

TESTIMONY OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY

MAYOR'S PRELIMINARY 2022 BUDGET

Delivered by Dr. Barbara Bowen, President, PSC

March 3, 2021

- Thank you for your advocacy throughout this difficult year for The City University of New York and the faculty and staff represented by the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY. The PSC's 30,000 members are grateful for the restorations you have won in recent budgets.
- The PSC calls for a fundamentally different approach than the approach you heard from the CUNY administration: we call on you to join us in advocating for a major increase in CUNY funding, not simply for a budget that returns funding to pre-pandemic "normal." "Normal" was crushing CUNY and sabotaging our students. "Normal" was planned poverty and racialized disinvestment. New York must do better. This is the moment not just to *protect* CUNY from budget cuts, but to think strategically about the future of the city and *invest*. The future of CUNY is the future of New York.
- We know this is a budget year unlike any other. We are aware of the strains on the City budget and the urgency of federal stimulus funds for the City. The PSC, as part of our national union, is campaigning aggressively for federal funds for states and localities. But especially in this challenging year, when the impact of COVID hit primarily communities of color hardest, investment in CUNY is critical.

Racial Disparities in Higher Education Attainment in New York City

- As the Council seeks to develop a budget that supports racial justice as part of economic recovery, we call attention to the importance of supporting CUNY as a potential force to counter systemic racism. The Center for an Urban Future recently released a report that reveals gaping racial disparities in college attainment in NYC:

"Just 20 percent of Hispanic New Yorkers, 27 percent of Black New Yorkers, and 45 percent of Asian New Yorkers hold a bachelor's degree, compared to 64 percent of white New Yorkers," the report states.

The disparities within neighborhoods are even more shocking. In Jackson Heights, 11 percent of Hispanic residents hold a bachelor's degree, compared to

58 percent of white residents. In Bushwick, 71 percent of white residents have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 24.5 percent of Black residents and 14 percent of Hispanic residents. These disparities come at a time when the city's economy is increasingly bifurcated, with "a large number of low-wage jobs . . . accessible to individuals without a college credential and a smaller number of higher-wage jobs that mainly went to those with at least a bachelor's degree." Unless CUNY is adequately funded, it will be unable to address these life-defining inequities.

- For the city's working class and communities of color as they seek to rebuild their lives after the economic devastation of the pandemic, CUNY is likely to represent the only chance to earn new credentials or a college degree. New York will not rebound if whole communities are left behind. If we are committed to an inclusive or anti-racist economic recovery, new investment in CUNY is essential.

New York City needs a vibrant CUNY to recover from the pandemic

- We urge you to pass a budget that paves the way for a vibrant future for New York City. To do that, we urge to include:
 1. **\$77.3 million to reverse cuts** in the enacted FY 2021 budget and eliminate proposed cuts through "cost efficiencies" in the Mayor's Preliminary Budget for FY 2022;
 2. **\$23.8 million to provide revenue** support to offset the loss in tuition from enrollment declines resulting from the pandemic, as requested by CUNY;
 3. **\$20.4 million** to support the first year of the New Deal for CUNY. Last month a bold plan called New Deal for CUNY was put forth by the State Legislature. I will explain more about this plan below but we are grateful to State Senator Gounardes and Assemblymember Reyes for their leadership in Albany on sponsoring this legislation

This request represents a total increase of \$121.5 million over the FY 2022 Preliminary Executive Budget allocation for The City University of New York.

- The Preliminary Executive Budget proposes cuts to ASAP, information technology, tutoring, and basic OTPS funding. CUNY simply cannot sustain such cuts. The CUNY community colleges are already cut to the bone; they cannot be cut further. CUNY has also been targeted for "cost efficiencies" in the current year and in the FY 2022 Preliminary Executive Budget. There is nothing efficient about undermining the nation's largest urban university in the city that continues to be devastated by COVID exactly when the university is needed most. We call on you to reverse these cuts. And we join

the University in asking the CITY to provide \$23.8 million to offset the short-term losses in tuition revenue because of the pandemic. Community college enrollment will rebound; allowing the community colleges to be hamstrung because of a temporary drop in enrollment will leave them unable to serve New Yorkers for many years to come. The PSC is also joining the University in urging the State to hold the CUNY community colleges harmless against reductions in per-student base aid during the temporary decline in enrollment because of the pandemic.

Introducing a New Deal for CUNY

- In addition to the defensive budget measures above, the PSC calls on the Council to join us—and join your legislative colleagues in Albany—in imagining a new future for CUNY. We ask you to support the initial year of a New Deal for CUNY (S4461/A05843). The legislation, introduced in recent weeks in Albany, establishes appropriate ratios of mental health counselors, academic advisors, and full-time faculty to students, ensuring a high-quality experience for CUNY students. It also returns CUNY to the tuition-free model that prevailed for more than a century. The new provisions in the legislation would be phased in over five years, but to get started in FY 2022, we request \$20.4 million from the city. The funding would enable CUNY to take the initial steps to ease the tuition burden and move toward these ratios at the community colleges. We have also called on the State to make analogous investments in the four-year CUNY colleges and in base aid to the community colleges.

Proposing PILOT funding for CUNY

- As we work together to develop new ways of funding CUNY and new State legislation, I also want to remind you of PSC's proposal for a payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) to increase the City's tax revenue and create a dedicated funding stream for CUNY. Our proposal is attached to this testimony.

Holding CUNY accountable for federal CARES funds

- Finally, we call on the Council for your advocacy in addition to the \$121.5 million budget allocation. CUNY received \$251 million from the CARES Act and is scheduled to receive an additional \$455 million from the CRRSAA. While the University used substantial CARES Act funding in direct aid to students, as required in the legislation, it has failed to spend even its first allocation and continues to hold approximately \$72 million in CARES Act funds. Meanwhile, nearly 2,000 adjunct faculty and staff are still laid off, closed class sections and cut course offerings. We call on you to demand a public accounting of CUNY's use of the funds and to join us in urging the University to use the federal funds

as they were intended—to keep employees on payroll and address the urgent needs created by the pandemic.

- Thank you for your commitment to public higher education. PSC's 30,000 members work at CUNY and stay at CUNY because we believe in our students and CUNY's mission. But New York City will not recover from the economic crisis laid bare by COVID if CUNY is not strong. This is not the time for the Council to shy away from giving CUNY what it has needed - we urge you to lead a new course for public higher education in New York City.

NYC Advisory Commission on Property Tax Reform
October 15, 2018
Testimony of the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY

*Delivered by Dr. Barbara Bowen, PSC President,
Dr. Michael Fabricant, PSC Legislative Representative*

- Thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony and for your collective service to the City of New York. We also want to thank Mayor de Blasio and Speaker Corey Johnson for convening the Commission.
- We represent the 30,000 faculty and academic staff at The City University of New York, CUNY. We want to bring to the Commission's attention a significant source of foregone tax revenue that should be given serious consideration. Our proposal goes beyond the Commission's goal of a neutral financial impact on the City and would result in additional income for the City, which we propose to earmark for a specific public purpose.
- We believe that the Commission should consider whether it is still appropriate to exempt private universities from virtually all NYC property taxes. Specifically, we ask that you consider whether the two largest private universities, NYU and Columbia, both of which receive enormous benefit from NYC public services, should continue to be exempt from almost all property taxes.
- Not only do Columbia and NYU rely heavily on City services, such as transit, parks, firefighters, sanitation and police—all of which they receive without paying almost any property tax to the City—but they also rely on the city's extraordinary cultural institutions and libraries in order to attract scholars, researchers and students. It is fair to say that neither university would have been able to expand as it has in the last two decades without the services and the benefits of New York City.
- We focus on these two large university systems because of the impact of their foregone property taxes on the City's budget, and also because both have undertaken massive expansion in recent decades. We believe that neither university would have been able to expand as it has without the huge investments the City has made in improving the quality of life in New York.
- A very conservative estimate of the value of the foregone revenue is \$189 million annually from NYU, and \$274 million annually from Columbia. That is a total of \$463—close to a half-billion dollars—in foregone property taxes per year.
- Those estimates are based entirely on the Department of Finance figures and formula for determining market value. We believe the figures are too low to reflect the actual market value of the untaxed property, but they are an important starting point.

- NYU and the NYU Hospital System own 105 buildings in Manhattan and Brooklyn. Most are fully exempt from property taxes; about a third are partially exempt. The Department of Finance gives these holdings an assessed value of \$1.7 billion, which converts, through DOF's own formula, to a market value of \$3.7 billion. The potential property tax responsibility of NYU, according to the DOF formula, would be \$188.5 million.
- Columbia and Columbia/Presbyterian Hospitals own 194 buildings. Assuming these buildings are all class 2, 3 or 4 buildings, the market value of Columbia's real estate, based solely on the DOF figures, would be \$5.6 billion. The corresponding property tax would be \$274 million.
- We suspect that the provision in the State Constitution for property tax exemption of private universities never contemplated mega-university systems such as Columbia and NYU, both of which have vast and valuable real estate holdings, as well as multi-billion-dollar endowments.
- NYU's endowment is \$4 billion. Columbia just announced last week that its endowment had reached almost \$11 billion.
- This is not an attack on Columbia and NYU. Both universities contribute tremendously to the cultural and intellectual life of the city. As academics ourselves and representatives of an academic union, we value the colleagues and intellectual community generated by the presence of Columbia and NYU. These major universities, with their communities of scholars, artists, professional schools and public programs, are a significant resource for New York City.
- But the majority of NYC's college students do not attend Columbia or NYU.
- The majority of New York City's college students attend CUNY. 60 percent of high school graduates in New York City go to CUNY. And CUNY is profoundly underfunded.
- While NYU and Columbia pay no property taxes and their students get the benefit of small classes, full-time professors, readily available counselors, abundantly equipped libraries, laboratories and student centers, CUNY students have to make do with crowded classrooms, leaky ceilings, too few full-time professors and a dangerous shortage of counselors. CUNY undergraduates at the community colleges, which receive funding from the City, are 85% people of color and have average family incomes below \$30,000.
- **We propose that the Commission rethink the tax exemption of Columbia and NYU, collect appropriate tax revenue from these two major universities, and invest that revenue in New York's *public* university, CUNY.** It is profoundly unjust that New York's big, expensive private universities reap all the benefits of being tax-free in New York City, while New York's public university is starved of funds.

- Balancing the resources the City receives from institutions of higher education with the urgent need for resources at its public university would be a major step toward reducing inequality in New York.
- Other cities in New York State, including Syracuse and Ithaca, and other cities nationally, such as Boston and Providence, have approached the problem of tax exemption for private universities by making agreements for Payments in Lieu of Taxes, or PILOTs. It's time for New York City to start collecting all or at least part of that foregone half-billion dollars and start investing in decent conditions for the vast majority of the city's college students.
- We believe that a PILOT would be a good solution for New York City. The City could reach agreement on a PILOT for Columbia and NYU without having to change the provision in the New York State Constitution.
- New York City cannot be the fairest big city in the world—it cannot be even minimally fair—while the 275,000 CUNY students endure substandard learning conditions and the big private universities reap massive benefits from being in the city but do not pay property taxes.
- We believe that collecting a fair share of property taxes from two heavily endowed private universities and directing it to relieve some of the extreme underfunding of CUNY would be an appropriate, even exemplary, goal for the Advisory Commission on Property Tax Reform.

**New York City Council Committee on Higher Education Preliminary FY22 Budget Hearing
Testimony Submitted by Student Leadership Network
March 3, 2021**

Good morning. My name is Robert Robinson, and I am the Senior Managing Director of CollegeBound Initiative (CBI) at Student Leadership Network, formerly known as Young Women's Leadership Network. As a Brooklyn native and proud New York City public school alumnus, I began my career as the Assistant Director of Undergraduate Admissions at my alma mater, New York University (NYU). I worked specifically with their Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) in an effort to increase enrollment for students from underserved communities. Following my time at NYU, I joined CBI as a Director of College Counseling at Middle College High School at Medgar Evers College. I also served as a Director of College Counseling at Juan Morel Campos Secondary School before joining Student Leadership Network's central office team in 2008. On behalf of Student Leadership Network, thank you to Chair Inez Barron and all of the members of the Higher Education Committee for this opportunity to testify about the Fiscal Year 2022 Preliminary Budget.

Student Leadership Network operates two programs in New York City that support young people from diverse, underserved communities to access educational opportunities that prepare them to lead successful lives: The Young Women's Leadership Schools (TYWLS), a high-performing network of single-gender, traditional district public schools, and CollegeBound Initiative (CBI), a comprehensive college access, persistence, and success program for young people of any gender.

In 1996, Ann and Andrew Tisch partnered with the Center for Educational Innovation and the New York City Department of Education to launch The Young Women's Leadership School (TYWLS) of East Harlem, the first public all-girls school to open in the United States in 30 years. Their vision was to provide girls growing up in underserved communities with a high-quality college preparatory education modeled after the finest private schools. Today, Student Leadership Network impacts more than 2,500 students through our five TYWLS public schools in New York City and nearly 8,000 through 16 partner schools nationwide modeled after TYWLS.

In 2001, with a vision for making the dream of college a reality for students from underserved communities and first-generation college students, Student Leadership Network launched the co-educational CollegeBound Initiative (CBI), first to support TYWLS of East Harlem's inaugural graduating class. Today, nearly 14,000 students in 25 New York City public schools are impacted by CBI, which places full-time college counselors in schools who, just as in the best private schools, do it all. CBI's Directors of College Counseling support *all* students with college selection, financial aid, scholarship resources, applications, essays, interviews, and so much more. CBI's Director of College Counseling cultivate a college going culture across their schools, working with students and their families as early as the sixth grade. Our average student-to-counselor caseload is 100:1, compared to the national average of 500:1. Since 2001, CBI has helped more than 19,000 students enroll in college. Cumulative college enrollment rate for students who graduate from a CBI partner school is a stunning 87%, with 74% enrolling in four-year colleges. This is well above the City's average college enrollment rate, which was 63% for the graduating class of 2019.

Student Leadership Network's laser focus on high school college access is grounded in compelling research that shows that students from underserved communities are less likely than their more affluent peers to graduate from college. This disparity in college degree attainment is linked to systemic, institutional barriers that disproportionately impact students from underserved communities, particularly students of color, including unequal access to rigorous academic preparation and enrichment opportunities, shortages of qualified college counselors, a lack of opportunities to visit college campuses,

and an overall unfamiliarity with the increasingly complex college admissions and financial aid processes among students and their families.

Additionally, COVID-19's disproportionate impact on communities of color in New York City has widened this pernicious disparity in access to critical educational resources. Many of our students, along with several of our partner schools, reside in communities that were among the hardest hit by COVID-19 in New York City. The critical support provided by CBI's Directors of College Counseling ensures that students from these communities earn college degrees, leading to better career and economic prospects for themselves, their families, and their communities in the aftermath of COVID-19 and resulting economic crisis. Students are also supported by our College Transition Coach (CTC) program, which is a peer-to-peer supported, high school-to-college transition initiative designed to maximize graduating senior's direct enrollment rates and mitigate the challenges posed by the "summer melt" in addition to new challenges posed by extended time social distancing and virtual learning. Finally, our collaborations with college success partners (e.g., Bottom Line) and CUNY programs (e.g., SEEK, College Discovery, ASAP) connect students to extended support programs through their years in college. Partnerships such as these support more than 2,500 CBI alumni attending CUNY.

In addition to our proven college access programming, SL Network continues to support students after their high school graduation through our Alumni Engagement Team, which supports students' persistence through their postsecondary plans via college and career events (now virtual) and targeted programming to see them through to their college graduation day. This critical task has become increasingly urgent as COVID-19 has created new obstacles and disrupted many of our students' future plans. Our team deepens collaborations with external organizations, leverages college connections, and taps into innovative technology platforms that help develop skills and provide opportunities for students to succeed in college and beyond, focusing on the critical transition between students' first and second year in college. The Alumni Engagement Team utilizes social media platforms, text messaging, web applications, and other technology mechanisms to provide guidance and support for students to accomplish key milestones that lead to college access, persistence, and graduation. To this end, we have established a formal partnership with uAspire, a Boston-based non-profit organization focused on removing barriers to college affordability. Our partnership allows us to leverage the expertise of uAspire's first in class college affordability and advising service that utilizes the text messages as a means to guide students through essential information and key tasks in financial aid processing during high school, the summer before college, and through college. Postsecondary degree attainment transforms the trajectory for students and affords them access to higher-paying jobs that lead to economic and social advancement.

COVID-19 has a drastic impact on the college application and admissions process. Factors including seniors and their families contemplating whether or not to go away from college, job loss due to COVID-19 impacting financial aid, and the lack of clarity on whether college campuses will open for in-person learning or operate virtually, impacts our students deeply. Despite CBI's ability to maintain our strong college-going outcomes for the class of 2020, we anticipate a deeper impact on the class of 2021 who will likely not get to sit for a standardized test, visit a college campus in their senior year, or apply to as many schools due to new competing priorities and virtual learning fatigue. Our work is now more important than ever, and Student Leadership Network is committed to meeting our students' and partner schools' needs during this incredibly challenging time. Our CBI team has codified their learnings and virtual college counseling best practices to create a suite of virtual resources to support students. Resources have been developed in each area of CBI standard programming: early college and career awareness, college awareness, test preparation, application support, enrollment (including financial aid prep and application completion), and training/faculty professional development.



Our successful programming would not be possible without our strong and exemplary partnerships with the New York City Department of Education and the New York City Council. We sincerely appreciate the New York City Council's investment in Student Leadership Network's CollegeBound Initiative program and look forward to continuing to partner with both the Council and the Department of Education to ensure that *all* students have the resources that will propel them to achieve their dreams.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony, and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.





**New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
Preliminary Budget Hearing**

**Submitted by Melanie Kruvelis, Senior Manager of Policy and Advocacy, Young Invincibles
Wednesday, March 3, 2021**

Good afternoon. My name is Melanie Kruvelis, and I am the Senior Manager of Policy and Advocacy at Young Invincibles. Young Invincibles is a policy and advocacy non-profit dedicated to elevating young adults in the political process and expanding economic opportunities for our generation. We work with young adults to ensure that our voices are at the table when it comes to higher education, health care, workforce development, and civic engagement. I want to thank the New York City Council and the Committee on Higher Education for the opportunity to submit testimony for today's hearing.

Mayor Bill de Blasio's Fiscal Year 2022 preliminary budget makes devastating cuts to programs that serve the city's low-income college students. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, New York City's college students faced hunger, homelessness, and precarious living situations. In 2019, a survey of CUNY undergraduates found that 14 percent experience homelessness in a given year — even higher than the alarming rates of student homelessness in New York City's public school system. The same survey found that half experienced food insecurity. That means before the pandemic, more than 35,000 CUNY students didn't know where they'd sleep at night, and more than 115,000 students struggled to get enough healthy food to eat.

Now a full year into the pandemic, New York City's students are struggling more than ever to meet their most essential needs. An April 2020 survey from CUNY School of Public Health researchers found that 48 percent of CUNY students were afraid of losing their housing. More than 17 percent said they had skipped meals due to a lack of food. Lacking these essential needs is harming students' mental health: the same researchers found that financial stress was strongly linked to anxiety and depression. The consequences of not addressing these issues is dire. Students cannot succeed in college when they have unstable housing, no food, and poor mental health.



While many in the City government, including the Mayor himself, are calling for an equitable recovery from COVID-19, the fact is that the preliminary FY22 budget does not deliver justice for the city's low-income, Black, brown, and immigrant students. Take, for instance, the preliminary budget's call to cut funding from CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (CUNY ASAP). CUNY ASAP is New York's true free college program, and provides students with free tuition, textbook support, individualizing counseling, and other supports. A national model, CUNY ASAP doubles graduation rates, and helps low-income students find a pathway to college completion and stability. CUNY ASAP is precisely the type of program we need to ensure an equitable recovery for New York City. Yet, the FY22 budget calls for a \$10-million cut to CUNY ASAP — on top of a proposed cut from the state of \$2.5 million. **We urge the City Council to reject the Mayor's proposed \$10-million cut to CUNY ASAP, and restore full funding for the program.**

We are also concerned about further cuts to programs that support low-income students, as well as critical omissions from the preliminary budget, including:

- **A \$2.9-million cut to CUNY Tutor Corps:** The Mayor's preliminary budget proposes \$2.9 million in cuts to CUNY Tutor Corps, a program that provides paid work experience for CUNY STEM students to tutor NYC DOE students.
- **No funding for the CUNY Food Insecurity Program:** The Mayor's preliminary budget did not include funding for the Food Insecurity Program, which provides students with \$400 towards groceries and meals.
- **No funding for CUNY's Citizenship Now program:** We also urge the Council to restore funding for CUNY's Citizenship Now program, which provides free legal services to New Yorkers applying for U.S. citizenship.

We urge the Council to restore funding to these critical initiatives that keep CUNY students enrolled, employed, fed, and supported during this crisis.

Finally, as young people across New York made it very clear in last year's budget negotiations, there is no justice in any City budget that cuts funding for CUNY while making no cuts to the NYPD's massive budget. At the March 2, 2021 Committee on Finance's budget hearing, analysis from the [City Council's Finance Division](#) revealed that the Mayor did not hear New Yorkers calls for justice, and instead *increased* the NYPD's budget by four percent in his FY22 preliminary



budget proposal — while *reducing* the City’s support of CUNY by four percent. As more CUNY students face hunger, homelessness, mental health issues, and another semester of remote learning, it is unthinkable to put more money towards police than the more than quarter-million students attending CUNY. We urge the Council to reject the Mayor’s dangerous budget proposal, and defund NYPD by at least \$1 billion. These funds should be reallocated to higher education, youth programming, and essential social services.