

RESOLUTION IN OPPOSITION TO GOVERNOR PATERSON'S PROPOSED PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION EMPOWERMENT AND INNOVATION ACT

Whereas, Governor Paterson's Executive Budget proposal for FY 2010-2011 calls not only for another round of disproportionate cuts to CUNY—\$84.4 million cut to CUNY's 11 senior colleges and \$285 cut per full-time-equivalent student to CUNY's six community colleges—but also for “the most significant overhaul of New York's public higher education system in a generation;” and

Whereas, this overhaul, the “Public Higher Education Empowerment and Innovation Act,” calls for the following approach to tuition and State support:

- a so-called “rational tuition policy,” which would remove tuition rate changes from legislative oversight and place responsibility for tuition increases with the Boards of Trustees of CUNY and SUNY,
- authorization of the Boards of Trustees to increase tuition *annually* up to a cap of two and one-half times the five-year average of the Higher Education Price Index [HEPI],
- authorization of Board of Trustees to implement differential tuition rates by campus and by program, differentials that would *not* be subject to the HEPI cap; and

Whereas, by allowing CUNY to set its own tuition levels, free from legislative oversight and public accountability, making zero commitment to match any tuition increases with additional State dollars, and providing no guarantee that ever-escalating tuition would not be used to replace existing State support, the governor's proposal essentially takes the public out of public higher education; and

Whereas, under this formula, CUNY could raise tuition up to ten percent this year, rather than the two percent requested, and could go on raising tuition by a similar amount every year; and

Whereas, tuition increases at this level, far from being “rational,” would place the University out of reach for those who cannot afford the constantly rising tuition, and would jeopardize a tradition of access to CUNY that spans three centuries and

Whereas, differential tuition means differential access—poorer students could be shut out of certain majors, thereby exacerbating existing and persistent inequalities of race, gender and class; and

Whereas, differential tuition also poses a threat to a comprehensive liberal arts education and to student choice, as it may force students to decide on a program based solely on cost, as it could eliminate the opportunity for exploration of courses in multiple departments, and as it could make changing one's major logistically untenable; and

Whereas, the proposal represents a new, more insidious phase of the slow-motion privatization of CUNY that has been occurring ever since free tuition was ended in 1975: the proposal would further shift the cost of college onto the backs of individual students and their families, making

attendance at CUNY largely a private rather than a publicly shared expense; and the decisions about the cost increases would be removed from public accountability and placed in the hands of a Board of Trustees that is unelected and not accountable to the public; and

Whereas, other aspects of the Act include further privatizing proposals, such as the provision—chiefly relevant to SUNY—that provides for the selling off of public land owned by the universities for private, for-profit enterprises; and

Whereas, the “Public Higher Education Empowerment and Innovation Act” fundamentally misunderstands the nature of public higher education: it is a public good, not a private commodity; its benefit is to the whole society, not just to the individual; therefore be it

Resolved, that while the PSC believes that some minor elements of the governor’s proposal—such as economies of purchasing—may be beneficial for the public universities, the Public Higher Education Empowerment and Innovation Act is, essentially—and dangerously—an attempt to privatize public higher education; and be it further

Resolved, that the PSC call on the New York State Legislature to reject the governor’s proposed budget cuts for CUNY, to support the PSC’s proposal to the Legislature to make a modest start this year on restoration of funds cut in the past two years, to reject the central, privatizing structure of the Public Higher Education Empowerment and Innovation Act, and to accept instead the PSC’s proposal to start now on a long-term strategy for rational *investment* by the State in its public university systems.