

## NEWS RELEASE

**Date:** March 13, 2016

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### **STUDENTS AND LAWMAKERS TO GOVERNOR CUOMO: SAVE CUNY AND THE AMERICAN DREAM!**

Today, hundreds of students from the City University of New York (CUNY) marched across the Brooklyn Bridge to protest Governor Andrew Cuomo's proposed budget cuts and tuition hikes.

Governor Cuomo's 2016-17 Executive Budget request, released in January, cuts half a billion dollars in state funding from CUNY and extends the NYCUNY2020 plan—which has increased tuition \$300 each academic year since 2011—for another five years.

According to the governor's office, his proposed changes in CUNY funding "will not hurt" CUNY. However, the CUNY University Student Senate (USS) and students across CUNY disagree.

"It appears as though the governor is trying to sell us the Brooklyn Bridge. Today we will walk across the bridge to help send a message to the governor: that we're not buying it," said **Joseph Awadjie, chair of the University Student Senate and student trustee on the CUNY Board of Trustees.**

"CUNY is our primary bridge to opportunity and success, and the governor's proposed budget, if adopted, will only force that bridge to collapse," said **Chika Onyejiukwa, USS vice chair for Legislative Affairs and President at Hunter College Undergraduate Student Government.**

The governor's cuts and tuition hikes come on the heels of a sustained disinvestment in CUNY. NYC Comptroller Scott Stringer recently found that had CUNY's funding kept up with the growth in the state budget, CUNY would have \$637 million more this year.

"Since its founding, CUNY has provided access to quality higher education for all, including communities that were not being served by private institutions. The proposed \$450 million cut in State funding for CUNY puts that accessible system in jeopardy and will undermine an institution that has provided New Yorkers with an opportunity to improve their economic situation," said **Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams** in a letter sent to Governor Cuomo on March 10<sup>th</sup> expressing his support for the march.

"CUNY is the jewel of New York City, plain and simple," said **Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer.** "I'm proud to stand with CUNY's faculty, staff and students in fighting Albany's proposed tuition hikes and budget cuts. If we cannot maintain CUNY's promise to all, our entire city suffers."

Rather than accept the governor's proposal, the University Student Senate is supporting the budget bill backed by the State Assembly majority. Speaker Carl E. Heastie, Higher Ed Chair Deborah J. Glick recently announced their plans to fight for budget restorations, enhancements, and a two-year tuition freeze. They have provided true leadership during this budget crisis.

Members of the State Assembly in attendance at the march emphasized the Assembly's support for CUNY.

"CUNY is a crown jewel of public higher education and a critical economic engine in New York that creates a pathway to success for the most diverse student body in the country. Cutting State support for CUNY would undermine the effort to fight income inequality and promote opportunity for all New Yorkers," said **Assembly Member Richard Gottfried**, whose district includes the campuses of several CUNY institutions, including Baruch College, Macaulay Honors College, Guttman College, the CUNY Graduate Center, the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism, and the CUNY School of Professional Studies.

"Education is the pathway to opportunities and nothing should be done to hurt our CUNY students and schools from realizing their dreams. With prices rising in all aspects of life, the last thing we need is to cut funding," said **Assembly Member Michael Blake**.

"I stand with CUNY in the fight for affordable higher education and state funding. CUNY institutions provide access to higher education to some of our most underserved students. CUNY schools of Hostos Community College, Bronx Community College and Lehman College surround our district and have great impact on students and residents of the 79th assembly district. We also benefit greatly from placement of the CUNY Terrance Tolbert fellow, Arielle Wright, who has joined our team and contributes immensely to our work in the district," he added.

"I will continue to advocate for more funding for our CUNY schools. If we focus on classrooms, then, we can focus less on courtrooms. If we stand up for students rather than try to stand out with slogans while we put pupils and professors ahead of politics, then we can truly show we are #BuildingABetterBronx," he concluded.

"As a proud graduate of Medgar Evers and Baruch College, I know firsthand the importance of sustaining unique institutions like the City University of New York. A draconian cut of \$485M will cripple the entire CUNY system," said **Assembly Member Diana C. Richardson**.

"CUNY is one of the largest university systems in the country, and is also one of the only affordable conduits to opportunity for the city's underprivileged population. Minority students make up nearly 75 percent of the student body, and one-third of its student body reported making less than \$20,000," she added.

"The state legislature should restore full funding of CUNY to ensure continued access and affordability for all students in the State of New York. Moving forward, we must protect this vital educational system and help facilitate the rapid growth of CUNY and its programs."

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#### ***About The University Student Senate***

*The University Student Senate (USS) of the City University of New York (CUNY) is the official representative governance organization of the 500,000 students at CUNY. Founded in 1972, USS is responsible for preserving the accessibility, affordability, and excellence of higher education within the City of New York.*