



222-05 56 Avenue
Bayside, New York 11364

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
New York State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

5th March, 2025

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

Dear Chancellor Matos Rodríguez and Governor Hochul:

This is a communication of these groups of Queensborough Community College:

The Faculty Academic Freedom Committee

The Faculty Executive Committee

The Executive Committee of the QCC Professional Staff Congress

We are communicating in response to the rescinding of the announcement of Hunter's two positions in Palestinian Studies. As faculty bodies we are concerned about academic freedom. We find Governor Hochul's action to be deplorable as it not only violates the Academic Freedom of the CUNY and Hunter College but it fundamentally rests on incorrect concepts of how universities, particularly public universities, function and their importance to the people they serve. In overriding the academic judgments of the College rather than safeguarding them, the recent actions are irresponsible.

First, it is a serious violation of academic freedom and autonomy that all institutions of higher education, public and private, depend on. In *Sweezy vs New Hampshire*, 354 U.S. 234, the Supreme Court further recognized and accepted academic freedom for educational institutions and grounded it more firmly in our Constitution. The Supreme Court accepted Justice Frankfurter's reasoning from *Wieman* and stated its belief that Academic Freedom is protected by the Constitution. In addition, Justice Frankfurter outlined the "four essential freedoms" of a university: "to determine for itself on academic grounds:

1) Who may teach ,2) What may be taught 3) How shall it be taught and 4) Who may be admitted to study

The actions of the Governor are violative of the legal right of CUNY and Hunter College to decide who may teach and what is to be taught.

The American Association of University Professors, the foremost authority on academic freedom, has asserted that "the common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition," and that rather than suppressing controversial ideas or sidestepping contentious debate, "controversy is at the heart of free academic inquiry." To fulfill our mission as a public college, not only should we not avoid controversy, but we are obliged to engage it free from the political priorities of government and the ever-changing vagaries of public opinion.

The assertion of authority over our academic institution would deny those who enter CUNY of access to scholars who are experts in disciplines and are aware of and offer perspectives and positions that may at times attract the attention of the public that may at times be volatile. The faculty of CUNY are professional educators with a responsibility to provide comprehensive information on the subjects they teach and multiple approaches and arguments in order to exemplify and promote critical thinking skills to allow those learners to arrive at and defend their own positions. In this matter the action of the Governor would deny students access to scholars who are part of a growing discipline. Palestinian Studies departments, programs, and centers exist at both public and private universities such as Columbia, Brown, Stanford, New Mexico State, UC Berkeley, Northwestern, and Princeton. Finally, as educators we take exception to Governor Hochul's characterization of the announcement of these hires as examples of antisemitism. Such a characterization exemplifies what CUNY is in part dedicated to mitigate against as it appears to rest on assumptions that the study of history is in part directed to address. The assumption that studying the history, culture, and arts of Palestine from a Palestinian perspective is by definition antisemitic reduces Palestinian experience only to its relationship to Israel. Most damaging, it equates critical assessment of Israeli policy towards Palestine with antisemitism. The conflation of Israel with Jews throughout the world is itself an idea that is associated with those who are motivated by antagonisms towards others. An education in such matters that CUNY has thus far been providing to the public that it serves mitigates against facile notions that often prove to cause or support anti-social behaviors.

At Queensborough Community College we welcome all who wish to study and we embrace all in common community and accept as our responsibility to impart to all who come to us all that they need to succeed in this world. Our academic freedom is essential to our faculty and to offer in our curricula what we deem best suited to accomplish our mission. The decision by the Governor violates both the spirit and the letter of that freedom.

We petition you for the reinstatement of the announcement of the faculty positions with the most accurate descriptions thereof with appropriate language as determined by the faculty of Hunter College.

Respectfully,

The Faculty Academic Freedom Committee, Julian Stark, Ph.D., Chairperson

The Faculty Executive Committee, Jonathan Cornick, Ph.D., Chairperson

The Executive Committee of the QCC Professional Staff Congress, Philip A. Pecorino, Ph.D.,
Chairperson

Cc:

William Thompson, Chairperson, CUNY Board of
Trustees

Nancy Cantor, Hunter College President

Christine Mangino, Queensborough Community
College President