



**New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Testimony from Young Invincibles and Young Advocates
March 3, 2020**

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New York City Council Committee on Higher Education

Preliminary Budget Hearing

Submitted by Melanie Kruevelis, Senior Manager of Policy and Advocacy, Young Invincibles

Tuesday, March 3, 2020

Good morning. My name is Melanie Kruevelis, and I am the Senior Manager of Policy and Advocacy at Young Invincibles. Young Invincibles is a policy and advocacy non-profit dedicated to elevating young adults in the political process and expanding economic opportunities for our generation. We work with young adults to ensure that our voices are at the table when it comes to higher education, health care, workforce development, and civic engagement. I want to thank the New York City Council and the Committee on Higher Education for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing.

Today's preliminary budget hearing for the Committee on Higher Education comes at a critical moment for New York's college students. Today, nine out of every ten jobs created in the United States go to those with a college degree.¹ In New York City, workers with a bachelor's degree earn, on average, \$550 more per week than those with a high school diploma.² While there are multiple pathways to a living-wage career, a college degree remains one of the best bets a person can make to attain long-term economic stability. Here in New York City, researchers point out that the CUNY system in particular is one of the nation's most important resources for propelling generations of low-income students into the middle class.³ That is critical, given the makeup and experiences of CUNY's student body: today, about half of CUNY's students come from households making less than \$20,000 a year.⁴ CUNY students are also experiencing homelessness and hunger at alarming rates: a 2019 survey of 22,000 CUNY undergraduates found that about half of CUNY students surveyed struggle with food insecurity, while nearly 15 percent experienced homelessness in a given year.⁵ We also know that CUNY students are often

¹ Goldstein, Steve. (2019). Nine out of 10 new jobs are going to those with a college degree. Retrieved from: <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/nine-out-of-10-new-jobs-are-going-to-those-with-a-college-degree-2018-06-04>

² New York State Department of Labor. Labor Statistics for the New York City Region. Retrieved from: https://www.labor.ny.gov/stats/why_go_to_school.shtm

³ Chetty, R. et al. (2017). Mobility Report Cards: The Role of Colleges in Intergenerational Mobility. Retrieved from: <https://www.nber.org/papers/w23618>

⁴ CUNY. (2018). CUNY Again Dominates Chronicle's Public College Social Mobility Rankings. Retrieved from: <https://www1.cuny.edu/mu/forum/2018/08/20/cuny-again-dominates-chronicles-public-college-social-mobility-rankings/>

⁵ Goldrick-Rab, S., V. Coca, C. Baker-Smith, E. Looker. (2019). City University of New York #RealCollege Survey. Retrieved from: https://hope4college.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/HOPE_realcollege_CUNY_report_final_webversion.pdf



balancing their lives as a college student with their responsibilities outside of college, including working part- or full-time, and caretaking responsibilities. In short, for many CUNY students, college is just one of many responsibilities and costs they face.

Today, as we consider the city's commitment to its public higher education system, we must recognize the reality for New York's college students. While CUNY's tuition prices are lower than many other public university systems (though increasing now both at CUNY's senior and community colleges), CUNY students are also living in one of the most expensive regions in the country. Affording tuition is just one piece of the puzzle when students must also cover costs like rent, food, transportation, healthcare, and childcare. Thus, any enacted budget for Fiscal Year 2021 must recognize the reality for CUNY's students. As such, we urge the Council and the Mayor to build on recent investments made towards addressing basic needs among CUNY's students, including a recent pilot aimed at addressing food insecurity on campus, and recent investments in CUNY's campus childcare, reversing a decades of flat investment in on-campus childcare. We also support investment in programs like CUNY ASAP, and will work with students to urge our state electeds to address the serious implications of the TAP Gap, and its impact on student success.

As the Council and the Mayor work towards an enacted budget, we also believe it is critical to hear from students themselves, and the challenges and opportunities they identify in their campuses. Today I am joined by Samer Hassan, our Policy and Advocacy fellow at Young Invincibles, and a senior at Columbia College. I am also joined by three CUNY students and Young Advocates, Marcia Collier of City College, Lisa Nishimura of John Jay, and Duwayne Wright of Borough of Manhattan Community College. I urge the Committee on Higher Education to consider the concerns and solutions they bring to the table. Thank you for your time.



**New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Submitted by Lisa Nishimura, Senior at John Jay College of Criminal Justice
Tuesday, March 3, 2020**

Good afternoon, my name is Lisa Nishimura. I am a senior at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, graduating this May with my Bachelor's of Arts in Criminology. Thank you Councilwoman Barron and the Committee on Higher Education for the opportunity to share my story and present challenges that I faced during my time at John Jay, in hopes of improving CUNY policies to allow more students like myself the opportunity to afford college.

I am here today to ask you to take steps to provide funding opportunities for students like me, who cannot receive either federal or state financial aid due to their inability to provide certain documentation, something which is outside of their control. I would also like to see the eligibility requirements for programs like ASAP and ACE to be made available to more students in the future, and would like the eligibility criteria to be expanded to allow for sophomores to enter into the program. These investments will help ensure that more students like me have access to financial aid and other programs that help make college affordable.

Throughout my entire five years at John Jay, I was unable to receive any state or federal aid, having solely to rely on scholarships and work to pay tuition. While I received a \$1,000 scholarship from my honors program every semester, this scholarship was not enough to cover even half of my tuition. As a result, every semester, I was met with a Bursar Hold, preventing me from registering for my classes until I paid off the remaining balance, which was usually \$3,000. To some, \$3,000 may be a small amount. However, coming from a low-income family, with a single mother, this amount could have been used to help pay for our rent, bills, and food.

To obtain aid, I have tried numerous avenues, all with dead ends. I tried applying for the Excelsior scholarship, but because it required FAFSA completion and documentation, such as proof of income, which was out of my parent's control, I was not able to apply. I even tried filing to be an independent student, because if I was granted this status, I would be eligible for both state and



federal aid. Ultimately, I was denied independent status. The bit of hope I had to not relive the same financial nightmare I had experienced, came crashing down. On top of it all, the financial aid office was not helpful in terms of finding any alternative way for me to get funding. They simply said there was nothing that could have been done and that was the end of it.

Program requirements also continued to prevent me from participating in other programs that would have helped alleviate my financial burden. Even programs that would have helped alleviate some of my financial burdens such as the ACE program that provides funding for textbooks and free MetroCards, I could not be a part of due to certain requirements. As an honors student, I was not eligible, and the following year when the policy was changed to admit honors students, I was no longer eligible because I was a sophomore and not an entering freshman.

Despite the socioeconomic barriers I continue to face, being able to graduate is a huge feat, and one that I take pride in. However, I know that this is not the reality for many other students who are in my situation. I once again ask the NYC Council to invest in programs that support students who are in situations similar to mine, and help them realize their college dreams. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



**New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Submitted by Marcia Collier, Senior at City College
Tuesday, March 3, 2020**

Good afternoon. My name is Marcia Collier, and I am a senior at City College studying Medicine and Psychology. Thank you to Councilwoman Inez Barron and the Committee on Higher Education for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing.

I am here today to ask the City Council to urge Albany to action and close the TAP GAP. I also want to ask for your support in expanding the CUNY ASAP and ACE programs across New York City.

It has come to my attention that the maximum TAP award in recent years does not cover full tuition at CUNY and SUNY. This is known as the TAP Gap. 42% of City College students receive TAP and use it as a primary method to pay their tuition. That's almost 7,000 students at City College alone! According to the Professional Staff Congress Union, the TAP Gap creates a \$139 million total shortfall across the state, leaving CUNY to cover \$74 million of that gap.⁶ This shortfall leaves a burden not only on CUNY, but on students and families that cannot afford to make up the difference. Consequences include staff shortages, limited course availability, increased workloads on remaining staff, and less advisors and overall resources for students.

Prior to 2011, low-income SUNY and CUNY students would have their tuition costs covered in full by TAP, with colleges receiving adequate TAP payments to help cover operating costs for hiring new staff, funding libraries and investing in student support services. In my time at City College, I have seen my fellow classmates leave college because it was no longer affordable. Furthermore, as students struggle to pay for CUNY, schools may put a hold on a student's account if they owe any outstanding payments, leaving students unable to register for classes or receive a transcript. As a result, many are forced to leave college unless they find thousands of dollars to pay the balance. As a low-income student, it is crucial TAP covers the full tuition amount so I may access

⁶ Close the TAP Gap. PSC CUNY. <https://www.psc-cuny.org/issues/close-tap-gap>. Published March 8, 2019



the resources and be able to afford to stay in school and access my classes. While the State plays the biggest role in closing the TAP Gap, I urge the New York City Council to work with their colleagues in Albany close the TAP Gap and end its impact on CUNY and SUNY students.

I also urge the City to invest in programs like CUNY ASAP and ACE. For ten years, CUNY ASAP has helped thousands of students transfer from two-year college to four-year college, and earn their degree.⁷ But for students at four-year colleges like myself, however, the lack of CUNY ASAP means we struggle to afford the \$127 MetroCard monthly for school usage. On top of increasing student fees, the increasing TAP Gap, plus food and housing costs, paying for transportation in New York City makes it difficult to keep a budget for a low-income student manageable and realistic.

ASAP graduates overwhelmingly credit the program's financial incentives and comprehensive advising to why they graduated. The City and State as a whole also benefit from investing in ASAP. A cost-benefit analysis of CUNY ASAP found a remarkable return on the investment for students under the ASAP program. It was found that there's a benefit/cost ratio of about 3.5 on average.⁸ The institutional cost per graduate (taxpayer) were subtracted from benefits per additional degree (taxpayer) to develop this ratio over a few years of those on the program.

The ASAP program has been piloted at two four-year CUNY colleges in the form of ACE, the Accelerate, Complete, and Engage program, or ACE. One of those two colleges, John Jay College of Criminal Justice has implemented the program now for five years and has already seen positive outcomes. The result would be even more impactful if all four-year colleges including City College had this program. Increasing New York State's investment in TAP program and expanding the CUNY ASAP and ACE programs with support of the City and State will ensure higher graduation rates, lower use of welfare benefits, and increased tax contribution from

⁷ Linderman D, Kolenovic Z. (2009) Early Outcomes Report for City University of New York (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP). Retrieved from:

http://www1.cuny.edu/sites/asap/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2014/06/asap_final_report_2009.pdf

⁸ Levin, H, Garcia E. (2013). Benefit-Cost Analysis of Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) of the City University of New York (CUNY). Center for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education, Teachers College, Columbia University. Retrieved from: https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/opportunity/pdf/Levin_ASAP_Benefit_Cost_Report_FINAL_05212013.pdf



educated individuals in a higher tax bracket.

Finally, as the City and State work together to fund the CUNY system, I am proposing a plan that New York may be interested in piloting. A ten cent increase on the toll of NYC bridges and tunnels will generate about \$51 million a year. Over the course of about one and a half years the CUNY TAP GAP would be fully closed. This small investment would improve our college system and provide more tax generating graduates which would bring in a lasting return. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



**New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Submitted by Duwayne Wright, Senior, Borough of Manhattan Community College
Tuesday, March 3, 2020**

Good afternoon. My name is Duwayne Wright, and I am a senior at Borough of Manhattan Community College. I will be attending Baruch College in the fall, pursuing a degree in business. Thank you to the Councilwoman Barron and the Committee on Higher Education for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing.

I am here today to ask the City Council to increase investments in CUNY, both for programs and services that better support students through to college completion, but also to help cover the cost of tuition for students. Over nearly the past decade, CUNY has increased tuition significantly, and as a result has become increasingly unaffordable to many. Even with scholarships like the Excelsior Scholarship, eligibility rules are so restrictive that many people are not eligible.

College was created as a means to a better quality of life. However, given the rising cost of college, that is not always the case. In 1636, traditional higher education within the United States began in Boston. Other states soon caught on and then the rest of the world. However, with the boom, there emerged a lack of room for certain ethnic groups due to the cost of college.

In the last four decades, the price of college has increased exponentially and caused the student loan crisis. Today, over one million people attend college with a staggering 70% of them in debt. This financial epidemic cripples students nationwide. As a result, it is hurting our economy and the financial future of students as they cannot afford to put a down payment on a home and build other avenue of wealth, as they are burdened with debt.

College is expensive enough with tuition. However, costs such as housing, food, and transportation, make college even less of a reality. In fact, 42% of CUNY students had household incomes less than \$20,000 annually. In addition, in a city like New York, it is immensely expensive to be a student. In fact, a report by the Hope Center at Temple University recently revealed that 14% of CUNY students experience homelessness and over half have experienced housing insecurity.

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It is clear that CUNY is not adequately supporting students. Why aren't more programs like ASAP, which have been shown to double graduation rates being expanded? Why aren't more academic, financial, and other support services being adequately funded across each CUNY institution? These are the questions that I ask today, in hopes that you provide more students with the resources that they need to be successful and graduate from college. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



**New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Submitted by Samer Hassan, Senior, Columbia University
Tuesday, March 3, 2020**

Good morning. My name is Samer Hassan, and I am a senior at Columbia University's School of General Studies, studying Political Science. I am also the Northeast Policy and Advocacy Fellow with Young Invincibles. I want to thank the New York City Council and the Committee on Higher Education for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing.

I am here today to ask the City Council to provide the housing, transportation, and food programs that support all college and university students in New York City. I am also here to ask you to hold more private institutions, like Columbia University, accountable for ensuring the basic needs of students are met, and that all eligible non-tuition grants be given directly to students. We have a duty to ensure all of our students have a level playing field in order to attain a quality education.

Columbia University is known for its large endowment and its Ivy League status, but I am here to tell you that the reality between its beautiful facade and the students within it are very different. I transferred from a community college and was instantly aware of the inequities at school. As I listen to the struggles of my fellow college peers around New York City, I can't help but notice the dynamics between community college students and four-year colleges and universities and how they mirror each other.

There is a connection between the public and private institutions and that is their inability to tackle real world problems, such as basic needs, that so many New York City students face. Student homelessness and housing insecurity are rampant in not only the city, but across the nation. In fact, even at Columbia, there are students sleeping in 24 hour libraries and only eating food from school events. In today's society, it is normal for students to have to choose between food or a textbook. There is an inherent problem here, one that I don't believe many colleges are taken into account. We need affordable housing, free transportation, and food. In a city where average rent is \$2,800 dollars, and average wage is \$49,000,⁹ we need to ask ourselves what that means to someone that is juggling rent along with tuition, and all the other costs that come along with being a student in New York City. The reality is that many of New York's students can't afford to have the luxury to just be students.

The average student has many additional costs to cover than just tuition, and this is not limited to Columbia students, but to every college student across the city that I have encountered. I am

⁹ NYC Census Data

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able to attend Columbia due to a prestigious scholarship for first generation, low-income students. It pays my tuition, and only my tuition. While the scholarship itself is purported to be an amazing opportunity for its recipients, the reality is that students (myself included) are coming from nothing and require more aid than the school is willing to help with. For example, our financial aid office told us to apply for the Pell Grant as it would help us cover the cost of housing. Unfortunately, after I received the grant, Columbia took the aid and applied it to the scholarship I already had, essentially turning my scholarship into a last dollar program. State and federal financial student aid should go to the students who desperately need the money, not the institutions who have the connections to establish other avenues of financial backing.

Our school tells first generation low-income students like me to focus on our studies and we'll eventually begin climbing the ladder of social capital and economic opportunity. But, we respond by saying that we can't even achieve these ladders in the first place because we're too busy working multiple jobs to pay expenses and commuting from place to place navigating the bureaucracy of our institutions. What we want and desperately need is a level playing field. We are smart, talented, and civically engaged members of society, but you will never know that because we're too busy just trying to survive.



**New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Submitted by Paola Cruz, Junior, Columbia University
Tuesday, March 3, 2020**

My name is Paola Cruz, and I am a Junior at Columbia University's School of General Studies, studying Comparative Literature. I want to thank the New York City Council and the Committee on Higher Education for the opportunity to submit testimony.

I'm a first-generation low-income student and an immigrant. That said, my family was not able to help me fully navigate the system in New York. But I knew that moving here was not going to be an easy feat, so I sought the services and programs that enabled me to settle and prepare for college. Having earned and learned all the resources that I have, I came to realize how my peers in college struggle every day because they don't have access to the same resources that I have.

I was a transfer student from LaGuardia Community College. My idea of a fun American experience in college is far from what I witnessed in LaGuardia. There were homeless students, undocumented students who didn't have access to resources, and students who worked three different jobs while also being a parent. I wasn't the only one who was striving for success. While in LaGuardia, I was a full-time student taking 15-21 credits a semester, all while working 45 hours a week. But compared to my peers, I was in a privileged position. I was able to graduate with flying colors and debt-free, and that is because CUNY ASAP exists. CUNY ASAP changes the lives of the students, allowing us to pursue our dreams without any financial burden holding us and slowing us down. I learned that ASAP is only available to community colleges and not through the four-year colleges of New York. Research shows that the ASAP graduation rate is more than three times the national three-year graduation rate of 16% for urban community colleges. It would be a tremendous help for students, either coming as first-years or transferring to a four-year college, to have the same kind of support that ASAP offers. Witnessing the problems students face in a two-year institution still extends to a four-year one.

The problems that students face in a two-year institution also happen to a four-year college. One would think that a private college offers many great deal of opportunities for students, but few know that low-income students suffer the most in these institutions. The main problem that I see on my campus is the lack of financial aid — not only on tuition, but also in support of other non-tuition costs such as food, housing, and transportation for low-income students. I never had to experience any of these problems while attending LaGuardia because of the support that sustained me through ASAP, thus allowing me to graduate on-time. I can only imagine how it must be for many students across CUNY schools and many other schools, for that matter.



I encourage the New York City Council to make CUNY ASAP accessible for all senior colleges of New York. I also challenge the state officials to ensure that low-income students receive more financial aid in private institutions. And I demand legislators to push through the policies that benefit the students who are in most need, thus lifting not only the marginalized and under-represented groups but also boosting the economic growth of our community.



**New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Submitted by Tanisha Williams, Senior, Hunter College
Tuesday, March 3, 2020**

Good morning. My name is Tanisha Williams and I am a senior at Hunter College majoring in Film. I am very thankful that the New York City Council and the Committee on Higher Education gave me the opportunity to submit testimony to the Council.

As a fifth year student, I realize that my college needs to prioritize students over administration. In fact, CUNY institutions are falling apart, with little to no funding dedicated to improving infrastructure while Hunter's President, Jennifer Raab, earns nearly half a million dollars in salary. Escalators are often not working and last year a ceiling light almost fell on me in the North Building. It was a terrifying experience and I would never wish the fear I felt on anyone. I commend the staff for trying their best to contain the problems and allowing students to send work orders to shed light on these issues.

We need a form of checks and balances in our school to ensure that the money that is allocated is used to benefit the students who pay to go here more than the extremely well paid higher ups. I am asking our City and State leaders to make the budgets for each CUNY school and their budget allocations accessible to students. In addition, state legislation such as the CUNY New Deal bill can help address these issues, and I urge our City electeds to look into this legislation. Proposals like the CUNY New Deal would help both students and staff: Hunter staff are quite overwhelmed and larger classes make it harder for students to learn. If possible, there also needs to be more hybrid or online courses with CUNYs that students could take so students could work on their degree and professors can have smaller classes and teach more. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.



**New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Submitted by James Hill, Third-year Student, Borough of Manhattan Community College
Tuesday, March 3, 2020**

Greetings! My name is James Hill, the Third. I am a first year, first-generation student at CUNY Borough of Manhattan Community College, and I am a Liberal Arts major. I would like to first express my warmest appreciation to the NYC Council and the Higher Education Committee Chair Inez Barron for the opportunity to submit testimony and for letting our voices be heard.

Stepping into BMCC, I experienced a gamut of emotions: happiness, fear, anxiety, optimism, pessimism, uncertainty, but most of all, a resounding sense of personhood or manhood as some might say. I saw going to college as my opportunity to “get my piece of the pie.” It did not take long for me to realize that when I was forewarned that “college would be hard,” I might have been in for more than I bargained for. But what has been even more jarring is the disparity in opportunity and resources for individuals like myself. It has become increasingly harder to compete, not because I’m not capable, but because two months into the semester, I still do not have the finances to buy all of the materials needed for classes to be successful. I am a part of CUNY Black Male Initiative (BMI), and Urban Male Leadership Academy (UMLA) at BMCC. Mr. Holmes, the BMI Director has done a great job with events, mentoring/networking opportunities, and has helped me to find a sense of belonging on campus. With all that said though, I still had trouble paying for my MetroCards, living expenses, and access to technology.

As a former representative in the Student Government Association, I know that there are a large number of students like me that don’t have the money to afford a laptop to complete work. Lack of funding has left us with old technology and absurd wait times to use computers at the library because a number of them are “out of service” at any given time. I am appealing to you to invest in money into BMCC funding for technology and programs like CUNY BMI so that we students can do our part and get the education we deserve. Our plan would be to purchase a small quantity of laptops, and create borrowing limits/agreements to mirror those similar to Baruch College’s. We would also like to look into the previous partnership CUNY had with Apple to reactivate that relationship. And since CUNY BMI has already built a targeted relationship with the underserved and underrepresented students, I think that helping this program get more funding will help reach the students like myself who need this the most. All of these requests are with the goal of student retention and graduation.

We don’t set out to fail, but we also aren’t set up to succeed. And it leaves me wondering, what do I do when showing up on time is not enough? When getting a 3.675 GPA, juggling 15 credits,

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three part time jobs and balancing various family issues is not enough? When overextending myself in extracurricular activities just so I can get a MetroCard so I don't have to hop the turnstiles or face the embarrassment of asking someone to swipe you in, what do I do? What should I do when enough is not enough?



**New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
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Submitted by Lyric Young, Senior, City College
Tuesday, March 3, 2020**

My name is Lyric Young. I am a senior at City College studying Psychology with a minor in Gender and Women's Studies. I'd like to thank the New York City Council and the Committee on Higher Education for the opportunity to submit testimony.

My journey through the education system in New York City was not traditional like most students. I didn't apply for high schools or take the Regents Exam. I had to drop out of high school and move my entire life to New York to start over again. Starting over didn't mean going back to high school and being a normal student. Starting over meant taking the TASC and getting my GED in order to catch up with the academic level I was supposed to be on. I was very fortunate to find the Pathways to Graduation program where I was able to prepare and take the TASC within a summer, which ultimately led to me starting my college career a semester before the rest of my former colleagues. As a first-generation student, I would never have dreamed of these kinds of opportunities being available to me. With full credit to the Pathways to Graduation program, Goddard Success program and the ASAP program, at Borough of Manhattan Community College the beginning of my college career was incredibly successful. I was able to worry about my academics and my personal life problems without thinking about how I was going to pay for my tuition, or how to get to class. I was able to attend my classes, and have access to the resources that I needed for class and the only requirements were to show up and keep my GPA over 2.0.

Transitioning from a 2-year to 4-year college program was completely different from the success story from above. After the application and acceptance process, there were no advisors and no guidance. I and other students in the same place as me were alone on their next steps in their college career. Tasks that once felt simple became some of the hardest problems. Applying for financial aid went from the submission of forms to being selected for verification every single semester despite it being "random selection." Suddenly, I was trying to explain to my recently laid-off immigrant single father of three how financial aid works in America when I barely understood how it worked and why all of these forms were necessary for the future of my education. It all felt incredibly invasive and like I was at fault for needing additional support to continue higher education while I tried to help support my family during this financial struggle. I was not prepared for how difficult everything would suddenly be. I don't think anyone would be, really. It drops on you like the air in humid weather: sudden, unexpected, and heavy like a stack of bricks. I had charges for things that I couldn't even comprehend. Fees for technology that doesn't even work, and for buildings that are run down and ridden with asbestos. It isn't fair or



right to expect students to accept these circumstances and sit idly.

Students in four-year universities need the support that students in two-year universities need. As a city that prides itself on public resources and the ability to help provide for its residents, why aren't there more resources for students in the city? Programs such as CUNY ASAP for community colleges need to be expanded to four-year universities to ensure success in higher education and promote students to get a degree. By expanding these programs and creating a clear-cut explanation on the transfer and financial aid process will relieve the stress off students and create a safe place to learn and succeed hopefully resulting in graduation rates going up. Students don't drop out because they aren't motivated, but rather they drop out because they simply can't afford to continue with their higher education for whatever reason. As much as they want to get a degree it simply isn't feasible for them due to the lack of resources and assistance granted to them by the city.

I am very aware of the ACE program taking place in two out of several CUNY four year universities, but I am asking the City to invest more in the ASAP and ACE programs in order to give lower-income students more opportunities to succeed in higher education beyond community college. Especially since these programs have already proven successful to students in CUNY institutions, expanding such programs will only create a successful future for the residents of New York City. As of 2018-2019, the city is providing 25,000 out of about 200,000 students support through the ASAP and ACE program. Through the expansion of ACE and ASAP, it is possible to provide even more students with the resources that they need to continue and finish their higher education and to move into the working world without the stress and fear of how their socioeconomic status will hold them back.



**New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Submitted by Sierra Atkins, Sophomore, New York City College of Technology
Tuesday, March 3, 2020**

My name is Sierra Atkins and I am a sophomore at New York City College of Technology. I would first like to thank the NYC Council and Higher Education Committee Chair Inez Barron for this opportunity to share with you all. The problem that I would like to address that I see on my campus, and across many CUNY campuses, is student homelessness and its impact on student success.

As a young adult supporting myself and having to navigate the CUNY system on my own, I can truly say that it has not been a pleasurable experience. Since I first started college I've worked two jobs and still attended school all while trying to maintain my grades. I have always been a great student, but many of my failures and challenges have risen exponentially due to the costs beyond tuition, such as high rent prices in New York City. Furthermore, each year, my costs increase. I also see a lack of support from the government: I am not eligible for many public benefits because of the age bracket I am in and the fact that I am considered "able bodied." Many of my colleagues and friends of all different races and creeds have also experienced hardship receiving financial aid and maintaining it while working part time, or the providing documentation. I myself have had an issue with proving that I was a self-supporting individual that did not have the support of family. Though I am supporting myself, the financial aid system sees me as someone who would need to base my college experience on my parents' income because I am under the age of 23.

Coming from a background of someone that has had a traumatic childhood experience and strained relationships with family, I had to find a way through college on the little money I had to go. I found a program in the city that would help legally represent me and show that I was indeed taking part in supportive services as an independent person. The resubmission process to a school and the pressure of trying to maintain housing in the city is ridiculously hard. Safe housing/shelters for a young woman my age is very hard to come by because of the influx of people in need, and had I not had the small support of case managers (some of whom have tried to have me exploited), I wouldn't even have made it into my school this far. The resources to food assistance is so limited and almost unheard of that it barely lifts the burden off anyone. There is no supportive housing to help the many CUNY students who commute to college, and access to MetroCards (for emergencies) are limited as well. I had so many instances where I needed to go to the school counseling office and explain personal issues such as these and the physical and emotional toll it was taking on me to finish the semester, it was mostly a hit or miss with actual support or just encouragement just now to drop out of class. Needless to say, I was unable to

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finish, along with my friends that became part time students because they could not afford to be in school full time, and pay tuition while working.

CUNY must address the real challenges students face, including homelessness, especially as the city has limited public benefits for able-bodied individuals between the ages of 18-49 years old. I would like to see dedicated, supportive housing programs for college students. The requirements would be that the student would be attending classes regularly, maintaining the grade average of a C, attending offered tutoring services that is reasonably within their schedule, workforce and resume workshops and time in between classes to help get employment/ paid internships when they are approaching graduation. If college was able to help tackle these issues it would help decrease the homeless population. In addition, we need more information on students and their basic needs at CUNY. Updated numbers on how many CUNY students experience issues like I've experienced can offer students a more effective approach of addressing their needs while also helping the schools maintain student enrollment numbers and boosting graduation rates.

It's common knowledge now that the government is leaving a grey area to the generation of Millennials who are trying to get degrees but are also trying as best as they can with what they can to make money and take care of themselves. I am calling on the leaders in both City Council and their colleagues in Albany to seriously shoulder a way for Millennials that would help with making a positive change, not just for students but for communities of people that will leave legacies of generations of poverty if we do not fix this problem. Its true that the government can't shoulder the weight of all these people, so as a solution we, young people want to learn and reach out to every part of our system through advocacy to all take up just a bit of the burden and make our systems work better. We are better than the labels that society gives us. Just give us the chance to show it. You have a whole new generation of innovative people being suppressed and world changing ideas being unrealized or unreachable just because we can't have access to knowledge that needs to be available to everyone. As the saying goes, "Teamwork makes the dream work", and I hope and truly believe we can make this work.



**New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Submitted by Neha Syeda, Sophomore, Brooklyn College
Tuesday, March 3, 2020**

Good Morning, my name is Neha Syeda, and I'm a sophomore at Brooklyn College studying Communications and Political Science. I want to thank the New York City Council and the Committee on Higher Education for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing.

Being a CUNY student, I have first-hand experience of what it's like to be part of an institution that is falling apart while keeping the facade of its empowering legacy. In today's economy where having a college education has become a necessity because a student with a college degree earns \$17,500 more than a counterpart without a college degree, many CUNY students cannot afford to pay a high tuition to attend public universities. Recently, CUNY has increased tuition for four-year students, saying that these hikes will help CUNY provide exceptional services to its students. Yet, as tuition goes up, the quality of services accessible to students seems to go down. I am currently in my sophomore year and I don't have a lot of time before I have to declare my major. I want to seek advising in order to make an informed decision of what major would be most suitable for my goals and my financial aid package, but that is almost impossible. In order for me to get an appointment to have a discussion with an advisor, I have to wait for an absurd amount of time. The workload of these advisors does not allow them to provide extensive advisement to everyone. I'm a first-generation CUNY college student and I'm not able to receive help from my family. My only hope is to get help from the resources provided by the college but because of the shortage of staff members, I'm not able to receive help from college. Despite paying increasing tuition, I am still deprived of the services that the tuition should cover. This shortage of staff is not only an issue in advising, but it also stretches over to the teaching faculty on campus. Colleges often tend to appoint adjunct professors rather than employing full-time faculty to save costs. Students do not benefit from this situation. Whether seeking help with classes, meeting with professors outside of the classroom, or seeking advisement, the students are usually at a loss. With their low-paying jobs, the adjunct professors are not able to offer to students the support that a full-time faculty is able to provide.

Another major issue that the CUNY students encounter is the lack of classes being offered. I have looked at different majors, and one of the most important aspects for me to consider before committing to a department is the availability of classes. More often than not the college cuts back on the classes being offered or the times at which these classes are offered. In order for me to graduate on time and maintain my financial aid, which I fully intend on doing, I cannot afford to take a major that I enjoy without risking my graduation delay. A lot of my peers are not able to take classes that they need in order to graduate and this leads to their delayed graduation and

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increased cost of college. I myself want to double major because I want to study the subjects that I enjoy, but that seems like an impossible task. I cannot pursue a double major without the risk of delaying my graduation because the classes that I will need might end up being cut out because of the shortage of funding.

I understand that the City Council fully intends to assist students to pursue their careers and therefore fund CUNY schools to their capacity but the issues that CUNY schools and its students are facing can be tracked to a state-level cause. The TAP GAP plays a vital role in the loss of funding because even when the schools raise their tuition every school year, the rise in TAP GAP restricts them from moving forward. The schools are caught up with the pressure to keep the lights on for their schools that they cannot afford to better their services. The responsibility that the state should be accountable for are now in the hands of the administrators. I urge the members of the City Council and especially the Committee on Higher Education to voice out their support and call on our leaders in Albany to end the TAP GAP so that the schools have the opportunity to better serve their students.

Thank you so much for your time.



**New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Submitted by Zaret Cortorreal, Junior at Lehman College
Tuesday, March 3, 2020**

My name is Zaret Cortorreal, I am a junior at Lehman College pursuing double major in Accounting and Computer Information Systems. I want to thank the New York City Council and the Committee on Higher Education for the opportunity to provide testimony.

My experience as a transfer student to Lehman College was not as flexible as it was when I first started at Borough of Manhattan Community College. I wanted to graduate early, and planned on taking summer classes to do so. But by the time I applied for my senior college and got a response from my new advisors, it was too late to take these summer classes. The lack of advising for transfer students is a big problem. Some of my classmates do not know what majors they should chose while at community college that will transfer successfully at their senior college. This makes it harder to graduate on time.

The challenge is CUNY knows what works for students. Guttman College, for instance, is one of CUNY's community colleges and has a 72 percent two-year graduation rate. Compared that with BMCC, which has a 25 percent graduation rate. Part of that success is that students at Guttman Community College have strong advising support, including advising for first-year students and transfer students. Each of these advisors makes sure that the student understands what they want to study and what that major can transfer to a four-year college. Strong advising support also means better tracking of students and their progress towards graduation. Advisors can weigh in early if summer or winter classes could help students graduate on time or early.

Part of the solution for CUNY is to increase advising for community college students. Advisors can provide not only general advice, but can help students with the process of transferring to a four-year college and choosing a major that will help them graduate on time or early.



**New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Submitted by Romy O. Robielos II, Junior at New York City College of Technology
Tuesday, March 3, 2020**

Good Afternoon! My name is Romy Robielos II, and I am a Junior student at New York City College of Technology – CUNY studying Biomedical Informatics. I want to thank the New York City Council and the Committee on Higher Education for the opportunity to testify at today's meeting.

Food Insecurity is a major dilemma not just facing young New Yorkers nowadays but also the entire nation. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, “food insecurity” is defined as the disruption of normal eating patterns due to lack of money or other resources for food. According to recent studies, one in eight New Yorkers are unable to afford an adequate amount of food which translates to more than one million city residents who are “food insecure”. The numbers are even staggering for college students as 45% of American college students are struggling with having to worry about what to eat daily – a number higher than that of the general population. CUNY Food Insecurity Data also reported about 60,000 CUNY undergraduate students or 25% experience food insecurity. As a full-time student from New York City who must worry about high costs of tuition and fees, textbooks, housing and daily transportation, quality food is often the one left on the line to be sacrificed so my other obligations will be met. Personally, I lost count how many times I had to be concerned on what to eat on a meal-to-meal basis so I could still have enough money left to purchase food for that day, for the week, and for the month. As I have experienced this myself, I know a lot of students in and out my campus are also struggling with the same problems of “food insecurity” such as me.

While there are existing food pantries and food vouchers available in some colleges for selected number of students around CUNY and SUNY system, there are still a lot of work to be done to limit this “food insecurity” crisis affecting majorly our student population. It will take everyone's voice working together – individual students, workers, school administration, families, local and state officials and lawmakers to make a change in this area. For this reason, I am asking the City to expand and continuously invest on programs specifically targeted to address the food insecurity crisis for young New Yorkers. I am also calling our leaders in Albany to prioritize issues on food insecurity for it creates a lasting impact on our young generation's mental, emotional, social and physical well-being necessary for a formidable future society we all aspire. As from the moving words of Waleek Boone, a student life specialist at Medgar Evers College: *“We want the student to not only think right, we want them to eat right... we want to try to give them the food that's going to have them focus in school that's going to sustain them.”* Thank you so much!



**New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Submitted by Yasmin Seweid, Senior at Baruch College
Tuesday, March 3, 2020**

Good morning. My name is Yasmin Seweid, and I am a senior at Baruch College studying Sociology. I want to thank the New York City Council and the Committee on Higher Education for the opportunity to submit testimony.

As a volunteer at the Office of Health and Wellness, I have had the opportunity to speak to Baruch students regarding their physical, mental and emotional health. Through various conversations, my peers and I have discussed the ineffectiveness of the services provided by the Counseling Center. After my first semester at Baruch College, I was forced to take a semester off to deal with school pressures and personal traumas. Upon returning to Baruch, I utilized the Counseling Center to combat my mental health problems. However, after three semesters of seeing a psychologist, I noticed no change and decided to stop going. Had there been proper resources to help me work through my problems, I would have been able to continue my education and stay on track to graduate on time. Although I am privileged in having health insurance through my parents and was able to find an external psychologist, many students do not have that privilege and continue to battle their mental health on their own. Baruch College's Counseling Center employs ten counselors, two of whom are student psychological counselors. With over 15,000 undergraduate students, the Counseling Center is understaffed and under-resourced, unable to properly serve them. Furthermore, some students in my university's diverse student body have varying experiences that necessitate the presence of counselors equipped with handling different mental illnesses. Because of the lack of sufficient funding, there is a deficit of properly trained counselors serving the students. Furthermore, the resources that are available to students are not well advertised and unknown to many. Baruch College students require efficient and productive counseling services in order to allow for a fruitful education.

Baruch College has continued to impose \$200 annual tuition hikes, with \$120 intended for health and wellness services. With over \$3 million collected from students, we are expecting gross improvements to the health and wellness department, but nothing has yet to be done. On behalf of the Baruch student body, I call on our leaders in City Council to ensure the allocation of more funds for the Counseling Center, to ensure that students are provided with the services that they are paying for. Through more funding, Baruch may be able to hire more well-trained counselors, advertise their services to a broad audience and implement necessary programs for the students' overall health and wellness. We are in desperate need of personnel who care about providing services to ensure an equitable and productive educational journey.



Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. I hope this will encourage New York City to assist in making general education better.