



**TESTIMONY OF NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC ADVOCATE LETITIA JAMES
CUNY BOARD OF TRUSTEES PUBLIC HEARING**

**FEBRUARY 16, 2016
CITY TECH, 300 JAY ST, BROOKLYN, NY**

The City University of New York is the nation's leading urban public university, serving more than 480,000 students at 24 colleges and institutions in New York City. CUNY is an essential part of the fabric of this great city and plays a crucial role in the life and economy of the city and state.

As of 2007, 54 percent of undergraduates and 46 percent of all college students in New York City were attending CUNY.¹ Since the post WWI era, CUNY provided a high quality, tuition-free education to the poor, the working class and the immigrants of New York City. It was an educational portal for many Jewish immigrants who were discriminated against and unable to attend some of the Ivy League universities. Today's CUNY students are three-quarters people of color; they are more than half from families earning less than \$30,000 a year; they are 40 percent immigrants; and 42 percent of them are working while attending school. CUNY serves a diverse student body, especially those students who face economic barriers and are unable to afford private universities.

A CUNY education provides an opportunity for New Yorkers to overcome the economic disparities that challenge and divide our city. That is why CUNY's nearly half-million students deserve an adequately funded university that can afford to offer salaries that will allow it to attract and keep the high-quality faculty and staff its students need.

CUNY faculty and staff salaries have fallen well behind inflation and I strongly support the \$240 million retroactive salary increases needed to ensure fair and affordable agreements with CUNY's labor unions. I also firmly believe we must look closely at the real cost of providing all CUNY workers, from tenured professors to custodial staff, the raises they deserve. If the real cost of wage equity is \$350 million, than that is what we should be paying.

However, in order to ensure that CUNY remains a leading academic light and a driver of New York's economy, we must ensure that it receives funding above and beyond what's needed to pay the University's staff what they are owed. I am extremely troubled by the long-term disinvestment CUNY has experienced over the last eight years. I firmly support the call for an additional \$100 million in funding this year and will fight to ensure that it becomes a reality.

We need to begin paying down what is owed, and the \$100 million is a good place to start. I am also alarmed by the nearly half- billion dollar increase in the City's obligations to CUNY. While the state has wisely budgeted for long overdue raises for CUNY staff, that funding, and more, will essentially come out of the City's coffers.

¹ <http://www.nyc.gov/portal/site/nycgov/menuitem.bfb7c8012ece7ce6a62fa24601c789a0/>



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Letitia James

Since before the 2008 recession, per-student state funding for CUNY has decreased by 17 percent after adjusting for inflation. Meanwhile, students have been asked to pay more each year for tuition, to the tune of an extra \$1,500 by 2022.

Rather than put the onus on the city and CUNY students, the state should enact maintenance of effort legislation and finally pay its fair share. Rather than discussing higher tuition, we should be looking at increasing the maximum TAP grant and further expanding EOP and HEOP Programs that so often help students who are the first in their families to attend college.

While I have been encouraged by recent statements that make clear that this burden may not fall on the city in the final reckoning, I have serious concerns about any plan that would either place an undue burden on the city or gut CUNY's administrative structure. If the final budget will "not cost New York City a penny," when it comes to CUNY, that means absolutely devastating cuts in the place of a necessary increase in funding.

If the City is indeed expected to foot such a substantial portion of the bill, it will be a fundamental upending of state responsibility. Neither outcome is acceptable, and I will stand by your side to ensure that CUNY and its hardworking student body and faculty get the support and resources that they deserve.