

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 24, 2020

Félix V. Matos Rodríguez
Chancellor
The City University of New York
205 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017

William C. Thompson, Jr.,
Chairperson of the Board of Trustees
The City University of New York
205 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017

Dear Chancellor Matos Rodríguez and Board Chairperson Thompson,

We write to you regarding the City University of New York (CUNY) administration's decision not to renew the contract of approximately 2,800 members of its faculty for instruction during the upcoming fall semester. As you know, we worked with our colleagues in Congress to pass the CARES Act in late March to address the economic fallout due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the CARES Act we secured \$118 million in emergency financial aid for CUNY students and an additional \$132 million in institutional support for CUNY colleges.

We are dismayed that in the midst of this pandemic you have decided to lay off nearly 3,000 employees, when the CARES institutional support funding was intended to help keep faculty on payroll. The cost of keeping all 3,000 faculty members on payroll for the fall semester, based on the current semester's data, is approximately \$30 million, which is a fraction of the CARES funding allocated in part for that purpose.¹ Hundreds of employees who received health insurance through their CUNY employment will lose health coverage, which is especially egregious during a pandemic. We are deeply concerned that CUNY is conducting mass layoffs when so much federal funding was allocated to avoid loss of employment and subsequent loss of healthcare insurance for hundreds of our constituents.

The livelihoods and health of CUNY employees are at stake, but equally at risk is educational quality for the students. Most of the laid-off employees were adjunct faculty who were collectively responsible for teaching thousands of courses each term. Without those faculty members, courses will either see their class sizes increase dramatically or be cut entirely. Either of these outcomes imperils students' education at a time when so many students are already struggling to overcome the challenges of distance learning and virtual courses. CUNY enrollment projections so far indicate a small decline for the fall, but a significant increase for this summer, according to testimony from Chancellor Matos Rodríguez on July 28, 2020. Fall figures may still rise. With new research suggesting that distance-

¹ Deborah J. Glick, Toby. "Attacking CUNY at the Worst Moment Possible." New York Daily News, 10 July 2020, <https://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/ny-oped-attacking-cuny-at-the-worst-moment-possible-20200710-42w4loa5hfcnpbe2154ziruhjq-story.html>.

learning classes should have no more than 12 students², we are alarmed to see that CUNY appears to be moving in the opposite direction.

New York will need CUNY more than ever as we seek to rebuild the economy and create a more just world. The communities that have borne the greatest loss of life and employment during the pandemic are the same communities whose members will rely on CUNY to rebuild their lives. New Yorkers from all parts of the city and surrounding region will need CUNY as they seek to gain new skills and earn college degrees. Reduced course offerings, fewer faculty and over-sized classes will leave CUNY under-prepared to support the students whose need for support is greatest. A strong and fully staffed CUNY is a unique and essential resource for New York's recovery and an essential part of addressing systemic racism.

We are proud that we were able to work with our colleagues in Congress to bring more than \$132 million in institutional funding to CUNY colleges through the CARES Act. We expect CUNY management to be a steward of these funds by maintaining worker employment and health insurance to the greatest extent possible in these precarious times. Thank you for your attention to this matter.


Sincerely,



Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress



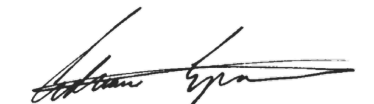
Max Rose
Member of Congress



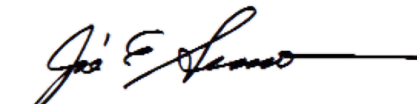
Kathleen M. Rice
Member of Congress



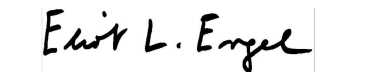
Thomas R. Suozzi
Member of Congress



Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



José E. Serrano
Member of Congress



Eliot L. Engel
Member of Congress



Sean Patrick Maloney
Member of Congress

² Newton, Derek. "Online College Classes Should Have No More Than 12 Students." Forbes, 28 June 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dereknewton/2020/06/28/online-college-classes-should-have-no-more-than-12-students/>.