

## **Statement by PSC member Donna Gill May 7, 2008, City Hall**

My name is Donna Gill and I have worked at Hunter College for 20 years. I work in the Financial Aid office, which means I work with students every day, and I work with them in a pretty intimate way—I see their taxes, I see their income, I have a window into their daily struggles to make ends meet. And here's what I can tell you: Hunter students, CUNY students, are hard-working people of very modest means. Many of them are poor. They are in college to make a better future for themselves and their families. They work incredibly hard to juggle school and work and family obligations.

Here's what else I can tell you: The financial aid and scholarships I and my co-workers are able to help them secure are a lifeline. Without them, they could not go to college. They would not have a future with economic security.

So when the Mayor talks about cutting CUNY's budget, and in particular cutting programs like the Vallone Scholarship, it has real consequences for real students—and it's devastating.

The Mayor's Executive Budget calls for \$11.2 million in cuts to the Vallone Scholarship Program. In budget terms, that sum is about two-one-hundredths of a percent of the overall city budget—tiny. And in terms of Mayor Bloomberg's own life as a billionaire, well, it's probably what he earns in a month in interest. But for the rest of us, \$11 million is a lot of money. In fact, it's hard for me, a non-millionaire, to grasp what that sum really means.

But I can tell you what it means to each of my students who get Vallone Scholarships. Those scholarships are \$625 for a semester. Or I should say they *were*, because the Mayor's budget cuts in the current fiscal year have already cut the scholarships by \$160. That means students who started the semester counting on \$625 to help with their tuition are now \$160 short. And while \$160 is probably a sum the Mayor can't really grasp, for my students it is often an insurmountable obstacle. \$160 is a week's groceries for a family. \$160 is two months of MetroCards. \$160 is the difference between them being able to register for next semester or not—because if they don't pay the additional \$160 now they're not allowed to register for next semester. And for many of them, I can tell you from personal experience, they don't have it to pay.

So we are here today, faculty and staff at CUNY, members of the Professional Staff Congress, to urge the City Council in the strongest terms possible to restore the budget cuts. Restore the cuts to the Vallone Scholarships! Restore the cuts to other programs! Restore the cuts to the operating budget! Restore the cuts! Restore the cuts!