

**Hearing Before the United States House of Representatives
Committee on Education & Workforce
July 15, 2025**

**Testimony of Félix V. Matos Rodríguez
Chancellor, City University of New York**

Chairman Walberg, Ranking Member Scott, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at this important hearing. I am Félix Matos Rodríguez, and it is a privilege to serve as Chancellor of the City University of New York (CUNY), and to represent our institution here today.

This Committee has highlighted the alarming rise in antisemitism on university campuses of all sizes. Our university has not been immune—but I want to be clear that **antisemitism has no place at CUNY**. I share your conviction to identify and address the underlying factors instigating antisemitism on campuses to ensure that our campuses are safe and welcoming.

To begin, I'd like to share a bit about the City University of New York, and my experience here. I began as an associate professor at Hunter College in 2000, and before I became Chancellor, I had the honor of serving as president of Hostos Community College and then Queens College. During that time, I taught hundreds of students in the classroom, and led thousands more as an administrator. I firmly believe that there is no higher calling than educating our next generation and I am proud of the work that we have done to create opportunities for New Yorkers in my more than two decades at the university.

CUNY is the nation's largest urban public university. We are comprised of 26 campuses spread across New York City's five boroughs, with 11 senior colleges, seven community colleges, and eight graduate, honors, and professional schools offering over 2,800 top-notch academic programs. We serve nearly 240,000 degree-seeking students, support 40,000 employees, and award 50,000 degrees each year. Each of our campuses has its own president and administration, and as Chancellor, I oversee the university's operations, implement policies, and work to advance our mission of providing accessible, high-quality education, regardless of means or background.

Due to our focus on affordability, educational quality, and meaningful job opportunities for our students, we have been recognized as a powerful engine of social mobility. **We're proud that we propel more students into the middle class and beyond than all the Ivy League schools combined.** And our annual tuition for in-state students, which is under \$5,000 for community colleges and under \$7,000 for senior colleges, remains among the most affordable in the nation.

By keeping costs low, we attract a wide array of students from across our city, the country, and the world. Across our campuses, over 55 percent of our students report household income below the New York City poverty line. For our first-time freshmen students, 87% attended a NYC public high school or a NYC parochial high school. Without relying on any racial preferences, our university reflects the diversity of the city in which it is located: we are roughly 22% Asian, 27% Black, 28% Hispanic, and 23% White. And two in three undergraduate students attend our schools tuition-free. Our geographic, racial, religious, and socioeconomic diversity enriches our community and benefits us. In many ways, our university reflects the dynamism, and the complexity, of the city we call home.

The size and scope of our university also comes with challenges, and we confront them head on. That includes the unacceptable rise in antisemitism that we are seeing in so many corners of our society.

From CUNY's earliest days, we've prided ourselves on being a home for New York's Jewish students when others would not accept them. CUNY experienced instances of antisemitism even before October 7th, 2023, and those challenges only grew more pronounced after the horrific terrorist attack on Israel on that day. Antisemitism is something I confronted the moment I became Chancellor in 2019, informed by my time as president of Queens College where I worked to combat antisemitism by partnering with Jewish students, faculty, staff, and community members. And although our response has not always been perfect, our commitment to this important work has never wavered.

I welcome the opportunity this hearing provides to discuss the various ways we have worked to address antisemitism on our campuses. I'd like to highlight one example that I think encapsulates the unique challenges that we face and how we have learned from these past experiences to make our university a safer and more welcoming place for our Jewish community.

In the spring of 2024, an encampment disrupted City College's campus during our spring break. In response, I called an emergency meeting of the Board to vote on additional funding for increased security personnel. We worked closely with the NYPD, and I am grateful for the critical guidance and expertise they provided. When it became clear that protestors posed a threat to the safety and well-being of our community, we made the serious and necessary decision to request NYPD's presence on campus. 170 people were arrested that night inside and outside City College, most of whom were not from the CUNY community. While we ended the encampment before students returned to campus after spring break, it was not before damage was done to City College property.

We learned from that experience. Prior to 2024, encampments were not an issue on our campuses. Now, we have clarified and better communicated our rules to the CUNY community—and it is well understood across all of our campuses that we have a zero-tolerance policy against encampments. We've also strengthened our campuses' safety by

hiring more than 150 full-time security employees and contracting with an additional 250 security personnel to provide extra support as needed. And prior to the start of this last academic school year, we conducted additional training for public safety and other campus personnel on creating incident plans and how to handle demonstrations and protests.

As a result of all this work, this past spring, we applied our zero-tolerance policy and, with CUNY public safety officers, prevented an encampment at City College. I want to be clear that ensuring our students remain safe is and must remain a top priority, and we are committed to constant vigilance against antisemitism.

In addition to meeting the moment from a safety perspective, we are also taking steps to address the underlying issues that affect the climate on our campuses.

As many of you know, Governor Hochul invited former Chief Judge of New York and Chief Judge of the New York State Court of Appeals Jonathan Lippman to examine antisemitism on our campuses. Judge Lippman's report was helpful to us as we have considered what additional actions we can take. To name a few:

1. We have launched a center charged with centralizing CUNY's discrimination and harassment policies across our 26 campuses to ensure that policies are enforced consistently and that when policies are violated, people are held accountable.
2. We've partnered with the Constructive Dialogue Initiative to drive a systemic culture shift across our 26 campuses. The initiative is designed to strengthen CUNY's ability to navigate differences, engage in civil conversations about difficult and polarizing issues, and confront discrimination targeting particular populations—including Jewish students, faculty, and staff—within the CUNY community.
3. We've procured a new state-of-the-art case management system to track, timely report, and respond to allegations of any type of discrimination.
4. We have expanded Title VI education, training, and compliance across our campuses.
5. We have established a Freedom of Expression Working Group to develop a university-wide policy to balance free speech with safety and civility.
6. We are collaborating with Hillel on their Campus Climate Initiative. We are taking Hillel's recommendations as part of this initiative and acting on them.
7. We've administered a comprehensive campus climate survey, the results of which are currently being analyzed and will strengthen our efforts to create a welcoming and respectful environment for all members of the CUNY community.

Since 2022, this important work has represented an institution-wide, deep-seated, multi-million-dollar effort to combat antisemitism and keep our Jewish community safe. We've undertaken all our antisemitism efforts in close consultation with our Jewish community members, as well as Jewish leaders in New York City. In 2023, I created the Advisory Council on Jewish Life to bring together local Jewish leaders to advise me on ways to lift up Jewish life and foster better communication. I am deeply indebted to the Council for their advice and partnership.

Our engagement with the community has resulted in powerful partnerships to combat antisemitism. CUNY is working with the UJA-Federation of New York to develop a three-credit undergraduate course for public school teachers. The course will empower teachers with the skills to navigate difficult conversations in the classroom around complex social topics, including antisemitism. And through the generosity of the Laterman Family Foundation and the "AddressHate" Initiative, Baruch College launched The Antisemitism Studies Laboratory, which will bolster research, advance pedagogy, and promote community engagement aimed at countering antisemitism locally, nationally, and globally.

I am also proud of our engagement with institutions of higher education in Israel. In 2022, I led a trip of CUNY college presidents to Israel. The Jewish Community Relations Council of New York organized our trip, giving us the opportunity to engage with students, faculty, and leaders at some of Israel's most important educational institutions. I had another trip planned for October 2023, which was postponed after the horrific terrorist attack on Israel. We are planning to return to Israel later this year to continue building bridges between CUNY and Israeli educational leaders, and we hope circumstances there allow it.

In the wake of the horrific October 7 attacks on Israel, I wrote a letter to the entire CUNY community, expressing our grief and outrage, and condemning Hamas' cowardly acts of terrorism. I was unequivocal: "We are sickened by these atrocities...[and] [w]e decry those who justify — and even celebrate — acts of terrorism as a means of furthering a political struggle." In my letter, I also spoke to the responsibility of universities:

I believe very strongly that part of the job of higher education — especially at a great public university like ours with all its diversity — is to provide students with the knowledge and tools to navigate the complexities of today's world. Ongoing global conflicts challenge all of us to embrace the ideals of education as an antidote to vitriol and violence and a path to justice and peace.

CUNY continues to work tirelessly to fulfill this responsibility. Although I am proud of the progress we've made as a university, we know that we must do better. We all must do better. I look forward to discussing how we can best address the root causes of antisemitism, and to speaking more about the important work being done at the City University of New York to achieve that goal.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

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