

New York State Senate Committee on Education Committee  
Maintaining Quality, Equity & Affordability in Public Higher Education throughout the  
Pandemic and Beyond  
October 25, 2021

Testimony of Dr. Daisy Cocco De Filippis, President  
Hostos Community College, The City University of New York

Dear Chair Stavisky and members of the Committee:

I am Dr. Daisy Cocco De Filippis, President of Hostos Community College located in the South Bronx. First, let me thank you for inviting me to testify at today's hearing. The future of Hostos, of CUNY, and CUNY's community colleges is of the utmost importance to me, as I know it is to the Governor and this committee. I know I am among friends and allies as I deliver the following remarks about Hostos.

A colleague once told me that pedagogy is about love, you have to love what you teach. To teach in the South Bronx is very much a labor of love. The history of Hostos is the history of poor Latino and other minority communities struggling for higher education and social mobility.

Hostos takes great pride in being inclusive of everyone. It is an immigrant college with a student population that is 58% Hispanic, 36% black and approximately two-thirds female. We also have a very diverse faculty, at 58% diversity, and a staff that is 85% diverse.

A total of 86% of Hostos students graduate debt free because of significant support from the State and Hostos support helping navigate students through the financial landscape of paying for college. Forty-nine percent are first in their family to attend college, 77% come from households with an annual income of \$30,000 or less, and 90% receive financial aid. We also have a number of in-house scholarships available for our DACA students who are not eligible for federal financial aid.

As these data illustrate, a typical Hostos student is a young woman of color, likely the first in her family to attend college, and needs financial aid to afford college. These are our students, your constituents, and the people we serve.

As for CUNY overall, a survey of students found that during the height of the pandemic 46% of CUNY students experienced food insecurity, 57% housing insecurity, and 14% experienced homelessness. I want to take a moment to tell you how Hostos Community College helped our students experiencing food insecurity, which had always been an issue for Hostos students but got worse during the pandemic.

We kept the Hostos food pantry open throughout, and at the height of the pandemic it was open five days a week, giving students grocery bags to take home dozens of meals every day. The

pantry made appointments for COVID-safe, noncontact food pickups with 2,915 students from March of 2020 through the height of the pandemic, and because students got to take home meals not just for themselves but for family members to last for one or more days, the number of meals served measures somewhere in the tens of thousands.

Through all of this, the hardships and heartaches caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, I am pleased to report that Hostos had 1,225 graduating students for the 2020-2021 academic year. This reflects the hard work and dedication of the Hostos community in reaching out to students to keep them engaged, the short-term mental health counseling and on-campus student support services we offer, the loaner devices distributed to students to make the transition to online learning, and the financial support we received from the State, city, and federal governments.

It is no secret that enrollment has been down at community colleges as a result of COVID-19 everywhere across the nation, including Hostos. I am grateful that, for the most part, our continuing students have stayed with us. These are students who were already invested in their education and engaged with the college prior to the start of the pandemic. But enrollment of freshmen students has been greatly diminished.

The pandemic has created a multitude of reasons why a community college-bound student might put their education on hold: the need to work, family responsibilities, the challenges of online learning, to name a few. It is therefore more important than ever that we put out a positive message that we are able to meet the new and changing needs of our students.

The economy is slowly rebounding. More and more people are getting vaccinated, which means that we can expect to see job growth and increased economic activity in the coming years. Although enrollment has dipped because of the pandemic, enrollment at Hostos was steadily trending upwards for years prior to 2020. We must be ready to meet increased demand as enrollment rises to pre-pandemic levels.

Emerging from the pandemic, we have strong programs in healthcare professions, engineering and other STEM fields. These are professions that were projected to be major employment growth sectors even before COVID-19.

The Bronx is home to four major hospitals, and thus there are many job opportunities for our graduates of allied health programs. Hostos also places a priority on training students in STEM fields, as does CUNY, because these are the fields where the well-paying jobs of tomorrow will be found. Additionally, our students come from the community, and when they graduate they stay and use the skills and education they received at Hostos in our community.

Education is the key to success and socioeconomic mobility. Young people need to be trained to compete in a New York City market that is not just a regional economic center but also a global city. To succeed in this new world, they need education. The students at Hostos leave with the knowledge and job skills needed to pursue careers that would otherwise not be open to them, or to go onto a four-year program if they so choose.

I thank the committee for its time, and I will answer any questions you might have.