campuses, which I would say at best are  
3 troubling.

4 Two, I guess two main questions, one is in the  
5 testimony two years ago it was said, the answer to  
6 speech you don't like is more speech. Fine. Has CUNY  
7 Central made any efforts... or what efforts have  
8 been made, rather, to promote more speech or more  
9 balanced speech to counteract some of the, again, at  
10 best, troubling increase in speech we are seeing from  
11 both students and faculty on various CUNY campuses?

12 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: Of course, we  
13 are one of the most diverse institutions in one of  
14 the most diverse cities in the country. So, we are  
15 not strangers to the problems that are national at  
16 this point. But, we have worked incredibly hard to  
17 try and both allow speech of our faculty, students,  
18 and staff, while also protecting against harassment  
19 and bigotry and hate. As you know, we received a \$1.3  
20 million last year from both the State and you to  
21 address this issues, and it fostered an incredible  
22 amount of projects across the campuses where they had  
23 the option to identify specifically what they felt  
24 was responsive in their communities.

1  
2       So, to give a few examples, City Tech had an *I am*  
3 *a Jew*, an information campaign and art exhibit,  
4 focused on bringing attention to the diversity and  
5 presence of Jews in the college community. Queens  
6 College had a Dismantling And Combating Hate  
7 Conference in April 2023, addressing all forms of  
8 discrimination. BMCC used that money to Do Social  
9 Justice Week, which ran from April 24-28, featuring  
10 panels, workshops, and other events that explored the  
11 theme *Belonging Together, Learning Together and*  
12 *Growing Together*. And we also then had an additional  
13 20,000 this fall to the campuses to continue this  
14 work, so that it's not... the challenge is not to  
15 have a one-off, but have a continuing dialogue that  
16 continues to grow and engage in difficult spaces. We  
17 had many conversations across the campuses that had  
18 both an Imam and a Jewish rabbi with students to sit  
19 and really delve into some of these conversations to  
20 try and understand the challenges from the other  
21 perspective. We also had Jewish cross-cultural art  
22 exhibits, fellowships, bystander intervention  
23 training, which I think is particularly helpful, a  
24 student leadership certificate series, to help folks  
25 know how to address these issues when they arise in

1 the moment that they arise. And just recently, in  
2 2024 in January, the College of Staten Island hosted  
3 an all day symposium on combating antisemitism. So,  
4 coming up very shortly that the Graduate Center will  
5 host a colloquium entitled *Critical Theory, Jewish*  
6 *and Antisemitism*. So, I don't want to... (CROSS-TALK)

8 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I'm surprised you didn't  
9 mention Hostos' Photography exhibit. It's on your  
10 list (LAUGHTER) that's fine...

11 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: There are so  
12 many examples, and obviously I am just identifying...  
13 (CROSS-TALK)

14 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah.

15 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: a few. But, it  
16 is robust in terms of the conversation. And the  
17 Central Office is looking to find faculty experts in  
18 these spaces to have ongoing intellectual academic  
19 conversations that set context for folks outside of  
20 the political, heated conversations that are taking  
21 place right now.

22 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So, I would like to talk,  
23 not at this hearing, because I don't think it's the  
24 right forum, but to talk further about what the  
25 balanced approach to speech really is. I am not

1  
2 advocating for stopping any of the faculty events,  
3 but again, some of them are... feel very one-sided.  
4 And, again, the CUNY's answer to this issue was more  
5 speech. Which is totally understandable and fine,  
6 but, again, since two years, when it comes to that  
7 faculty aspect, the sort of educational aspect, I do  
8 want to delve further into what that balanced  
9 approach looks like and what CUNY Central is doing to  
10 ensure that those speakers are being recruited to  
11 provide, I guess a broader and more diverse  
12 perspective what is going on, and how it's impacting  
13 islamophobia and antisemitism here in New York City.  
14 Uh...

15 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: Absolutely, I  
16 would be happy to sit down with you and have that  
17 conversation.

18 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And, lastly, Title VI,  
19 what.. do you have a Title VI coordinator at CUNY, is  
20 that per campus, is it CUNY Central?

21 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: We do not have a coordinator  
22 at CUNY Central, I don't believe... I believe that  
23 there are Diversity... Chief Diversity Officers at  
24 each campus that coordinate responses.

25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Are the... so, every single  
3 campus has someone who is in charge of Title VI  
4 complaints?

5 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: I believe  
6 that's the case. I could be getting that wrong, but  
7 based on the response, I believe so, yes it. It is  
8 not at Central. It is done on the campus level.

9 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay, I mean, there are a  
10 number of things that have happened since last fiscal  
11 year, again October 7th, was a huge point at which we  
12 saw a flareup in hatred in antisemitism and  
13 Islamophobia. And we also saw increased reporting of  
14 Title IV complaints, in part because of actual  
15 increases, and in a part because the Biden  
16 Administration didn't make updates, and changes, and  
17 clarifications to Title IV. So, I would also like  
18 clarification on what... how CUNY has responded to  
19 the Biden Administration's updates the Title IV... I  
20 think we are getting an answer...

21 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: So, the way it  
22 works now, when the reports come in, to the best of  
23 my knowledge, they are given to the Chief Diversity  
24 Officer who has access to that, as well the president  
25 on every campus. So, the Chief Diversity Officer is

1 responsible for investigating those complaints and  
2 taking appropriate action. But it is within the  
3 context of each campus. We do collect information  
4 centrally, but there is no central designated person  
5 who is responsible. Because, the facts are on the  
6 campuses; therefore, the Chief Diversity Officer is  
7 closer to the ability to investigate the  
8 circumstances.  
9

10 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay, as you are  
11 considering budget, I think it is worth considering  
12 that colleges are seeing increased complaints. One of  
13 the issues was that it takes many months for students  
14 to even get a response. And students from all walks  
15 of life are really struggling with increased hate  
16 across the board. And that needs to seriously be  
17 addressed.

18 I am now going to turn it over to Council Member  
19 Bottcher.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: One of the amazing CUNY  
21 schools in Council District 3 is The School of  
22 Professional Studies school. It's a school that's  
23 been doing very innovative work on remote learning,  
24 in particular, for working professionals and others.  
25 That school is one of the nine colleges of concern

1  
2 that have been identified, and cuts have been  
3 proposed.

4 Can you be a little specific about letting us  
5 know why the School of Professional Studies was  
6 identified as a college of concern, and what are the  
7 cuts that are on the table for the School of  
8 Professional Studies?

9 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Sure, thank you  
10 for the question, Council Member.

11 School of Professional Studies is on the list,  
12 which, again, I want to emphasize is not a static  
13 list, it is a dynamic list, and they've been showing  
14 real signs of progress. And they were on the list  
15 initially, because they met two of the three criteria  
16 that I mentioned. Notably the two are their  
17 structural deficit was 5 percent or more of their  
18 available resources, and the enrollment trend that we  
19 saw was not commensurate with what was needed to  
20 basically climb out of this designation. But they are  
21 showing signs of strength in the review of their  
22 latest financial plans - and by the way, you know, at  
23 CUNY Central what we do is, for those colleges we  
24 meet monthly and it's constant communication to go  
25 back-and-forth to see progress on their financial



1  
2 plans. So they are one of the nine that have  
3 performed well with the actions that they have taken,  
4 so we anticipate that the future looks brighter for  
5 the School of Professional Studies.

6 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: I would add to  
7 that, part of... CUNY Online is developing a  
8 nationwide marketing campaign. A lot of the programs,  
9 SPS, in the past has had to market their own  
10 programs. This new campaign allows all of their  
11 online programs to be elevated and marketed to a  
12 wider audience. And they are seeing an uptick in  
13 their enrollment. So, I really believe there are  
14 better days ahead.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: The enrollment trends  
16 have been positive. From what I understand, SBS, they  
17 have seen an increase in enrollment, but you are  
18 saying that it hasn't been enough of an increase to  
19 meet the criteria?

20 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: Correct, right,  
21 exactly.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: But, in the latest  
23 filing, the numbers are going in the right direction,  
24 at least with respect to finances. Do you think that

1  
2 this might be... this school might be taken off the  
3 list of colleges of concern perhaps?

4 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: I am saying that,  
5 yes, we have seen significant improvement, and we  
6 have seen sort of the actions that they are taking,  
7 you know, again, with CUNY Online as a component, so  
8 we are seeing ways that they can not only increase  
9 the revenue side of the equation, but also the kinds  
10 of actions that they are taking with the hiring  
11 restrictions. We are beginning to see that slow, but  
12 without really much impact on the educational  
13 outcomes. So, we do anticipate that once they are  
14 reevaluated, we will be able to make some progress  
15 there. But, as with all of the schools, we are  
16 meeting on a monthly basis with them, and once we see  
17 improvement, again, it is not a static list, dynamic  
18 list, if you no longer meet one of the criteria that  
19 was established, then certainly you will no longer be  
20 on the list.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHE: When will those  
22 decisions be made?

23 SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR SOLIMAN: I think that we  
24 are monitoring, certainly we want to make sure what  
25 we see out of this budget cycle, right? I think it is

1  
2 important to see not only from the State side, but  
3 also from the City side, so I think not only have the  
4 targets been established, without the beginning of  
5 the spring semester, so we are seeing what enrollment  
6 looks like. We do quarterly financial reports, so we  
7 are seeing what that means for revenue. We are going  
8 to see what kind of, again, aid comes from Albany, we  
9 will see what happens here in terms of funding for  
10 the community colleges, and then I think it's an  
11 opportunity to reassess.

12 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you, Council Member  
13 Bottcher.

14 As you were finishing your remarks, I just  
15 realized between you and Council Member Brewer, and  
16 Council Member Restler, I think I have known all of  
17 you the least amount of time, and they have all known  
18 for about... many years. But, I want to thank you all  
19 for coming today, and of course, Jeff Rodus, sitting  
20 in the back over there. Thank you for coming today.  
21 It is very clear that with CUNY, the City has a lot  
22 to do in terms of ensuring that CUNY gets the funding  
23 it needs so that our students, and faculty, and the  
24 facilities have the support they need. There are a  
25 number of items to follow up with, which I look

1 forward to doing in the coming weeks. Thank you very  
2 much, I will soon call the next panel.

3 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR HENSEL: Thank you

4 EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR BATISTA: Thank you

5 (PAUSE)

6 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Ladies and gentlemen, we  
7 will be calling the next panel momentarily.

8 (PAUSE)

9 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: For our first panel, I  
10 would like to call James Davis, Dorian Block, and  
11 Megan Ahearn.

12 (PAUSE)

13 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Is Megan here?

14 (PAUSE)

15 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Before you begin your  
16 testimony, please state your name for the record. We  
17 will begin with President Davis.

18 PRESIDENT DAVIS: Good afternoon, Chair Dinowitz  
19 and Committee members, my name is James Davis, and I  
20 have the privilege of serving as the President of the  
21 Professional Staff Congress, which represents 30,000  
22 faculty and staff at CUNY. I want thank you for your  
23 continued advocacy on behalf the students, faculty,  
24 and the staff at CUNY. I will just say that without  
25

1  
2 your intervention last year, the fiscal strain on the  
3 University that we have been discussing already  
4 today, would have been much more severe.

5       There's a number of really positive indicators at  
6 the University right now, and the previous panel  
7 spoke to some of them, and I want to begin there.

8       Enrollment is rebounding, we have seen that this  
9 spring enrollment is up over last spring - that  
10 continues a trend where last fall enrollment was up  
11 over the previous fall. So, the pattern in the trend  
12 seems clear. The applications for fall 2024 are  
13 tremendous, hundreds of percentage points larger in  
14 October of 2023 than they were the previous year. So,  
15 that's really encouraging, and there are a number of  
16 legislative initiatives, including, most  
17 spectacularly, The CUNY Reconnect Initiative, that  
18 Speaker Adams and this council supported, that have  
19 brought thousands of students that have some CUNY  
20 credit, but they haven't completed their degree, back  
21 to the University. This is tremendous, and the waiver  
22 of application fees, and a number of recruitment  
23 strategies have yielded additional applications. So,  
24 it's encouraging to see the direction that things are  
25 moving on enrollment.

1  
2 The road back from COVID, nevertheless, is long  
3 and it's been pretty bruising for the faculty and the  
4 staff. Many years of disinvestment have made the  
5 University vulnerable - as you heard from the  
6 previous panel - vulnerable to the vagaries of  
7 enrollment. So, high dependence on tuition and  
8 tuition offset means that University really struggles  
9 fiscally when there's a dip in enrollment - as there  
10 was during the pandemic. And you heard from the  
11 Administration about the measures that they have  
12 taken to try to close what they describe a structural  
13 deficits. And those have been extremely difficult for  
14 faculty and staff, especially at those nine colleges,  
15 so-called high financial concern. We believe that the  
16 Administration's response in trying to manage the  
17 financial challenges has been too overly panicked and  
18 preemptive, and it's put unnecessary strain and  
19 stress on my members, and have made things very  
20 chaotic for the students. (TIMER CHIMES) But,  
21 nonetheless, we join them... is my time up already?

22 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yes, why don't you...

23 DR. DAVIS: Can I just finish my sentence?

24 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yes, sure thing.  
25

1  
2 PRESIDENT DAVIS: I will go straight to my  
3 recommendations, thank you, Chairperson.

4 Our request would be to restore the \$94 million  
5 in PEGs that the previous panel spoke about; fund  
6 CUNY Reconnect and ASAP, those are proven programs,  
7 and that would cost... our estimate is that cost  
8 \$35.5 million; screen students for the Fair Fares  
9 Program. We know that other panelist and subsequent  
10 panels are going to speak about free MetroCards, and  
11 we certainly recognize the need for students to have  
12 wraparound services to complete their educational  
13 journey.

14 So, again, thank you for fighting for PSC  
15 members, for CUNY students, and for the opportunity  
16 to testify today. I look forward to responding to  
17 your questions.

18 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you.

19 Dorian?

20 DORIAN BLOCK: Good morning. I'm Dorian Block. I  
21 am Senior Editor at the Center for an Urban Future,  
22 an independent think tank focused on creating a  
23 stronger and more inclusive economy in New York.

24

25

1  
2 I'm testifying today on behalf of CUF's Editorial  
3 and Policy Director, Eli Dvorkin. Thank you to  
4 members of the committee for this opportunity.

5 To help more New Yorkers get ahead in today's  
6 fast-changing economy, as we have heard from the  
7 previous panel, there are few investments more  
8 worthwhile than boosting college and career success  
9 initiatives at the City University of New York.

10 In recent years, the Center for an Urban Future  
11 has published several reports focused on what  
12 policymakers can do to strengthen CUNY's vital role  
13 as a springboard to economic mobility.

14 Investing in CUNY isn't just a win for students,  
15 it's vital for the economic security of New York City  
16 and State.

17 We strongly encourage the Council to fully fund  
18 CUNY in the FY 2025 budget. In addition, we recommend  
19 four key areas where these investments can have the  
20 greatest impact:

21 First, I align with my co-panelist, is Renewing  
22 the highly successful CUNY Reconnect Initiative.  
23 Nearly 700,000 working-age New Yorkers have obtained  
24 some college credits but no degree -700,000. In just  
25 two years, the CUNY Reconnect initiative, thanks to



1 the tremendous commitment of Speaker Adams and the  
2 City Council, has helped more than 26,000 students  
3 return to college and re-enroll. The majority of  
4 these students are Black and Hispanic, and women, and  
5 most are over the age of 24. At a relatively modest  
6 cost of just \$5.4 million last year, CUNY Reconnect  
7 has succeeded in helping working-age New Yorkers  
8 complete credentials while boosting enrollment, and  
9 this program deserves to continue and grow.

11 Second, expand CUNY ACE, which we have also heard  
12 about today, to help more senior college students  
13 succeed. Today, only 36.2 percent of full-time  
14 students at CUNY's senior colleges graduate in four  
15 years. Fortunately, the ACE program has begun to  
16 change this, providing students attending CUNY's  
17 senior colleges with a mix of academic advisement,  
18 career development, tuition scholarships, textbooks,  
19 and transportation assistance that has proven to be  
20 critical in boosting graduation rates—by as much as  
21 40 percent. However, limited funding has restricted  
22 that program to serving just 3 percent of all  
23 eligible students. We urge the Council to invest in  
24 growing CUNY ACE, which will help students and  
25

1  
2 maximizes the City's other investments in student  
3 success.

4 Third, We recommend boosting CUNY's career  
5 success programs. CUNY still has work to do to ensure  
6 that CUNY degrees lead to lasting economic  
7 opportunity. Fortunately, several CUNY programs are  
8 succeeding in launching students into well-paying  
9 careers in the tech sector, health care, finance, and  
10 other industries. But these programs are generally  
11 operating at a very small scale, and budget cuts  
12 threaten their continuation. To ensure that CUNY is  
13 as effective as possible in generating economic  
14 mobility, the City Council should support the growth  
15 of these initiatives. (TIMER CHIMES)

16 And my last, and fourth recommendation, is to  
17 strengthen the crucial CITE program so that every  
18 future teacher can be trained in computing education.  
19 At the same time, fewer than 5 percent of all new  
20 teachers are prepared to teach computational  
21 thinking—the ability to ask questions, organize data,  
22 and solve problems with computers. This training gap  
23 is preventing many students in New York City public  
24 schools from receiving early encouragement in  
25 computing education and from pursuing computer

1 science in high school, college, and beyond. With the  
2 Council's support, this program can expand to reach  
3 all 11,000 aspiring teachers enrolled at CUNY every  
4 year. New York's elected leaders are nearly unanimous  
5 in expressing the desire to expand economic mobility  
6 and making the state's tax base more resilient. No  
7 institution is better positioned to deliver on those  
8 needs than CUNY.

9  
10 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

11 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you.

12 MEGAN AHEARN: Good afternoon, my name is Megan  
13 Ahearn and I am Program Director for NYPIRG. Thank  
14 you to Chair Dinowitz and the Higher Education  
15 Committee for the opportunity to testify today.

16 CUNY's testimony was pretty clear on the impact  
17 of the PEG cuts being the reduction of positions  
18 from dozens at some schools to over 100 at others.  
19 These cuts have and will continue to create few  
20 hours of operation for libraries, cafeterias,  
21 student resource offices, advisement, and  
22 counseling. Students will tell you, it's already  
23 difficult to get classes that they need to  
24 graduate, and now that enrollments are beginning to  
25 bounce back, the PEG cuts undercut CUNY's ability

1  
2 to bolster services that attract new students. They  
3 also critically create an atmosphere of uncertainty  
4 where students are having to rearrange their lives  
5 just a few weeks before the semester starts because  
6 of cuts and faculty layoffs.

7 We urge the Council to fight for a final budget  
8 that rejects the PEG cuts and adds, as my colleague  
9 said, \$35.5 million for new academic advisors and  
10 expanding CUNY Reconnect, ASAP and ACE. These  
11 programs work for retention and graduation rates,  
12 and they worthy of expansion. On top of that, every  
13 student that goes to CUNY deserves the kind of  
14 wraparound services that these programs provide.

15 I also want to bolster what a number of other  
16 people have said, and that mass transit is an  
17 extension of CUNY. The need to address transit  
18 affordability is only getting more pressing. We thank  
19 the Council and Speaker Adrienne E. Adams for your  
20 stalwart advocacy for Fair Fares. We agree with and  
21 echo calls to do more eligibility reviews and helping  
22 students through Students Resource Centers, that are  
23 currently experiencing cuts, to apply for and get the  
24 benefits that they already qualify for. We'll go step  
25 further to fight for an advocate and urge you to

1  
2 expand Fair Fares to 200 percent of the federal  
3 poverty level, up from 120 percent, and to include  
4 all CUNY students in eligibility, regardless of  
5 income.

6 And I just wanted to mention something really  
7 quickly - CUNY testified about an emerging master's  
8 program in AI that could explore, among other things,  
9 AI for advisement to offset human advisors for  
10 routine matters. And we really would underline the  
11 importance that that Council follows up with CUNY to  
12 ensure the involvement of students, from the start,  
13 in the creation of such programs to get the students  
14 perspective and input on things, such as what would  
15 be considered as a routine matter, for example. We  
16 hear from students right now that advisement is a one  
17 size fits all approach, because their caseloads are  
18 so high. We wouldn't (TIMER CHIMES) that to be  
19 exacerbated, thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you.

21 I will point out two things. One is, again,  
22 speaking of these funds not as expenditures but as  
23 investments, as I think all three of you correctly  
24 pointed out, and as CUNY correctly pointed out.

1  
2 I will go back to my first question that I asked  
3 CUNY Administration, which is the Director of OMB in  
4 his testimony said that they're really just cutting  
5 fringe benefits, and they are not aware of any  
6 programmatic cuts. But, in your various interactions  
7 with CUNY or various roles, have you or your members  
8 or the people you interact with felt cuts to CUNY? In  
9 other words, is the Director's testimony accurate?

10 PRESIDENT DAVIS: The cuts have gone much deeper  
11 than to fringe benefits. I think CUNY  
12 Administration's own testimony laid out a few numbers  
13 at a few community colleges. If it's okay, I'll ready  
14 just two brief examples from a couple of my  
15 colleagues from BMCC. One is in the mathematics  
16 department, she expressed that, "We are really  
17 feeling the cutbacks. In my department, one of the  
18 largest at BMCC, we are not being allowed to replace  
19 our full time office assistant. The department has an  
20 approximately 150 faculty, but it is currently  
21 operating with only part time staff. To top it off,  
22 we just added a new Data Science major that will earn  
23 money for BMCC, but we don't have the staff to  
24 support it." One of the licensed mental health  
25 counselors at BMCC told me that, "Restrictions placed

1 on hiring have meant that for every three vacated  
2 positions, one can be considered for replacement. How  
3 are advisors, counselors, and financial aid officers  
4 supposed to continue serving students, if positions  
5 that are vacated won't be replaced? How are we as a  
6 college supposed to continue to advise students,  
7 process financial aid applications, or see students  
8 who are seeking mental health counseling if  
9 professional staff are not hired?" So, these are  
10 anecdotal responses that I think correspond closely  
11 to what you heard from the CUNY administration, which  
12 that the cuts have in fact gone much deeper than  
13 nibbling around the edges. My colleagues are really  
14 stressed out. Morale is terrible. And a lot of them  
15 are doing the work that had previously been assigned  
16 to their colleagues who have left and not been  
17 replaced.

19 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: (INAUDIBLE)

20 MEGAN AHEARN: I will just add there is also ,you  
21 know, for campus staff that do resource work like  
22 helping students apply for SNAP and other agencies,  
23 that they are already eligible for, that's literally  
24 money being left on the table for these students. And  
25 sometimes the hurdle really is just learning how to

1  
2 go through the application, how to interface with HRA  
3 if they're doing it for the first time, for these  
4 benefits. And CUNY has a Student Experience Survey  
5 that sometimes even student that have applied for a  
6 benefit, and maintain eligibility, just don't re-  
7 enroll. So, we know that the need is there, and  
8 sometimes it's just that one connection to have an  
9 office that is dedicated to that.

10 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you.

11 Council Member Brewer?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I just would like to ,you  
13 know, thank you for your testimony on PSC. I really  
14 liked the fact when you said fund ASAP and CUNY to  
15 the maximum, in other words, for all. So, is that  
16 \$35.5 million that you are talking about that would  
17 fund ASAP for all in addition to Reconnect? Is that  
18 what that number means?

19 PRESIDENT DAVIS: Yes, that is what it would take  
20 to raise the ratio of academic advisors to the ASAP  
21 ratio. And we talk about it this way, look this  
22 should just be what college is, right? We talk about  
23 ASAP, it has been such a profoundly important program  
24 for so many people, and it is wonderful for the  
25 students that it serves. Outside of CUNY the national



1  
2 recommendations for ration of academic advisors to  
3 students is available, and there is no reason in New  
4 York City why we shouldn't be able to achieve that  
5 ratio. That's just what college should be for all of  
6 the students at our community colleges.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That was what I was trying  
8 to ask, what about academic advisors? And I got sort  
9 of a non-answer by saying we don't have enough money  
10 for those who are not in ASAP. And it was very  
11 frustrating, because you really cannot get through  
12 without it. And certainly not in a timely fashion -  
13 and you have to work, et cetera, et cetera. But, this  
14 number would cover everything is what you are saying?  
15 The \$35.5 million?

16 PRESIDENT DAVIS: Right. And I am still unclear,  
17 and maybe you know the answer to this, I thought last  
18 year that this council worked really hard to get some  
19 earmarked funding for academic advising, that I am  
20 not sure went to academic advising in the University.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's what I though also.  
22 That's why I am confused, thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you.  
24  
25

1  
2 I would like to call the next panel, Salimatou,  
3 Monique Thomas, Brenda Vargas, Cynthia Suarez-  
4 Espinal.

5 Thank you. Salimatou, we can start with you. And  
6 for the panelists, welcome, and before testify,  
7 please state your name for the record.

8 SALIMATOU DOUMBOUYA: Thank you, Council Member  
9 Dinowitz, My name is Salimatou Doumbouya, and I serve  
10 as the Chairperson of the CUNY University Student  
11 Senate and the CUNY Student Trustee.

12 I am a proud student at the New York City  
13 College of Technology, and I stand before you today  
14 to talk about the students' budget needs.

15 I represent all 225 CUNY students, and today's a  
16 very special day for us, as we've been advocating for  
17 different things for CUNY.

18 In terms of infrastructure, you are no stranger  
19 to the fact that when students get some of their  
20 facilities, some of their classrooms, they are afraid  
21 that some roofs are going to fall over their heads.  
22 On specific cases of bathrooms, they are so bad that  
23 no amount of cleaning would make them utilizable, and  
24 some students are still going in because they have no  
25 choice.

1  
2 But today the most important topic for me is a  
3 topic of transportation. Transportation is a  
4 significant barrier for many students. The Chair of  
5 PSC, James Davis, spoke about the fact that ASAP, ACE  
6 and other programs, their benefits are a huge  
7 contributors of student success. However, right now  
8 not all students are eligible for ASAP, so not all  
9 students can benefit. A recent survey conducted by  
10 the University student senate, which is the  
11 organization that I chair, had about 849 student  
12 testimonies, where they were sharing that they had to  
13 sometimes not be able to eat in order to purchase a  
14 MetroCard. They shared that they had to sometimes  
15 spare... It was difficult to balance, having to buy  
16 MetroCards having to buy books or having to afford  
17 school at sometimes. because of the chain of events  
18 with inflation and all of that. A particular students  
19 shared that, "Sometimes, I don't have money to pay  
20 for transportation, because maybe in the week I spent  
21 all of my money paying bills," and that's the student  
22 from Bronx Community College.

23 Recently, I have discovered with my colleagues  
24 that situations a CUNY with transportation particular  
25 has gone so bad that we are trying to do it

1  
2 ourselves, which I think is acceptable. At the  
3 University students senate, we are spending \$6,600 to  
4 purchase 50 MetroCards for student leaders just so  
5 that we can advocate for our students CUNY-wide.

6 In terms of food access, it is Ramadan right now;  
7 I myself am an evening student taking classes from  
8 six to 9:45 p.m. There's no food services during the  
9 daytime in the building where I am -- I am in the  
10 architectural building, which is remote, let alone  
11 the nighttime. I'm also the president of my student  
12 government, so we started a food initiative that  
13 costs us about \$10,000 to buy 50 food boxes for all  
14 of our buildings for all of our students regardless  
15 of religious affiliation. We also spent around  
16 \$10,000 to buy coffee for our students during the  
17 daytime which we started since last fall.

18 I believe that when students feel like they have  
19 (TIMER CHIMES) to take out of their own pocket to  
20 feed other students, it becomes unacceptable because  
21 student activity fees are just for that - activities  
22 for our students.

23 The possibility of having and education and a  
24 campus life should be made possible by those whose  
25

1 hands we put our futures in by deciding to have  
2 education not by us the youth ourselves.

3  
4 Then we have the issues of mental health, of  
5 students with (INAUDIBLE) disabilities, and housing  
6 and, I could go on forever about how important it is  
7 for you to push CUNY, and to push the Mayor, and to  
8 push council to give students the funding that they  
9 need in order to succeed. Higher education is a  
10 choice, but it is a choice that benefits the  
11 students, their families, but also our great city of  
12 New York, thank you.

13 MONIQUE THOMAS: Greetings, Chair Dinowitz and  
14 members of the Higher Education Committee, it is my  
15 honor to be here speaking today before you and  
16 members of the New York City Council.

17 My name is Monique Thomas, I am long-term full-  
18 time student since 2005. I am a single parent,  
19 household of two, and also I am here to just testify  
20 on behalf of how hard it is to be a student for CUNY,  
21 and you know facing challenges within attending  
22 college, and just basically maintaining a great point  
23 average - which is kind of hard these days, because  
24 we face a lot of challenges with funding. And without  
25

1  
2 that funding, it is impossible to actually continue  
3 educational studies.

4       Being that I'm a Brooklynite resident, it is very  
5 difficult with public transportation. As far... Since  
6 the pandemic it has been even harder as far funding  
7 and having a MetroCard. I have experienced that  
8 plenty of times where didn't have carfare to go to  
9 school. And going to the token booth clerk and asking  
10 for a ride, it was difficult. Because they let you  
11 through, some let you through, and some don't. Then  
12 you have the officers you have to deal with as far as  
13 you know letting you do the gate, and you're letting  
14 them know you're going to school. It's very hard ,you  
15 know, it's not easy. At times I wasn't able to go to  
16 school, because I was afraid I wasn't going to be  
17 let through the gate. And that dropped down my GPA a  
18 lot from me not attending courses for.

19       Also with the (INAUDIBLE) of me proceeding with  
20 school through difficult times when I was employed  
21 with the City -and as a former NYPD School Safety,  
22 I'm continuing my educational career goals in  
23 Political Science, and so forth. I also had the  
24 opportunity to gain ,you know, some kind of interest  
25 with having ,you know, utilizing with funding, as

1  
2 opposed an ambassador for our school (sic). In 2023,  
3 earlier in March, I was in model senate, where we  
4 were able to go to Albany, and I did a speech on the  
5 ERA. It was very, very (TIMER CHIMES) interesting.

6 So, as I'm saying, the funding is needed, we  
7 don't need the funding to be cut. We need more  
8 funding to provide for CUNY students and for the  
9 future students ahead. Thank you for your time.

10 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you, Monique.

11 BRENDA VARGAS: Good afternoon, Chair and  
12 committee members, my name is Brenda Vargas, I am the  
13 Director of College Discovery at Kingsborough  
14 Community College, and I am here with my colleague...

15 CYNTHIA SUAREZ-ESPINAL: Good afternoon, I am  
16 Cynthia Suarez-Espinal, the Director of the College  
17 Discovery Program at Bronx Community College.

18 BRENDA VARGAS: We want to thank you for this  
19 opportunity to present this testimony to you.

20 The College Discovery Program was established  
21 within the community colleges by the Board of Higher  
22 Education Resolution on February 17, 1964. Its major  
23 goal was the admission of students from a spectrum of  
24 academic standing below the level of that which is  
25 conventionally regarded as an inappropriate for

1 admission. Originally conceived as an experimental  
2 five-year program, College Discovery fought to  
3 demonstrate that students were then being excluded  
4 from college because of an existing admissions  
5 criteria could, with the proper supportive services,  
6 attain a college degree.  
7

8 The College Discovery Program marked its 60th  
9 Anniversary within CUNY on February 17th of this year  
10 of 2024.

11 Recognizing that the New York State Educational  
12 Department as a New York State opportunity program,  
13 CD operates under the framework of - Education Law  
14 (INAUDIBLE) #6452.

15 This program is designed to support students  
16 whose income falls below 185 percentile of the  
17 federal poverty level at level guidelines, and whose  
18 academic performance is below an average EPA of 80.

19 Despite City students facing significant  
20 challenges, the retention rates for CD students at  
21 all six community colleges in CUNY for the year 2019  
22 cohort were higher than the general student  
23 population, and both the two-year and three-year  
24 graduation rates for CD students were higher than the  
25



1  
2 general student population by five and eight points  
3 respectively.

4 CD is an access program is committed to providing  
5 holistic support to its students. This support  
6 encompass financial, personal, and academic  
7 counseling, academic support services, and he Summer  
8 Bridge Program.

9 Since its inception almost 60 years ago, CD has  
10 continued to be beacon hope and a catalyst for the  
11 transformation in the lives of countless CUNY  
12 students who, due to academic and socioeconomic  
13 barriers might otherwise be denied the opportunity to  
14 peruse a higher education.

15 The CD program is an educational initiative that  
16 operates at six community colleges in CUNY. It  
17 receives funding from the City at 92 percent and the  
18 state at eight percent. However, over the past  
19 decade, the program has seen a significant 32 percent  
20 (TIMER CHIMES) decline in CD students, dropping from  
21 2,086 to 1,000 students. This decline cannot be  
22 attributed to solely to the nationwide decrease in  
23 higher education enrollment and disrupted learning.  
24 Budget constraints are also a factor, the program  
25 budget, which includes administrative costs and

1 financial aid support for students has not kept up  
2 with contractual increases in personnel. This  
3 increase has risen by 35 percent over the past decade  
4 accounting for 58 percent of the average City budget  
5 of \$5.5 million over the past 10 years.

7 And I am just going to bring this to a close,  
8 because I know my time is up.

9 In order for CD programs to carry out their  
10 mission of providing vital support to the most  
11 academically and financially vulnerable students, as  
12 well as those with the greatest educational needs, it  
13 is essential to secure additional funding and  
14 specially baselined funding for the programs for  
15 2025. Investing in CD is an investment in the future  
16 of our state ensuring a more equitable, prosperous,  
17 and educated society. And we have included some data  
18 there to show the (INAUDIBLE) numbers.

19 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I have it up here, thank  
20 you.

21 PANEL: Thank you

22 CYNTHIA SUAREZ-ESPINAL: In closing (INAUDIBLE)...  
23 (CROSS-TALK)

24 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Could you speak into the  
25 microphone and then say your name for the record?

1  
2 CYNTHIA SUAREZ-ESPINAL: In closing, I just wanted  
3 to read a blurb for a current student at Bronx  
4 Community College, Elizabeth (INAUDIBLE) Rojas, who  
5 is graduating this May says, "My experience as  
6 someone who is part of the College Discovery Program  
7 at Bronx Community College has been the most  
8 wonderful experience I've had in my two years in  
9 college. Coming to college as the first in my family  
10 to pursue a higher education is scary and challenging  
11 knowing that I am creating a path for future  
12 generations in my family. However, the College  
13 Discovery Program erased my doubts and fears by  
14 providing me with guidance and support that made it  
15 less challenging. During the summer program in 2022,  
16 I got to experience the dynamics of what a day-to-day  
17 college class looks like. They showed us how to  
18 annotate while reading and provided us with genuine  
19 feedback also, not to mention, the incredible  
20 advisors, peer leaders, tutors, and the entire staff.  
21 They've been an incredible support in my education  
22 and in learning how to navigate through college. They  
23 taught me how to access Blackboard, CUNY First,  
24 create my BCC email, schedule my classes, complete my  
25 FAFSA application, and make sure I complete and meet

1 all the requirements. The moment I walk into the  
2 office of CD, they give me a warm welcome. The  
3 environment there is friendly, and I have an  
4 excellent relationship with my advisor. They are  
5 always making sure I'm doing well in my education and  
6 reminding me to schedule meetings with my advisor.  
7 The events, CD has always been the best. Throughout  
8 CD throughout I met a couple of friends there, which  
9 helped me feel less lost and lonely. Overall, I would  
10 say, I'm very pleased to be part of the College  
11 Discovery with their support and financial  
12 assistance, making my journey a lot less difficult  
13 and meaningful."

15 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. Salimatou, I  
16 have just one question. You mentioned a number of  
17 things in your testimony that arise from  
18 disinvestment like not being able to have a bathroom  
19 that could be used, a cafeteria where food is not  
20 available, are there other impacts of disinvestment  
21 that you have seen inside the classroom or outside  
22 the classroom that you would like to just speak a  
23 little more about?

24 SALIMATOU DOUMBOUYA: Yes, I would like to expand  
25 on the consequence of mental health advisors and even

1  
2 academic advisors. As President of Student Government  
3 at City Tech locally, I hear these stories every day,  
4 "I am having to take classes that I don't need,  
5 because I didn't have an advisor. Or maybe my one  
6 advisor had too many students that they had to deal  
7 with. It was just a mess." And the fact that students  
8 have sometimes to pay money to take classes that they  
9 don't need plays with their mental health. Because  
10 they are having to spend more time than they need on  
11 campus, and they start performing in a really bad  
12 manner, and then it causes problems. I have a  
13 personal example from one of my peers from student  
14 government, who I am not going to name, this affected  
15 him so much that now he had to take a break from  
16 school, which affected us a lot, because we knew that  
17 some things that he was mentioning, the campus  
18 couldn't fix themselves because they were  
19 consequences from not funding. But, due to his mental  
20 health issues, these are things that he did not  
21 necessarily understand. And it affected him to the  
22 point where he was frustrated, because he couldn't  
23 graduate on time because of taking extra classes.  
24 And, now, he will not be graduating when he needs to  
25 graduate, because this caused mental health issues

1 that he has to fix before he can complete his degree.  
2 And of course he couldn't get that help on campus,  
3 because, again, there are not enough mental health  
4 advisors; it's a short amount of people for a lot of  
5 students that need help. And the students are not  
6 getting enough services. So, mental health and  
7 advising you see in the classroom all of the time -  
8 with our peers, people that don't know, we hear these  
9 stories in the hallways, it's a lot.  
10

11 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Wow. Our city seems to  
12 be... Or the Administration wants to balance our  
13 City's budget on the backs the very students who need  
14 the most investment, and our students are suffering  
15 as a result.

16 I would like to thank this panel for testifying  
17 today and call the next panel. As a reminder, if you  
18 would like to testify in person, please fill out a  
19 slip with the sergeant at the back of the room.

20 Gustavo Garcia-Flores? You may begin, just state  
21 your name for the record, please.

22 GUSTAVO GARCIA-FLORES: Good afternoon, Chairman  
23 and council members, My name is Gustavo Garcia  
24 Flores. I am a student at the city College of New  
25 York. I'm currently in my sophomore year. I would

1  
2 like to mention that students need more investment  
3 and not budget cuts. I, as a student myself, would  
4 like to mention that these budget cuts that were  
5 brought up, they affect us a lot, especially on  
6 campus, because right now on... Our student  
7 government is proposing a student activity budget  
8 increase of \$11.00, and that's going to affect us  
9 lot, because that's more money that we have to pay  
10 out-of-pocket.

11 Most students that I have spoken with told me  
12 that they oppose this increase the student activity  
13 fee, because they don't think that it's fair for  
14 students to pay more out-of-pocket, as a result of us  
15 receiving a funding from the City.

16 I would also like to mention that, from my  
17 personal experience, clubs on campus are currently  
18 underfunded, because there seems to not be enough  
19 budget coming out of the City and CUNY. I myself as  
20 the former president of a club on campus, the CCNY  
21 Soccer Club, I feel that for clubs we need more  
22 investment, and not just clubs, I would say that for  
23 our college the facilities seem to be falling apart,  
24 especially in the North Academic Center, or as we  
25 call it, the NAC Building, usually when it rains, it

1  
2 leaks a lot on campus. And it is very hard for us,  
3 because we have to deal walking through a building  
4 that is going to flood as a result of all of that.  
5 You know? (TIMER CHIMES)

6 And to finalize, I would like to say that I hope  
7 that my testimony today brings to your attention that  
8 students need more help, instead for funding to be  
9 taken away from students who need it the most. Thank  
10 you.

11 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Gustavo, what clubs are you  
12 in at City College?

13 GUSTAVO GARCIA-FLORES: I am currently in the  
14 Latin American Engineers Association LAESA-SHPE. I  
15 used to be a member of the soccer club on campus. I  
16 was the president for one year, since last year in  
17 October when I founded the club as a freshman  
18 student.

19 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: When you founded it?

20 GUSTAVO GARCIA-FLORES: Yes, I founded it.

21 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: You started a club? That's  
22 very impressive.

23 GUSTAVO GARCIA-FLORES: Yes.

24 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So, now you are in the  
25 Latin American Engineering Club?



1  
2 GUSTAVO GARCIA-FLORES: I have been a member of  
3 that club since freshmen year.

4 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: That's wonderful. And you  
5 are still a member of that club.

6 GUSTAVO GARCIA-FLORES: Yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Are you a member of other  
8 clubs as well? By the way, I imagine engineering  
9 takes up a lot of time. So, I don't imagine you're in  
10 multiple clubs.

11 GUSTAVO GARCIA-FLORES: Only those two clubs  
12 really. I left the soccer club due to personal  
13 reasons. I needed to take a break and focus more on  
14 my academics.

15 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Are you an engineering  
16 major?

17 GUSTAVO GARCIA-FLORES: Yes, computer engineering.

18 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So, in addition to taking  
19 the engineering courses, you are in the Engineering  
20 Club? You must really love engineering!

21 How are the clubs different than the classes? If  
22 I were taking engineering classes, that would seem  
23 good to me. What is so special about the club?

24 GUSTAVO GARCIA-FLORES: Which club?

25 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Engineering.

1  
2 GUSTAVO GARCIA-FLORES: Engineering? I would say  
3 LAESA has allowed me to form connections with  
4 companies and get access to recourses that I would  
5 need, especially as minority student majoring in  
6 engineering.

7 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Wow. Another reminder,  
8 thank you Gustavo, another reminder that our schools  
9 are not just about the four walls of a classroom, the  
10 academic component, but as you said, the connections  
11 and building relationships. And as Salimatou  
12 mentioned, things like MetroCards, mental health, and  
13 food. Gustavo, I want to thank you for your testimony  
14 today, and thank you for joining us at the hearing.

15 GUSTAVO GARCIA-FLORES: Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: On Zoom we have Emely  
17 Campoverde and Kadillatou Sillah, and we are going to  
18 start with Emely Campoverde.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has started.

20 EMELY CAMPOVERDE: Hi

21 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Hi, we meet again.

22 EMELY CAMPOVERDE: (\*Transcription Note: Inaudible  
23 Zoom Connection Throughout) Uhm, (BACKGROUND NOISE)  
24 (INAUDIBLE) need this so we can learn about our...  
25 What we are learning (LOST CONNECTION) (INAUDIBLE) and

1 we can also (INAUDIBLE) for our teachers to  
2 (INAUDIBLE) so we can (INAUDIBLE) buy us stuff, so we  
3 can do experiments about what we are learning  
4 (INAUDIBLE) learning about science, so they can buy  
5 us money, (INAUDIBLE) give us money so that we can  
6 buy the stuff that we need to learn about (INAUDIBLE)  
7 little frogs and space. And they also purchased us  
8 trip to a museum (INAUDIBLE) so we could learn more  
9 about it. (LOST CONNECTION) (NO AUDIO)

11 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Emely, I'm not sure if we  
12 lost you or if there is some connection issue. But,  
13 we had a little trouble hearing you on this end. I  
14 want to thank you for your testimony, and remind that  
15 you can submit written testimony as well if your  
16 verbal testimony got cut off.

17 I would now like to call on Kadillatou Sillah.

18 KADILLATOU SILLAH: (INAUDIBLE)

19 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Hello?

20 KADILLATOU SILLAH: Hello? Greetings, Chair  
21 Dinowitz, members of the City Council Committee on  
22 Higher Education. My is Kadillatou Sillah, and I am a  
23 second year student at Guttman Community College  
24 majoring in Human Services. I currently serve as the  
25 President of the College (BACKGROUND NOISE) Abilities

1 Club in addition, I serve as (INAUDIBLE) at the CUNY  
2 College for students with disabilities (BACKGROUND  
3 NOISE) known as CCSD an advocacy group representing  
4 the interest of more than 10,000 self-identified CUNY  
5 students with disabilities. I am testifying before  
6 you today in support of CUNY's \$2.3 million operating  
7 budget requesting services for students with  
8 disabilities. The city of New York has never provided  
9 any consistent support for campus accommodations for  
10 students with disabilities. This might sound  
11 unbelievable, but it is the truth. CCSD would like to  
12 thank Chancellor Matos Rodríguez and the University's  
13 leadership for being proactive in requesting public  
14 support for the hiring of (INAUDIBLE) staff to  
15 provide basic disability accommodations at our  
16 campuses. CCSD also requests that the City Council  
17 and the Mayor consider approving an allocation of  
18 \$250,000 for CUNY unlimited (INAUDIBLE) campuses  
19 program that provides access to higher education for  
20 students with intellectual disabilities. I urge the  
21 members of the City Council to finally invest in CUNY  
22 students with disabilities during its FY25 budget  
23 deliberations. Thank you.  
24  
25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you for your  
3 testimony. I couldn't agree more that there needs to  
4 be significantly more investment in facilities and  
5 programs for our students with disabilities. As many  
6 people here know, that was my career before I was in  
7 the City Council. I was a teacher for students with  
8 disabilities in our public schools. And,  
9 unfortunately, it is very believable that a lot of  
10 CUNY facilities are not accessible to people with  
11 disabilities. So, thank you for your testimony today.

12 If there is anyone else on Zoom who would like to  
13 testify, please indicate so with the Zoom Raise Hand  
14 Function.

15 Seeing none, I would like to thank everyone who  
16 testified today at the CUNY Preliminary Budget  
17 Hearing. It is very clear that the Mayor's proposed  
18 cuts will be devastating and has been devastating to  
19 the very programs that support the students in our  
20 city, the very programs that provide an economic  
21 ladder for our students here in New York City. The  
22 greatest engine of social mobility here in New York  
23 City is CUNY. And CUNY deserves investments, not  
24 divestments.

25 The hearing is closed, thank you.

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COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

[GAVEL SOUND] [GAVELING OUT]

C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date April 19, 2024