CUNY Board of Trustees Meeting Testimony

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I am coming before you today to discuss the importance of workplace bullying prevention at CUNY, and to consider the execution of this initiative in the upcoming budget. I speak to you as someone who has done published research in this field and as one who has spoken on this issue in various settings.

Yes, at CUNY there are many policies in existence, for example the CUNY Workplace/Domestic Violence Policy, The Policy on Reporting Alleged Misconduct, the Henderson Rules, etc., however none of them directly address workplace bullying prevention.

Workplace bullying is defined as, but not limited to unwanted, offensive, humiliating, and undermining behavior towards an individual or groups of individuals. It is repeated and inappropriate behavior, either direct or indirect, whether it is verbal, physical, or otherwise expressed by one or more persons, against another or at others, in the workplace and/or in the course of employment. Examples of workplace bullying include slandering, ridiculing or maligning a person or his/her family, and can include persistent name calling which is threatening, hurtful or insulting to the target. Clearly such abusive language or behavior is unacceptable, and should not be tolerated.

Some of the behaviors that I am specifically alluding to in our environment, include if displayed on an ongoing basis-can possibly lead to certain effects. These are effects that are based on judgment, and may differ from individual to individual:

1. Falsely accusing a staff member of 'errors' not performed as such. This attitude can possibly lead to low morale of the accused staff member.

2. Not acknowledging a colleague's work-especially one who is going for promotion. This behavior can lead to physical and/or psychological symptoms for the accused colleague.

3. Creating rules that are unexpected, and did not exist earlier to the conversation. This can lead to a colleague blaming himself/herself for problems of misunderstanding rules.

4. Criticizing a colleague on an ongoing basis. This can lead to a colleague feeling withdrawn or evasive.

According to the Workplace Bullying Institute (2014) 49% of adult Americans have been bullied, or have witnessed bullying on their jobs.We can only ask why are higher education institutions so prone to workplace bullying:

1. The climate of tolerance at the University, if misused, can lead to colleagues being manipulated, to advocate certain positions.

2. The bystanders of workplace bullying or witnesses to workplace bullying, are afraid to speak up, for fear they may lose their jobs.

3. Tenure and promotion issues lead to the fact that certain people control this process, more than others.

4. Administrators may demand rapid decisions of their staff members-which makes staff exhibit higher stress levels, and therefore possibly abnormal physical symptoms.

5. The culture of academic freedom guarantees that we can share ideas, but does not ensure this is done in a civil and collegial manner.

The idea is to eliminate workplace bullying from our workplace. Not only do we focus on the consequences of workplace bullying on individuals who are the affected targets, but we must also concentrate on our culture that has allowed such workplace bullying to occur in the first place. We need to focus on the bullying behaviors, not on the bullies themselves who express such behaviors. The focus is not to label people as bullies nor targets, but to analyze this issue as an organizational issue-so that we prevent such unwanted behaviors in general.

With a statement of commitment, definition, prevention measures, duties and accountability of managers, supervisors, chairs and faculty and other staff, information and training will demonstrate to all individuals at CUNY that this issue is to be taken seriously.

I am appealing today to the Board of Trustees to recognize the existence of such issues on their  respective campuses--so that administration, staff and faculty can take the appropriate measures to ensure that our CUNY employees are not subjected to such inappropriate behaviors-so that absenteeism, turnover, lack of teamwork and job disengagement are not manifestations of this issue.

Thank you.