
CUNY Rising Alliance



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May 31, 2016

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Leader John J. Flanagan
New York State Senate
Room 330, State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12247

Speaker Carl E. Heastie
New York State Assembly
Room 932, Legislative Office Building
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Governor Cuomo, Leader Flanagan and Speaker Heastie:

Thank you for restoring the State's base line investment of \$485 million in the City University of New York. Without this restoration, CUNY would have been forced to make draconian budget cuts hurting students, faculty and staff. In addition, thank you for passing a one-year tuition freeze. It will offer relief to many poor and working class students who are finding it increasingly difficult to meet the costs of a public higher education. While understanding the importance of these legislative steps, the CUNY Rising Alliance is also clear about the urgent need to address the neglect of basic public investment in CUNY.

Since 2008, the state investment in CUNY's senior colleges has fallen 17 percent per full-time-equivalent students adjusted for inflation. As resources have declined so has the colleges' ability to maintain a quality of education for students. This year's budget will continue this trend of declining state investment in full-time-equivalent students. If state funds are not increased, we risk further deterioration in the quality of education and opportunities for almost 500,000 current students and future generations of inner-city youth. The consequences are clear:

- No retroactive pay for employees or funding for contracts means that fewer faculty are attracted to and more faculty will depart from CUNY, while a growing cohort of part-time

faculty are unable to dedicate additional time and guidance to students outside of their official classroom hours.

- Classes will grow in size, reducing faculty-student interaction, while sections of other courses are cut hindering student capacity to secure the courses needed to graduate on time.
- Fewer academic advisors will be available, and insufficient support services will undermine the colleges' capacity to fully meet the academic challenges faced by many students entering public higher education.

If CUNY is to remain a leading urban public university in the United States, it must have the resources necessary to provide an affordable quality education to poor and working class students, especially students of color. Affordability without the investment necessary to sustain and improve quality is a systematic short-changing of students who come from the poorest communities in NYC.

For these reasons, we urge you to address this unfinished business during this session and in the next budget cycle.

Pass a CUNY contract pay bill: The CUNY Chancellor has stated that the investment needed is \$330 million to provide retroactive pay for 25,000 faculty and professional staff and 10,000 additional CUNY workers. Without viable salaries, CUNY cannot attract or retain high-quality faculty and staff. The result is that full-time faculty are either leaving CUNY or are more difficult to recruit. As well, part-time faculty increasingly needed to fill instructor roles throughout the University are not paid a living wage.

Pass a strong Maintenance of Effort bill: A true Maintenance of Effort (MOE), like the one passed by the Legislature with near unanimous support last year, is necessary to meet critical operating costs for CUNY (e.g. rent, electricity, fringe benefits and collective bargaining increases). Without such a provision to sustain basic operations, funding will not be available to expand and improve academic services. Higher Education Chairs Senator Kenneth LaValle and Assembly member Deborah Glick are sponsoring a new MOE bill (S 7648-A / A10021) which we urge you to make law.

Expand New York's investment in CUNY. We applaud the Governor, Senate and Assembly for agreeing to freeze tuition this year. This is an important step in keeping public higher education in New York State affordable. However, without additional public revenue CUNY will increasingly face harsher choices regarding the size of classes, reduced numbers of sections of classes needed to graduate on time, and greater demands placed on already overstretched support staff. The cumulative impact will be a continuing deterioration of the experience of higher education for CUNY students, faculty and staff.

CUNY is at a tipping point. The failure to reverse long-term disinvestment in CUNY will profoundly impact current and future generations of CUNY students. We value what you have achieved through the budget negotiation process this year. At the same time, the investment necessary to sustain and strengthen the CUNY system has not been made. We believe this is the time for the leadership of New York State to address the basic need and right of CUNY students to a quality and affordable college education. The longer we wait, the greater the danger to public higher education in New York City.

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