

Testimony of Interim Chancellor Vita C. Rabinowitz
The City University of New York
Joint Senate and Assembly Legislative Public Hearing on
The 2019 – 2020 Executive Budget Proposal: Topic “Higher Education”
Monday, January 28, 2019

Good morning Chairs Stavisky, Kruger, Glick and Weinstein, members of the Finance, Ways and Means, and Higher Education Committees, staff and guests. I am Vita Rabinowitz, Interim Chancellor of The City University of New York. I am joined by Matt Sapienza, Senior Vice Chancellor and Chief Financial Officer and Judy Bergtraum, Senior Vice Chancellor for Facilities Planning, Construction and Management. Interim Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Christopher Rosa and University Associate Provost for Academic Affairs, David Crook and others have also joined me today.

I am delighted to share with you today some recent progress at CUNY, and to discuss priorities and goals for our future. I am then happy to answer any questions you may have.

Let me start by thanking Governor Cuomo and all of our funding partners in the State and City for enabling us to deliver results for our students and the citizens of New York. I would also like to thank the CUNY Board of Trustees for their tireless efforts on behalf of our students, faculty, and staff.

This is an exciting time in the University’s history, one marked by national acclaim for our senior and community colleges, prestigious awards for our students and faculty, and a remarkable expansion of our physical plant.

The records we have set in freshman enrollment—almost 40,000 more new freshmen in fall 2018, a rise of 4% over the previous year—is a testament to the quality of our institutions and the excellent outcomes our graduates can expect.

Our budget request contains two important components: mandatory cost increases which form the core of our budget request and strategic investments in four areas, three centered around our students' needs and evidence-based practice and the fourth, strengthening the University's infrastructure.

To support our mandatory cost increases, we are pleased that the Governor's Executive budget promises an increase of 3% for our senior colleges and includes \$47.7 million in funding for fringe benefits. The modest senior college tuition increase that we planned for under the predictable tuition policy is also included, generating an additional \$31.3 million. I want to take this opportunity to highlight our request for a multi-year plan to close the TAP Gap, the difference between the maximum TAP award and tuition. For community colleges, we have proposed a base aid increase of \$250 per student for community colleges which will enable us to keep tuition flat.

We are committed to making the University's operations more efficient so that we can redirect funds to strategic investments. CUNY is on track after two years of our four-year plan to realize \$75 million in administrative efficiencies. Also, we will continue to work with our private funding partners to enhance their contributions to the University.

Our first category of strategic investments will expand upon proven approaches that advance student academic success and degree completion. As the economy rapidly changes, completing degrees of value will remain essential for our students to thrive in their chosen careers. We propose to expand our signature Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) student success program, its new four-year counterpart, Accelerate, Complete and Engage (ACE) and support other academic momentum initiatives that together are accelerating progress to completion, raising graduation rates and, crucially, closing racial achievement gaps. Growing our rigorous and proven early college programs will give more high school students college credit while still in high school, improving their chances of ultimately earning college degrees. Expanding and supporting the growth of a diverse body of full-time faculty is essential to all academic success initiatives because we all know that outstanding teachers, researchers and mentors really matter. We also ask that you continue full funding for the SEEK and CD college

opportunity programs which have proven an important initiative for so many students' horizons at CUNY over the years.

Second, we need to make sure that students do not become sidetracked in their academic pursuits by issues like food and housing insecurity, unmet mental and physical health needs, the demands of childcare and other basic needs. We propose to expand to all senior campuses the powerful initiative, Single Stop, which connects students and their families to untapped government benefits and other kinds of assistance. To date, Single Stop sites have served more than 77,000 students at Community Colleges and John Jay College, helping them access public benefits, legal services, financial counseling and tax refunds valued at \$183 million. We are also requesting resources to increase availability of campus childcare, as many of our 16 centers have waiting lists, and to address student food insecurity and homelessness, both unfortunate trends in our student body.

More specifically, almost 80 percent of CUNY's first-time freshmen come from the NYC Department of Education where they are eligible to receive breakfast and lunch at no cost. Upon entering CUNY, students must pay in-full for their meals. While the University has made a commitment to maintain food pantries and provide food vouchers at the colleges, there is much more to be done. With additional funding, we would develop a program to provide swipe cards to be used at University cafeterias throughout the year.

Third, we propose to invest in CUNY Works, a set of integrated, bold new steps to ensure our students are well-positioned to thrive in today's changing world of work. We will scale up CUNY's new workforce center to engage employers across 10 high-growth sectors and translate their needs into career exploration and development, hard and soft skills training, and job placement for our students. Similarly, we plan to grow the availability of paid internships and expand experiential and service learning for our students. We have seen how transformative programs like Service Corps Puerto Rico have been for our students, and we know that our students need experiential learning and paid internships to enable them to compete for higher quality first-time jobs.

This category of investments also includes essential support for the CUNY School of Medicine, which opened its doors in fall 2016 and has been from its inception one of the most diverse and inclusive medical schools in the nation. Thirty percent of our medical students are Black and 18% are Latino. We are seeking essential support of \$2.8 million for the Medical School. Also, we ask to continue support for the new CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies which opened as an autonomous school just last fall

Finally let me address the all-important category of CUNY's infrastructure. We appreciate the commitment to CUNY's infrastructure needs with \$444.5 MM of new capital funding including \$284 million investment in critical maintenance for senior colleges and the \$68 million in matching funds for community colleges which will continue to make a significant difference in upgrades or replacements for aging elements of these buildings.

In addition to addressing the effects of age, high usage and wear, our physical plant needs expansion. Our 25 institutions, many serving thousands of students and staff, are open seven days a week, with classes scheduled throughout the day and most evenings. This puts huge strain on our existing facilities. Therefore, we are requesting funding for new buildings to improve science and health-professions facilities, which are essential for our students. We recognize the budget challenges faced by the state, and we will continue to explore new ways to address our facilities' needs.

Thanks to Governor Cuomo and the State legislature, we have been able to meet essential needs of our students at City Tech this fall, where we opened a \$400 million, state of the art academic building with cutting edge technology to train future STEM and allied health professionals. We also opened a beautiful expanded performing arts complex at Brooklyn College, as well as a new academic wing in the 2M Building at the College of Staten Island. We are very proud of these new facilities.

We are also grateful to Governor Cuomo and the legislature for your continued commitment to keeping public higher education affordable, especially in comparison with most other States. CUNY's relatively low tuition, generous financial aid, and the Excelsior scholarship combined

with tax credits to allow 65% of CUNY students to attend tuition-free. In the last academic year nearly 3,300 CUNY students earned this scholarship, and with the higher income limit this year, that number is sure to rise. Excelsior scholars have higher GPAs in spring 2018 than non-Excelsior students (2.83 compared to 2.55) and higher one-year institutional retention rates (79% compared to 67.4%). One more key point about Excelsior, we identified almost 22,000 students who would have qualified for Excelsior in its first year, but for whom other sources of aid, including New York's TAP program, had already covered all of their tuition and fees.

We also appreciate the investments in strategic initiatives like Open Educational Resources and computer science and technology education.

We are delighted that under the DREAM Act, eligible undocumented students will qualify for in-state tuition, TAP and the Excelsior scholarship. At CUNY we estimate that we have thousands of undocumented students, and we applaud the Governor's national leadership on this issue.

In closing, CUNY's strength comes from the extraordinary richness and vibrancy of our community. We are arguably the most diverse university in the nation, if not the world, in all the ways that matter: race, ethnicity, country of origin and languages spoken at home, thought and opinion, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, disability status, and religious affiliation, among others. The broad knowledge, cultural competence, and intellectual and emotional depth borne of this constitution is one of New York's greatest resources. We are on the cutting edge of implementing academic strategies, technologies and programs that help students better navigate the college process and achieve their dreams. We ask for your continued support of our students' and our state's success.

Thank you and I will be happy to address your questions now.