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Testimony of Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez
The City University of New York
Joint Senate and Assembly Fiscal Committees Budget Hearing on
The 2020 – 2021 Executive Budget Proposal: Topic Higher Education
Tuesday, February 4, 2020

Good morning, Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Stavisky and Glick, and members of the Senate Finance, Assembly Ways and Means, and the Senate and Assembly Higher Education committees, staff and guests. I am Félix Matos Rodríguez, Chancellor of The City University of New York. I am joined this morning by Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost José Luis Cruz and Senior Vice Chancellor and Chief Financial Officer Matthew Sapienza.

I am now in my tenth month as Chancellor, so this is my first appearance to provide testimony before this body. For those of you who don't know me, I am a historian by training and started my CUNY career 20 years ago as a professor at Hunter College and director of its Center for Puerto Rican Studies. I later served for five years as president of Hostos Community College and then five years as president of Queens College.

After two decades in a variety of roles on several CUNY campuses, I am honored to oversee the premier and largest urban public university in the United States, serving 500,000 students, 20,000 faculty and 25,000 staff at our 11 four-year-colleges, seven community colleges and seven graduate and professional schools. On behalf of the entire CUNY community, I want to thank Governor Cuomo, the State Senate, and the State Assembly for your past support, which has enabled CUNY to deliver strong results for our students and the citizens of New York.

I am pleased to share with you some of our important recent achievements and to outline our priorities, plans and goals for the coming fiscal year and beyond.

In my first year as Chancellor, I have built an exceptional leadership team of experienced and diverse professionals who are representative of the students and the city we serve. In addition to the two members of my leadership team sitting with me, let me introduce you to two others who are here today. Sitting in the audience are Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer Hector Batista; and Senior Vice Chancellor for Institutional Affairs and Strategic Advancement and Special Counsel Glenda Grace.

My Administration will also have the rare opportunity to shape the future of CUNY leadership for years to come. We have nine presidential vacancies, and yesterday I named the first of those nine. The Board of Trustees approved a new president for Baruch College, Dr. S. David Wu. The provost and executive vice president of George Mason University, Dr. Wu is an accomplished scholar who makes history by becoming the first Asian-American president of a CUNY school. I expect to make about half a dozen presidential appointments this year.

At a time of growing inequality, CUNY has become a national leader in promoting upward social and economic mobility. In 2019, six CUNY colleges placed in the top 25 nationally on CollegeNET's 2019 Social Mobility Index, with Baruch College ranking Number One for a fifth straight year. CUNY also dominated both the Forbes and Wall Street Journal's "Best-Value" college rankings.

Our history of delivering high-quality, affordable education and promoting social mobility help explain why freshman enrollment rose 3 percent this past fall, countering the national trend. It was part of a 17 percent increase since 2010 — a decade in which freshman enrollment for both public and private universities nationwide remained largely flat.

Also in my first year, we made a vital investment in the future with our historic agreement with our largest union, the Professional Staff Congress, which provided well-earned increases for our faculty and, perhaps most notably, reaffirmed the importance of adjunct faculty — not only with substantial pay increases but with provisions that advanced our efforts to further integrate them into academic and campus life. With these advances we are blazing a trail for higher education nationwide.

We have also started to identify key priority areas that establish a foundation for a bold vision for CUNY over the next 10 years. We will be laying out our ideas in the coming year with input from all our stakeholders. But even before then, we will get a head start with moves that increase our focus on pedagogy and improve the craft of teaching, and others that expand career-engagement initiatives so that CUNY students have the same opportunities for internships and career paths that young people from more affluent families have.

At the same time, we have a renewed drive to expand our sources of revenue for CUNY. This approach is aligned with our belief that CUNY, the State and the City share an obligation to the future for all New Yorkers. To that end, we are proposing partnerships with the State and the City, along with the private sector and philanthropic community to tackle the daunting economic, environmental, and social challenges ahead.

We are pleased that the Governor's Executive Budget includes an increase of \$24.3 million in funding for employee fringe benefits and continues current-year funding levels for our critical

opportunity programs, SEEK and College Discovery. The budget proposal also continues to include \$4 million for Open Educational Resources, which is funding that we have leveraged to significantly reduce the costs of textbooks for our students. Our students saved \$49 million in textbook costs from 2017-2019, which amounts to students saving \$7 for every \$1 invested by New York State.

We are also grateful that the Executive Budget proposes to raise the income-eligibility cap for the Excelsior Scholarship and that it would make more community college students eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, or SNAP. The Governor's budget moves us closer to a future in which quality higher education is accessible to all low- and middle-income New Yorkers at no cost, and we thank him for his leadership.

For our community colleges, we are very thankful that the Legislature has supported base aid increases in recent budget cycles. The University seeks your help again.

I would now like to take a few minutes to address tuition. The capacity to adapt and plan ahead is critical to effective leadership, and we welcome the flexibility that the Governor's proposal to extend the Predictable Tuition Policy through 2025 gives us. The current proposed tuition increase of \$100 per semester would generate \$36 million for the senior colleges for the next fiscal year.

Students who are in the most need will have any additional out-of-pocket tuition costs significantly defrayed or covered completely by New York State's generous financial aid programs – TAP, Excelsior, SEEK, College Discovery, the Peralta DREAM Act – along with Federal Pell grants.

We are proud of our affordability and value we are able to offer our students: Two out of three CUNY undergraduates do not pay for tuition out of pocket, and three out of four of our graduates leave debt free. As such, even with the proposed adjustments, CUNY's tuition will remain of high value, even as it will continue to be much lower than other university systems throughout the country.

As I mentioned, CUNY has earned high regard as a national model in promoting social and economic mobility. For it to remain so in a rapidly changing world, the University must maintain our ability to innovate and serve our core mission. With the continued support of the Governor and you, I am confident that we can do so.

Regarding the University's capital program, we appreciate the Governor's Executive Budget commitment to CUNY's infrastructure needs, including its \$284 million investment in critical maintenance for senior colleges and the \$64 million in matching funds for community colleges.

These will continue to make a significant difference in upgrades or replacements for aging, mission-critical elements of these buildings. We are excited by the opportunities offered by Governor Cuomo's proposal for a 2-for-1 capital matching program, which offers a unique opportunity for our senior colleges to leverage private funds to generate state support for new building initiatives.

Thanks to the Governor and the State legislature, a year ago we were able to open a state-of-the-art academic complex at City Tech in Downtown Brooklyn, with cutting edge technology to train future STEM and allied health professionals. We have also opened a beautiful arts complex at Brooklyn College, as well as a new academic wing at the College of Staten Island. We are very proud of these new facilities.

As this nation's largest urban university, which has, as previously mentioned, an educational footprint that spans 25 academic institutions, we take seriously the responsibility of environmental stewardship. We know that higher education plays a key role in shaping a sustainable society, not only by preparing our students for careers that address climate change but by example. That is why CUNY is currently investing over \$340 million in dozens of energy performance capital projects on its campuses that will significantly reduce emissions.

We have always been at the forefront of integrating sustainability and energy efficiency into our campus operations, our curriculum and our research. But we have a challenge with our aged building stock which includes 300 buildings, totaling 29 million square feet. They range in age from one year old to over 100 years old, with the average building age exceeding 50 years. That is why, over the past 10 years, CUNY has focused on retro-commissioning, a process to improve the efficiency of an existing building's equipment and systems. Looking to the future, CUNY continues its focus on leveraging its capital funds in the upcoming five-year capital plan for projects that will reduce CUNY's carbon footprint and energy consumption. CUNY's capital program and initiatives reflect the University's commitment to sustainable technology and energy efficiency, including CUNY's commitment to develop a plan to meet the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) goals.

CUNY is an unparalleled resource for the state and the city. The increasing investments that our funding partners have made over the past few years have paid undeniable dividends: CUNY is finding new ways to help more students succeed academically, earn their degrees on time, and acquire the skills they need to build successful careers and fulfilling lives. There's also no question about the powerful impact that a well-funded and dynamic CUNY has on all our citizens. Now is the time we need to be even better and bolder. We ask for your continued support in that aspiration.

That concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions.