



Office of the University Student Senate  
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**The New York State Assembly Legislative Budget Committee Hearing on Higher Education**

**Ms. Salimatou Doumbouya, Chairperson University Student Senate (USS)  
Student Trustee  
City University of New York**

To the members of the committee on Higher Education and the members of the committee on Education, to the chairs of said Committees, I thank you for this opportunity for me to be of great service to the university of the people of the City of New York by testifying on an issue that is affecting the daily lives of current and prospective students who want to have the opportunity to make CUNY their foundation for Higher Education.

As the sole student trustee on the board for CUNY, I will always put the needs of students first. It is my honor to represent the 220,000 degree-seeking students and 150,000 continuing education students of the City University of New York.

I believe that it is necessary to show the importance of building a solid road to higher education, and it is equally essential to the current students and prospective students of the City University of New York that we receive adequate funding to help us be the driving force in the workforce across industries in our City and State.

Members of the joint committees, the students of CUNY are in full support of the investment initiatives that our board of trustees recommended to help students enter our university; those operating and capital priorities include, but are not limited to:

1. The support of STEM students by funding
2. State matching fund for endowment contributions
3. Online and Multi-Modal Program Development
4. Graduate Education
5. Enrollment and Retention
6. Modernizing the CUNY System, Building Infrastructure Maintenance and Renewal Repair

Despite our unwavering support for more funding for CUNY as it aligns with CUNY central's goals, the students have concerns that go from no tuition hikes, to funding requests in various categories.

A **case for no tuition hikes** was made in 2020 and published by the CUNY University Student Senate "Budget Gaps lead to tuition hikes" :



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*“Initially, the Governor and State Legislature promised the increased tuition would go towards enhancing student services; less crowded classrooms, more academic mentoring, and more counseling and advising available for students. In addition, SUNY 2020 included an important provision known as the “maintenance of effort,” which stipulated that the legislature would not reduce SUNY’s or CUNY’s general operating funds in following budgets. **This was to ensure that increased tuition would not be offset by decreased state support.**”*

It is 2023, and it is very noticeable that CUNY is still not getting enough funding. It is even more noticeable now that the proposed tuition increases are expected to cover the university’s budget deficits.

- CUNY is now experiencing a structural deficit of about \$160 million and the tuition increase will not supplement that. Furthermore it is unfair to expect students to save the university that is here to serve them.
- Although TAP will cover tuition for part of the student population, we still have the other part to account for. International students, out of state students and all students who pay full tuition need to be accounted for.
- A tuition increase and attacks on student’s wellbeing will hinder people's willingness to enroll into CUNY and pursue a higher education degree.
  - A study conducted in September 2022 titled “Why Would-Be Students Aren’t Choosing College” says:  
*“People had a variety of reasons for not attending or completing college, including but not limited to financial barriers. The study found that **38 percent of students didn’t enroll because of fears about the cost of college** and amassing debt, 27 percent felt college would be “too stressful” or “too much pressure,” 26 percent believed it was more important to work and earn money, and 25 percent felt uncertainty about their career”*
  - This percentage will go up as time goes by and as these proposals get amplified. All prospective students will hear that the state is increasing the barriers between them and a higher education.

**Tuition increase is not the message that will bring students to CUNY or back to CUNY.**

Higher Education is a vital lifeline for all communities across our great city, and those students enter our university in continental need of more support. We are asking you as a joint committee to work with the students of CUNY so we can make the public university the people’s university that is free, the way it's supposed to be. We say that you can’t have one without the other.

To make the University free again, the way it was between 1961 and 1976, we are asking that we work together to pass the New Deal for CUNY, which is as follows:

***“The New Deal for CUNY mandates that all tuition and fees for in-state undergraduate students within specified time-frames for degree completion be eliminated and that the revenue to the colleges that would otherwise derive from tuition and fees be replaced annually by federal, state, and city funds.”*** Senate Bill S4461A



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A *Politico* article that was published on February 1st, 2023, and titled, “New York's massive budget surplus gives Hochul money to spend” stipulates that:

*“And she’s benefiting from an \$8.7 billion surplus thanks to higher-than-expected tax revenue to fund projects and programs to appease a wide variety of constituencies.”*

Although the students appreciate the \$34.4 billion investment in education, which is vital as students transition to either the workforce or public higher education, the students of CUNY also expect investments in public higher education. By not investing in Higher education, you are choosing for high school students to NOT attend college after graduation.

A fantastic student leader used to say that “Education is the greatest equalizer.” My sentence is in the past tense because that student had to leave all his extracurricular activities and become a part-time student due to financial difficulties related to paying tuition, housing, and other expenses. He is one of many students whose stories you may never hear because they are the most silent ones. For that student, the opportunity to use education as a tool to succeed turned into a burden. His perseverance allowed him to remain in college but for how long? And how many other students will not persevere and just leave?

I would like the committee to consider non-tuition expenses as well to support more funding for CUNY student resources. We are asking for the following:

1. Transportation support for all CUNY students
  - a. We are grateful for ASAP and other support programs for the resources they provide to our students. However, all CUNY students, regardless of their eligibility for a program, citizenship status, or economic background, deserve to be seen. The Fair Fare program offers an opportunity but with a financial barrier and the extra steps to apply.
    - i. **Incorporate a fund for each CUNY student to use the MTA for free. We believe that by using the available technology, whether it is OMNI paired with CUNY’s technology, such a mission could be achieved. We ask for your support and collaboration to clarify and materialize this necessity.**
2. Food Security
  - a. One of CUNY’s most outstanding accomplishments from our perspective is the formation of food pantries across the campuses. However, the individual campuses are facing some challenges in funding those pantries. The private and public organizations and the city council who donate food and/or funds have been the lifeline of our pantries.
    - i. **We ask that the committee takes into consideration a sustainable funding system by the state for the food pantries in CUNY. The students of CUNY are ready to meet to communicate what that system looks like in our vision of a hunger free CUNY.**



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3. Textbooks & course materials

- a. The costs of textbooks and required course materials continue to rise for students. On average, students pay \$1,200 a year for textbooks. An analysis by the Bureau of Labor Statistics states that the price of textbooks and supplies has risen four times as fast as inflation over the past decade. The costs lead 2 in 3 students to not purchase a required textbook and 1 in 4 to drop a course.
  - i. **We support efforts to renew and expand investment in grants that promote open education resources.**

The students of the CUNY are dealing with near-impossible challenges in their daily aspects of life while passionately pursuing to change their lives and the lives of those around them by understanding the importance of acquiring a Higher Education degree. We are living in a time where thousands of students of CUNY are facing eviction while falsely being told that funds in the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) are still available; students are dealing with mental health challenges where they need support and are unable to afford a therapist at this time; there are thousands of students who especially after post-quarantine of 2020 do not feel connected to the college they are attending because of the lack of student life and investment thereof.

On behalf of the 220,000 degree-seeking students and 150,000 continuing education students of the City University of New York, we are calling on you to invest in the people's university, the City University of New York. Many of you in this historic chamber of legislature would not be here if it were not for the great educational opportunities that CUNY provides, we want those same opportunities for our homes and communities.

CUNY is home to many born and bred NYers, to out of state students and students from all over the world. Many who earned their credentials understand this important entity, and yet, it is still difficult to make it through when our students are facing all-time high inflation costs, lack of job opportunities that will give our students a position in leadership, an expensive city where rent prices are high, and still trying to pass their classes. Investing in CUNY means promoting the success of our great country and making sure **CUNY stays a giant in higher education in the face of the entire world, across continents**. Therefore, please invest in CUNY, so that our future remains in the hands of the people of our great city.

Respectfully Submitted,

[Salimatou Doumbouya](#),  
Chairperson  
University Student Senate  
City University of New York Trustee



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[www.usscuny.org](http://www.usscuny.org)

## REFERENCES:

A CASE FOR TUITION FREEZE IN 2020

<https://www.usscuny.org/tuition-freeze/>

WHY WOULD BE STUDENTS ARE NOT CHOOSING COLLEGE

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/09/29/new-study-explores-why-people-drop-out-or-dont-enroll#:~:text=The%20study%20found%20that%2038,felt%20uncertainty%20about%20their%20career>

NEW DEAL FOR CUNY

Legislation: <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2021/S4461>

CUNY Rising Alliance: <https://cunyrisingalliance.org/newdeal4cuny>

FAIR FARE

<https://www.nyc.gov/site/fairfares/index.page>

NEW YORK BUDGET SURPLUS

<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/02/01/new-yorks-massive-budget-surplus-gives-hochul-money-to-spend-00080724>

HUNGER FREE CAMPUS ACT

<https://www.swipehunger.org/hungerfree/>