

12

Testimony of Executive Director Henry Garrido

District Council 37 – AFSCME

Joint Legislative Public Hearings on the

2016-2017 Executive Budget Proposal

Higher Education

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Legislative Office Building

Hearing Room B

Albany, New York

Testimony of Henry Garrido, Executive Director, District Council 37, AFSCME, AFL-CIO Regarding State Funding for The City University of New York (CUNY)

Good afternoon. My name is Henry Garrido. I'm the Executive Director of District Council 37, AFSCME, AFL-CIO. I represent 122,000 dedicated public employees including some 10,000 employees of The City University of New York (CUNY). I'm here today in support of our members working at CUNY, dedicated public servants working in a variety of white collar and blue collar titles. Their hard work and dedication is vital to the operations and maintenance of CUNY facilities and to the administrative duties involved in educating hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers striving to improve their lives and opportunities through a CUNY education.

In January, Gov. Andrew Cuomo dropped a bombshell on CUNY by declaring his intention to shift \$485 million in funding obligations from the State of New York to the City. For decades, the State has been CUNY's single biggest funder, providing 46 percent of the system's operating budget primarily for the Senior Colleges. Tuition and fees are the second largest source of funding (roughly 44 percent), with New York City contributing the remaining 10 percent. Gov. Cuomo has provided no credible justification for this proposal. The State took on its funding obligation in the midst of the City's fiscal crisis in the 1970s, the Governor believes those costs should be shifted back to the City now that it has returned to full financial health.

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Mayor Bill de Blasio and budget watchdogs alike have questioned the Governor's proposal, and have called on the State to maintain its historic level of support for CUNY. Burdening the City with new and unexpected costs will destabilize the long term funding of CUNY, a main source of economic growth and upward mobility for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers.

Gov. Cuomo has also proposed to set aside \$240 million in the State's fiscal year 2017 budget to fund collective bargaining increases for CUNY employees who have not had a raise since 2008. We support this proposal and want to see it remain in New York State's budget. These monies will allow CUNY and the Unions to reach a fair and equitable contract settlement.

We are, however, deeply disappointed that the Governor chose to exclude CUNY employees from his plan to establish a \$15 per hour minimum wage for public employees in New York. Thousands of DC 37 members employed by CUNY make less than \$15 per hour and have not received a wage increase since 2008. Employees of New York State, New York City, and the State University of New York will all see their minimum wage rise to \$15 per hour in the coming years. CUNY workers are the only public employees in the entire State who have been left out. Their exclusion is unjust and must be remedied as soon as possible.

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Finally, we call on Gov. Cuomo to reverse his position on maintenance of effort regarding State funding for CUNY. Last December, the Governor vetoed a bill passed by the State Legislature that would have funded increasing operational costs and reasonable wage increases without increasing tuition for CUNY students and their families. By reducing its level of financial commitment to CUNY, the State has done harm to one of the most effective engines for growing the economy and the path to the middle class for hundreds of thousands of New York City residents, many of them immigrants and people of color.

We urge the support of the Legislature in restoring fair and equitable funding to CUNY. Thank you for your time today. I will be glad to answer any questions you may have.

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