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*New York State Legislature Joint Assembly & Senate Legislative Public Hearing:*

*Higher Education: Fiscal Year 2017-2018 State Executive Budget Proposal*

*Testimony of Hercules E. Reid*

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*Vice Chair for Legislative Affairs, CUNY University Student Senate -USS*

*January 23, 2017*

Good afternoon members of the New York State Legislature,

My name is Hercules E. Reid, and I serve as Vice Chair of Legislative Affairs for the CUNY University Student Senate and two-term President of the Student Government Association at City Tech. It is an honor to be here today, for the first time representing a population of people who are depending on me to express their many concerns and aspirations. What I share in common with most of you is that I was elected to represent the people. I am a Senior at New York City College of Technology, a CUNY school in the heart of downtown Brooklyn, sitting in between the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridge. I will be graduating with an Associates and Baccalaureate Degree in Architectural Technology in June of 2017. I'm working to become a licensed architect with hopes of designing and building beautiful, resourceful and sustainable structures, such as the bridges that connect Brooklyn and Manhattan, allowing citizens from all across the state the ability to navigate the CUNY system from Borough of Manhattan Community College to City Tech.

As a student I have directly benefited from my engagement in programs such as the Black Male Initiative (BMI). Through BMI, I was able to save money on textbooks for a few semesters and received the necessary one on one tutoring to pass my remedial and beginning level courses. Without BMI, I know I would not have survived my first academic year at City Tech. Throughout my time in CUNY I have seen and learned about the great benefits of opportunity programs such as BMI, CUNY ASAP, SEEK, CUNY LEADS, which, allows CUNY to not only remain accessible, but also enhances the quality of our education. We encourage you to challenge any divestment in these programs. We humbly ask that you not only challenge any divestment, but also aid in the growth, expansion and investment of these programs.

We are also asking you to support our students by providing more capital investments to support eroding facilities and development of new state-of-the-art centers of education. We are very appreciative of the governor's investment in critical maintenance for our senior colleges. The reality is our students need to be in a safe and comfortable learning environment to excel and succeed. I have sat in classrooms at City Tech with temperatures measured at above 90 degrees. We understand that there are challenges associated with maintaining facilities, however we need an investment, which will allow us to enhance our facilities to meet the needs of society in the next generation. Understanding that some of our students have children, more funding needs to be added from the state and city budget to provide access for child care centers and services on campuses to aid parents pursuing or continuing their degree.

We feel compelled to mention that USS is strongly against any raises in tuition. In the SUNY2020 bill which was passed in 2011, we were promised a Maintenance of Effort provision. Tuition rose for five

years, students paid their fair share, and today, in 2017, we still have not a commitment from the executive budget to support a maintenance of effort.

The Governor's Executive Budget proposes another five years of unaffordable tuition hikes to CUNY students. An increase in tuition of \$250 totaling \$1,250 over the suggested five years. This would bring tuition to \$7,580 at CUNY senior colleges and create a \$2,415 gap between tuition and the maximum TAP award of \$5,165. Raising tuition at CUNY is contradictory to the Governor's plan to make college more affordable.

Legislation like the DREAM Act, which the governor is looking to pass is an example of truly aiding not only the privileged but also the unprivileged and underrepresented population of individuals the state of New York have sworn to represent and protect. We encourage you all to make it your business to pass the Dream Act on behalf of all the "Dreamers" out there striving to be better individuals in society and the community.

When accessibility is mentioned that does not only reference ADA Compliance, but the need for public transportation to commute back and forth to college.

MTA is looking to raise the fare yet again. What serious conversations or legislation has been created to address this on behalf of how it affects access to Higher Education in the City. I have so many friends now who miss class on multiple occasions because they can not afford the fare on that day for class. How many students need a monthly or weekly metrocard due to being a full-time student, yet purchase rides regularly because they cannot afford the full price of a monthly, in fear of not having money to eat throughout the month. We are asking you to consider, but the idea of a reduced fare initiative for college students. Even something as minimal as 30% reduced fare would increase revenue for the MTA due to more students being able to purchase a monthly or weekly metro. We ask that you take action to make transportation affordable. I can directly tell you how hard it is to pay the ever increasing cost of rent, tuition, food, textbooks, and an ever increasing metrocard. If we thought what we were requesting was unreasonable or unfathomable, I would not be here speaking with so much conviction. You all are the people that can make or break Higher Education not only for the present, but also for the future.

In addition to what my colleague mentioned the also, The State Education Law 6201 Legislative findings and intent reads that "Only the strongest commitment to the special needs of an urban constituency justifies the legislature's support of an independent and unique structure for the university. Activities at the city university campuses must be undertaken in a spirit which recognizes and responds to the imperative need for affirmative action and the positive desire to have city university personnel reflect the diverse communities which comprise the people of the city and state of New York."