

**NYC Council Committee on Higher Education**  
**Hearing on Resolution 2022-0121: New Deal for CUNY**  
**Testimony of Bronx Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson (Submitted)**  
**February 25, 2022**

For decades, the City University of New York (CUNY) has been a crucial path to opportunity and prosperity for New Yorkers of all stripes. Tens of thousands of New Yorkers earn associate, bachelor, graduate, and professional degrees at CUNY institutions every year. As of 2019, approximately 65% of CUNY students were Black and Latino.<sup>1</sup> However, the opportunities that communities here in The Bronx and across the City can gain from CUNY are constrained by the economic factors that many New Yorkers face every day.

For decades, CUNY schools were free to many or all of the students attending. However, once the system moved to an open enrollment model, letting in many more Black and Latino students, a tuition-based model became the standard. Moreover, while the state and federal governments provide many options for grants, aid, and loans, many current and prospective CUNY students face financial hardships in attending these schools. Instead of being a lifeline into a future career and economic stability, CUNY retains barriers to low-income individuals who often have to maintain employment in order to support their families. The New Deal for CUNY is a strong step in the right direction to solve these problems.

First and foremost, the New Deal for CUNY would make CUNY free for all in-state undergraduate students. Tuition would be replaced by public funds, from the redirection of existing financial aid programs such as TAP as well as from the allocation of additional public funds. Eliminating tuition and fees for CUNY students will provide new opportunities for students who are struggling to get by. Instead of these students having to pay thousands of dollars in tuition and fees, they would be able to spend that money supporting themselves and their families.

The New Deal for CUNY also helps students through hiring more academic advisors and mental health professionals. A college degree is the gateway to a more economically secure future. However, many students with the passion and drive to get there still need help in creating a roadmap to graduation. With so many CUNY students being first-generation college students, academic advisors are an essential resource that these students cannot necessarily find elsewhere. Navigating college life is a new experience for most of these students, and hiring more advisors will help more of them achieve their goals.

CUNY students will also benefit from more mental health professionals. College is an incredibly stressful period of life for many people – especially the young people who are often independent for the first time. Adding to this, challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, racism, food and housing insecurity, and having to maintain a job in addition to schoolwork are all added stressors. Mental health professionals on campus can prove to be an essential lifeline for students who may be struggling. Getting the ratios of mental health counselors and academic advisors in line with national standards will be an important step forward.

Lastly, the New Deal for CUNY also provides more justice to the hardworking professors who make CUNY a world-class system of higher education. Right now, far too many CUNY educators are hired on an adjunct basis, earning lower wages and with less job security. These jobs should be converted to full-time permanent positions. Raising the ratio of full-time faculty to students to be more in line with national standards will elevate the student experience while also giving the current adjunct faculty the status and compensation that they've earned.

Overall, I am deeply supportive of the New Deal for CUNY. As a proud alumna of Baruch College, I know firsthand the benefits a CUNY education can provide. The Council should pass Resolution 0121 under consideration today supporting the passage of the New Deal for CUNY in the state legislature. I commend Councilman Justin Brannan for his leadership in sponsoring this resolution as well as the

members of the Bronx delegation in the council who have cosponsored. I also commend all the members of the Bronx delegation in the state legislature who have sponsored the legislation, including prime sponsor Assemblywoman Karines Reyes. Together, we can work to ensure that CUNY students are getting their fair share and create the strongest opportunities for them to succeed.

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<sup>i</sup> [http://www.cuny.edu/irdatabook/rpts2\\_AY\\_current/ENRL\\_0015\\_RACE\\_TOT\\_PCT.rpt.pdf](http://www.cuny.edu/irdatabook/rpts2_AY_current/ENRL_0015_RACE_TOT_PCT.rpt.pdf)