

**Testimony of Chancellor James B. Milliken
The City University of New York**

**Joint Senate and Assembly Legislative Public Hearing on
The 2018 – 2019 State Executive Budget Proposal: Topic “Higher Education”**

Tuesday, January 23, 2018

Good morning, Chairs Young, Weinstein, LaValle, and Glick, members of the Finance and Ways and Means and Higher Education Committees, staff and guests. I am James B. Milliken, the Chancellor of The City University of New York. A number of my senior colleagues are with me today and I will ask Matt Sapienza, Senior Vice Chancellor and Chief Financial Officer and Judy Bergtraum, Vice Chancellor for Facilities Planning, Construction and Management, to join me at the table at the conclusion of my opening remarks.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear today and discuss the goals and priorities of The City University of New York, the exciting progress we’re making as a result of your investments, the leadership of our Board of Trustees, and our strategic plans, and to address any questions you may have. This is an especially important time for this discussion, and I’m pleased to be able to share the many reasons for our excitement and optimism at CUNY. Despite the skepticism expressed about the value of higher education in some circles, there has never been a time when education beyond high school was more critical for individual success and the state’s economic competitiveness. And notwithstanding the many serious challenges public higher education is facing across the country, New York has much to be proud of.

The return on the public’s investment in CUNY is exceptional and, as I will discuss, it is getting better. Governor Cuomo has staked out an important position of national leadership for New York’s public universities with the Excelsior scholarship program, and the

investment made in that groundbreaking program is being rewarded at CUNY. That, together with this Legislature's demonstrated commitment to higher education, especially your support for CUNY's historic mission of accessibility, inclusion, and high quality, is a good part of what makes me optimistic about the future of what we unabashedly call "the greatest urban university in the world."

Nothing is more important to the economic strength of our state and the vitality of our society than a talented workforce to attract investment and good jobs and to foster the innovation necessary to remain competitive. The knowledge economy of the 21st century offers an array of exceptional career opportunities, but the most promising jobs increasingly require a college degree. That trend is only accelerating. If you want to succeed in the economy of the future, you have to succeed in higher education.

The high-growth industries that are shaping our future need not just employees with technological skills, they need a workforce that is intellectually nimble, able to collaborate effectively and able to function well in different cultures and languages. In short, they need talent, skills and diversity. Those are the hallmarks of the college degrees that we offer our outstanding students at CUNY and there is increasing evidence that businesses appreciate and are seeking and rewarding employees with those characteristics. It is a win-win because the city and state prosper and our students realize their ambitions.

As many of you know, a landmark study by a group of respected economists released last year demonstrated that CUNY is an unsurpassed engine of social mobility, lifting almost six times as many lower income students to the middle class and beyond as all the Ivy-plus colleges combined. CUNY colleges held six of the top ten slots in the rankings of the institutions that did the most to advance the economic position of their graduates. Importantly, most of the students who benefit from a CUNY education are from underrepresented and immigrant groups, bringing much energy and creativity to our city and state. With our new strategies and the support of the Governor and the legislature, we are only improving on that record and, in the process, closing the troubling inequality gap.

If you stop for a moment to take a look at some of these students who benefit from educational opportunity I think you will agree with me that it is nothing short of inspiring. When a young mother, who is undocumented, is close to giving up on her education after high school until she is assisted by CUNY in winning a private scholarship, and then goes on to become valedictorian of her Bronx Community College class, I'm inspired. Or when Faiza Masood, the daughter of immigrants who came to this country to give their children opportunity, won a coveted Marshall Scholarship, I'm inspired. And just recently, when Thamara Jean, the daughter of Haitian immigrants and a Hunter student in the Macaulay Honors College, was named a Rhodes Scholar, CUNY's eighth, I'm inspired. As the Daily News said of Ms. Jean's honor, "More quintessentially American, more quintessentially New York, it does not get." They might have added, "more quintessentially CUNY, it does not get."

Essential to any success at CUNY is an outstanding faculty, and I want to thank you for your support in helping CUNY recruit and retain our world-class scholars. Their commitment to the CUNY mission and their passion are essential to motivating our students and nurturing their achievements in every imaginable field. Last year, a professor at the College of Staten Island won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry, the second time in three years that the coveted award has gone to a CUNY scholar. Annie Baker, at Hunter College's MFA program in playwriting, won a MacArthur "genius" award, which, by the way, follows the MacArthur for our Brooklyn College professor, Ben Lerner, a poet and scholar. These are some of the reasons why the New York Times called CUNY "Poetry U," just one in a long list of accolades for our faculty.

I am particularly proud of the fact that, since I arrived at CUNY, we have strengthened our faculty considerably while increasing diversity. Almost 44 percent of the new faculty hires last year were from underrepresented groups, a continuation of a significant upward trend. The result is that the percentage of minority faculty members has reached an historic high of 36 percent. This is a critical goal in CUNY's strategic plan and the percentage will continue to grow due to the initiatives we have put in place. In addition, we're pleased to have strengthened our faculty over the last few years by significantly improving terms for

adjunct employees, through negotiations with the PSC. Key gains include health insurance for eligible adjuncts and greater job security through three-year appointments for long-serving adjuncts. The state and the city provided important support for these steps. In addition, we have provided across-the-board salary increases through collective bargaining, and detailed eligibility requirements for tuition remission.

The investment that the Governor has proposed in his Executive Budget will help further advance our strategies. I want to share some of what we see as compelling evidence that the investment in CUNY is paying off tremendously. We graduated a record 52,000 students in the last academic year and then enjoyed record freshman enrollment this past fall, more than 38,000 students, and applications are up eleven percent again this year. This is an important result of programs that widen access, accelerate student readiness and promote timely graduation.

One of the most important elements of our strategy is the adoption of a university-wide culture of completion. Nothing could be more important to student success and I am very pleased to report that the percentage of full-time freshmen taking a full course load, 15 credits a semester, has jumped to 41 percent from 31 percent just a year ago. This is a major step towards accelerating graduation rates, which the Excelsior scholarship program encourages.

Our current graduation rates have risen to historic highs over the past several years, but we aren't finished yet. We are on track to meet our ambitious goal to double—yes, double—our community college graduation rates and increase by ten percentage points our senior college graduate rates. Those figures demonstrate national leadership and are being watched across the country. CUNY's progress has a disproportionate impact on students from low income, immigrant and underrepresented groups and underscore CUNY's position as the leading engine of social and economic mobility.

Another critical student success initiative in the strategic plan is our focus on the Career Success of CUNY students and graduates. The program ensures that our students get the critical thinking and problem-solving skills that they will need to launch promising careers. We are rapidly scaling up public/private partnerships and internship programs with employers in the private, nonprofit, and public sectors to ensure that our graduates obtain important work experience and grow their professional networks as they start their careers.

Over the next three years we will significantly increase access to internships for both community and senior college students in industries from healthcare and finance to information technology by working directly with hundreds of employers in NYC's key economic sectors. We will also increase the number of graduates placed in full-time jobs that offer competitive wages in critical economic sectors and occupations including life sciences, data sciences, community healthcare, and digital marketing. These successes are a tribute to the shared commitment of faculty, staff, alumni and employers who have embraced our shared goals. Your continued support helps make this possible.

Turning specifically to the Governor's Executive Budget, there is much to applaud. It proposes a \$70 million increase for our senior colleges, an important investment that supports critical areas, including mandatory fringe benefit cost increases and funding for the exciting initiative supporting the development and use of free online textbooks and course materials.

The Executive Budget also includes adoption of the DREAM Act in New York State, which would extend financial aid to CUNY's many undocumented students, a well-deserving group that brings ambition, talent and hard work to our campuses and our state. Everyone is well aware of the intense national debate over renewing the DACA program and the obvious impact it has on the students who benefit from it. You may not, however, be familiar with the evidence demonstrating how well these students do when support is extended, which benefits our city and state.

Because they are not eligible for the same public support their high school classmates receive, CUNY and other universities have worked hard to find other ways to support their education. We are fortunate to enjoy a robust partnerships with TheDream.US, the brainchild of Don Graham, the former chairman of the Washington Post. Since 2015, a total of 775 of CUNY Dreamers have earned these generous scholarships, more than any other university in the country. By all measures, these students excel. Their retention rates – the percentage who continue their studies semester after semester -- have consistently been above 90 percent, higher than comparable numbers for their American citizen classmates. Of the 474 Dream.US scholars enrolled at CUNY last year, 70 percent maintained a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher. These students give back, too. They are mentors, leaders in student government, club officers, researchers—and valedictorians. And they have gone on, after graduation, to do the jobs that make our city and state work, in health care, finance, IT and the legal profession. It is heartening in light of the lack of support for these deserving students in Washington that Governor Cuomo and New York are in a position to take a lead with the adoption of the Dream Act.

The Governor’s budget also includes the planned second phase of the Excelsior Scholarship. Importantly, the income eligibility threshold will increase, giving New Yorkers with household incomes of up to \$110,000 the opportunity to apply. The state executive budget includes \$118 million to support free tuition for an estimated 27,000 students.

Another welcome element of the Executive Budget is the Governor’s No Student Goes Hungry Initiative. Our own research demonstrates that food insecurity makes it more difficult for CUNY students to remain in school. Researchers at the CUNY School of Public Health have demonstrated that even when controlling for race/ethnicity and household income, food insecurity is associated with lower GPAs and more frequent leaves of absence among CUNY undergraduates.

About half of CUNY campuses now have food pantries in place, but demand exceeds capacity and the addition of the remaining colleges will make a difference in the health and academic success of our lowest income students. New York would be the first state to

require every public campus to have a food pantry—another important demonstration of commitment to access and student success on the broadest levels.

With regard to the capital budget, we are especially pleased with the \$284 million investment in critical maintenance for senior colleges. It is a necessary investment in many aging facilities that are very well-used by a growing population of CUNY students. The same is true of the \$49 million in matching funds for community colleges. There is great demand for these funds on our campuses and I am confident the funds will continue to make a significant difference.

In addition to addressing the effects of age, high usage and wear, our physical plant is in need of expansion. Our 24 institutions are open seven days a week, with classes scheduled throughout the day and most evenings. We have 274,000 degree students and more than 250,000 students who are enrolled over the span of a year in continuing and professional studies. There are 40,000 more CUNY students using our facilities today than a decade ago. In other words, the equivalent of adding a university about the size of the University of Michigan. We're pleased with the increases in enrollment and the exceptional opportunities we provide, but it does present challenges. Our request includes important capital priorities at Brooklyn College, Hunter, Medgar Evers, College of Staten Island, York and more. Many of these are requests that would improve science and health-professions facilities, which are essential for providing great career paths for our students in a thriving New York industry and help meet the medical, science and technology needs of New York City. We recognize the budget challenges faced by the state, and we will continue to explore new ways to address our facilities needs.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees and the administrative leadership at CUNY, I want to express our gratitude for the leadership and support of the Governor and the Legislature for the investments that support the critical programs of The City University of New York. Those investments are helping make us an even more powerful and effective beacon of opportunity for New Yorkers and advance our momentum. Thank you for your commitment to CUNY. I look forward to addressing your questions.