



Office of the University Student Senate
555 West 57th Street, 1420
New York, NY 10019
Tel: (646) 664-8844
Fax: (646) 664-8863

2025 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Transportation
Testimony of Daniel Reden
City University of New York (CUNY) Student Trustee,
CUNY University Student Senate (USS) Chairperson,
February 6, 2025

Good Morning, Chairs and Distinguished Members of the Senate and Assembly,

I am Daniel Reden, Chair of the University Student Senate (USS) and a Trustee of the City University of New York (CUNY) Board of Trustees. I represent over 225,000 undergraduate and graduate students across CUNY's 25 campuses, spanning New York City's five boroughs. As a member of the Higher Education Services Corporation and a student at the CUNY School of Professional Studies, I am honored to advocate for policies that uphold equity, accessibility, and affordability for our student body.

CUNY is the largest urban public university in the United States and a cornerstone of social mobility in New York City. With 76% of our students coming from communities of color and predominantly from working and middle-class families, CUNY graduates more than 55,000 students annually—80% of whom remain in New York and contribute directly to the city's vitality. Despite CUNY's unparalleled role in shaping New York's workforce and economy, students face persistent barriers to success, with transportation costs emerging as one of the most significant obstacles.

The Case for Free or Reduced Metrocards for CUNY Students

Transportation costs are a top barrier to accessing higher education for CUNY students. The inability to afford a Metrocard often results in absenteeism, academic difficulty, delayed graduation, and, in some cases, students dropping out entirely. More than 70% of students cite financial challenges as a significant obstacle to attending college, and the rising cost of public transportation exacerbates this burden.

The USS has worked extensively to address this issue through our **Student Commuter Metrocard Pilot Program**, which was officially included in the **FY2026 CUNY Budget Request asking for a 1 million dollars investment to CUNY to start the pilot**. This program highlights the urgent need for free or reduced-cost Metrocards for all CUNY students and provides a roadmap for a sustainable and effective long-term solution.

The proposal for free Metrocards for CUNY students has also been included in **The 2025 Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Caucus People's Budget** that recommends extending free or reduced-cost Metrocards, that is **\$75.5 Million Dollars**, for all CUNY students, recognizing for reinvestment in public higher education and transportation equity. This inclusion underscores the broad public and legislative support for this initiative as part of a comprehensive strategy to reduce financial barriers for students.



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A Partnership Between CUNY and the MTA

The Governor's Executive Budget includes significant public transportation and higher education investments, creating an opportunity for the MTA and CUNY to collaborate on this transformative initiative which would do the following:

- **Reducing Fare Evasion and Strengthening**

Many CUNY students face financial hardship that forces them to choose between paying for tuition, food, and transportation. This strain has contributed to fare evasion, a persistent issue for the MTA. Free or reduced-cost Metrocards would directly alleviate this burden and reduce fare evasion, helping the MTA recover lost revenue while fostering compliance.

- **Meet the Needs of New Yorkers**

By partnering with CUNY, the MTA would position itself as a champion of equity and accessibility, aligning its mission with the needs of New York's diverse and underserved communities. Joining CUNY in this mission to serve people across the city, the MTA would be a partner in CUNY's commitment to education and social mobility.

- **Strengthening the City's Workforce and Economy**

CUNY graduates are the backbone of New York City's workforce, with 80% staying in the city post-graduation. Addressing transportation barriers would reduce dropout rates, accelerate graduation timelines, and ensure that more students enter the workforce equipped to contribute to the city's economy.

- **The People's Budget and Legislative Support**

The People's Budget proposal further emphasizes the need for free or reduced Metrocards for CUNY students as part of a larger reinvestment in public education and equity. It calls for:

- **Restoring funding cuts to CUNY**, enabling the hiring of faculty and staff and improving the quality of education.
- **Free Metrocards**, to reduce the financial burden on students and improve access to higher education.

These priorities align closely with the goals of the Student Commuter Metrocard Pilot Program and the initiatives outlined in the FY2026 CUNY Budget Request. Together, they represent a unified vision for removing financial barriers and promoting student success.



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Call to Action

As the Chair of the University Student Senate and a Trustee of the CUNY Board, I urge you to:

Support funding allocation for free Metrocards for CUNY students in the FY2026 budget.

By investing in free, you will not only remove a critical barrier to education for CUNY students but also invest in the future of New York City.

Conclusion

CUNY students are the future of New York, and their success is inseparable from the city's prosperity. Free or reduced Metrocards are not merely a transportation solution—they are an equity solution, a workforce solution, and an investment in the city's long-term growth.

Thank you for your time, your commitment to public higher education, and your dedication to ensuring that all New Yorkers have access to the opportunities they deserve. I am happy to answer any questions and to work with you to make this initiative a reality.

Respectfully,

Daniel Reden

Chairperson, University Student Senate

CUNY Trustee

FREE METROCARDS FOR CUNY STUDENTS



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2025 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Higher Education
Testimony of Akkeem Polack
University Student Senate (USS CUNY)
USS Vice Chair for Legislative Affairs
February 6, 2025

Good Morning,

My name is Akkeem Polack, and I proudly serve as the Vice Chair for Legislative Affairs for the University Student Senate, representing over 200,000 CUNY students across 25 colleges. I am a student at York College, majoring in Communication Technology. I'm also an international student from Jamaica.

For many CUNY students, transportation is not just a financial burden—it is a barrier to success.

- The cost of a MetroCard adds up quickly, especially for students balancing tuition, rent, food, and other living expenses.
- Long commutes—sometimes up to four hours a day—cut into time that could be spent studying, working, or participating in extracurricular activities.
- Many students have had to skip classes or even drop courses because they could not afford the fare.

We should not have to choose between our education and the ability to afford the transportation needed to access it.

That is why I am urging the Legislature to fund Free MetroCards for CUNY students.

Providing Free MetroCards for CUNY students would:

- Eliminate a major financial burden, allowing students to focus on their education instead of worrying about affording their next bus or subway fare.
- Increase access to internships and job opportunities, ensuring students can participate in professional development without transportation barriers.
- Improve graduation rates, as students with reliable transportation are more likely to stay enrolled and complete their degrees on time.
- Promote equity, ensuring that no student is forced to sacrifice their education simply because they cannot afford the cost of getting to class.



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Investing in Free MetroCards for CUNY students is an investment in New York's future workforce, economy, and communities.

CUNY has been a gateway to opportunity for generations of students, but that gateway is closing for many because of something as simple—but as essential—as the cost of a MetroCard.

I urge the Legislature to take bold action to remove this barrier and ensure that every student, regardless of income, has the opportunity to succeed.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Akkeem Polack



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2025 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Transportation
Testimony of Davia Willis
University Student Senate (USS CUNY)
February 6, 2025

Good Morning,

My name is Davia Willis, and I am a Criminal Justice major at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, with plans to graduate in Spring of 2027. I chose to attend CUNY because of their diverse programs and affordability. As a First-Generation College Student, my career goals are to become a defense attorney and a politician with hopes of being in congress and erecting my own firm. My experience at CUNY has been both positive and challenging. Being an international student has precluded me from the flexibility of participating in a variety of opportunities, resulting in financial strain that has been a major issue as this is also associated with commuting. Currently, I commute to campus using both subway and bus, which costs me approximately \$132 per month. This expense adds a significant financial burden, especially for students already struggling with tuition, rent, and basic living costs. Many students are forced to skip classes, limit extracurricular involvement, or turn down internships because they cannot afford to travel.

To address these issues, I urge the Legislature to FUND FREE METROCARDS for CUNY students. Ensuring free fares for students would:

- Reduce financial barriers to education, allowing students to focus on their studies instead of worrying about transportation costs.
- Improve access to academic and professional opportunities, ensuring students can fully participate in their education.
- Promote retention and graduation rates, as students with reliable transit options are more likely to complete their degrees on time.

As students, we should not have to choose between our education and our ability to afford the transportation needed to access it. I strongly encourage the Legislature to invest in equitable transit solutions that support student success.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Davia A. Willis
John Jay College of Criminal Justice