

University Student Senate

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Doctoral and Graduate
Students' Council

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JOINT RESOLUTION Demanding a Safe Vessel at NYC Hudson Yards

Adopted by the Doctoral and Graduate Students' Council on March 19, 2021

Adopted by the University Student Senate on April 11, 2021

To: The City University of New York (CUNY), CUNY Board of Trustees, Elected Officials of the City and State of New York, and the United States Congress.

WHEREAS, New York City, a major metropolitan hub of tourism and a global immigrant-receiving city, welcomes millions of visitors, businesspeople and citizens from across the United States and throughout the world annually; and

WHEREAS, the [\\$25 billion Hudson Yards mega-development in Manhattan's Far West Side was funded in part by \\$1.2 Billion in taxes through a calculated and manipulative form of financial gerrymandering,](#) and by strategic stringing together of census tracts, the developer of Hudson Yards, [The Related Companies,](#) funded the largest and most expensive private real estate mega project in U.S. history using E-5 Visa Funds designated for community renewal of the "Targeted Employment Area" (TEA) of Harlem, a process that was [sanctioned under New York State law;](#) and

WHEREAS, [divestment from distressed urban communities is tantamount to financial homicide of said communities,](#) the divestment of E-5 Visa funds designated for the TEA of Harlem to build the Hudson Yards Megaproject, the most luxurious private and commercial real estate development undertaking in [the history of the United States,](#) must be publicly acknowledged and redressed through reparations of massive proportion; and

WHEREAS, Harlem has an unemployment rate that is 51% higher than the national average, the median household income in Harlem in 2018 was \$48,500 - about 25% less than citywide median, and 56.1% of Harlem residents identified as Black, 22.9% identified as Hispanic, 13.8% identified as White, and 4.4% identified as Asian ([NYU Furman Center](#)); and

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WHEREAS, the poverty rate in Central Harlem was 25.1% in 2018 compared to 17.3% citywide. [The median income in Manhattan's poorest neighborhood, East Harlem, is less than half the borough's as a whole. Just 23% of East Harlem's students perform at grade level in math and only 22% in reading. Public housing makes up 33% of rental units in the area, the highest rate in the city;](#) and

WHEREAS, the real median gross rent in Central Harlem increased from \$820 in 2006 to \$1,160 in 2018, with 23.9% of renter households in Central Harlem severely rent burdened (spent more than 50% of household income on rent), 43.8% of the rental units are affordable at the 80% Area Median Income - 15 percentage points lower than the share in 2010, 16.3% of the rental units were public housing rental units in 2018, and the overall rental vacancy rate in Central Harlem was 4.1% ([NYU Furman Center](#)); and

WHEREAS, these statistics provide clear and compelling evidence that this is a community that would have benefited greatly from the "TEA" funding, even pre-pandemic, let alone throughout this pandemic, when the infrastructures of support that the E-5 Visa funding would have surely provided, if not diverted, could have ensured greater resilience overall in the community of Harlem; we must also address the lethal destruction that, not once, but three times, has occurred at The Vessel, Hudson Yards' "crowned jewel," as a symbol of unchecked capitalism at the expense of working-class communities across New York City; and

WHEREAS, since its 2019 debut, [The Vessel](#) has gone viral as the centerpiece of one of New York City's top travel destinations, the Hudson Yards Development, attracting millions more tourists every year; and

WHEREAS, this Thomas Heatherwick-designed, \$200 million dollar climbable public art installation, towering at 150 feet tall, has become a social media sensation, offering panoramic views of New York City; and

WHEREAS, since its grand opening in the Spring of 2019, The Vessel has also become the means by which three college-aged students have died by suicide: 3 public suicides at The Vessel within one year before the structure would be ["temporarily" closed to the public](#); and

WHEREAS, the untimely loss of these young people is profoundly felt by their families, classmates and friends, and is also traumatic to members of the public who witnessed these suicides; and

WHEREAS, according to the [Centers for Disease Control](#), suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the US for all ages, taking the lives of over 48,300 Americans every year, with approximately 123 suicides every day or one suicide every 12 minutes; and

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WHEREAS, depression affects 20-25% of Americans ages 18+ in a given year, and the prevalence of adults with a major depressive episode was highest among individuals aged 18-25 (13.1%) and among adults reporting two or more races (11.3%) ([NIMH, 2017](#)); and

WHEREAS, nearly half of those who experience a mental illness will also experience a substance use disorder and those that experience substance use disorder will also experience mental illness ([Ross & Peselow, 2012](#), [Kelly & Daley, 2013](#)); and

WHEREAS, indigenous youth have more than a 500% higher mortality rate due to opioid-related overdose compared to the general population, as well as the largest percent change increase in the number of deaths between 1991 and 2015 ([CDC, 2017](#)), and nearly 2.2 million Black Americans aged 18 or over had a substance use disorder ([PARR](#)); and

WHEREAS, excessive alcohol use is a leading cause of preventable death in the United States, is associated with various health problems, including cancer, heart disease, poor mental health, and suicide, and is responsible for approximately 95,000 deaths annually in the United States during 2011–2015, resulting in an average reduction in life expectancy of 29 years, and 2.8 million years of potential life lost ([CDC, 2020](#)); and

WHEREAS, alcohol sales increased by 54% in the week ending March 21st, 2020 due to stay-at-home orders in the United States ([JAMA Network](#)); and

WHEREAS, more than 70,000 Americans died from drug-involved overdose in 2019, including illicit drugs and prescription opioids ([Drug Abuse, 2020](#)); and

WHEREAS, according to [Mental Health America \(MHA\)](#), one of the nation's oldest mental health assistance providers, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a fourfold increase in the number of people accessing services for help with depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and other mental health-related issues; and

WHEREAS, mental health issues transcend ethnicity, race, age, class, socioeconomic status, gender, language, religion, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability, thereby affecting us all on varying levels, especially when exacerbated by food insecurity, housing instability, and the loss of employment; and

WHEREAS, in recognition of the pernicious mental health fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, especially among college-aged students, CUNY's Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez announced a [\\$5 Million Expansion of Mental Health Resources](#), stating in October 2020, "Many CUNY students face

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significant burdens that affect their mental health and, consequently, their academic success. The pandemic has only exacerbated these challenges.”; and

WHEREAS, in CUNY’s December 2019 release of its [2020-2021 Operating Budget Request and Four-Year Financial Plan](#), it included another highly contentious \$200 tuition increase at the senior colleges, along with a similar increase at community colleges, and a new \$120 per year “health and wellness fee” for all CUNY students. While there clearly is a need for improved mental health services at CUNY, the [CUNY student community protested both the tuition hike and health and wellness fee](#), arguing that it placed a greater financial strain on students as they bear the burden of financing resources and support for their own mental health; and

WHEREAS, the deleterious effects of the pandemic are [still reverberating among students in New York City, especially in working-class BIPOC communities such as Harlem, leaving many feeling anxious, depressed, isolated and with suicidal ideation](#);

WHEREAS, [CUNY’s University Student Senate \(USS\)](#) is charged with the mission of preserving the accessibility, affordability, and excellence of higher education within the City University of New York; protecting the rights of the student body, furthering the cause of public higher education and promoting the general welfare and representative governance of its student constituents comprised of over 500,000 students of the 25 CUNY campuses and the University, thereby playing a crucial role in student advocacy and ensuring the voices of our CUNY student population are being heard and their mental health be prioritized on local, state, and even national levels; and

WHEREAS, the [Doctoral and Graduate Students’ Council of the Graduate Center \(DGSC\), CUNY’s](#) mission is to foster a sense of community among graduate students; reflect and encourage the expression of their diversity; develop reciprocal channels of communication among graduate students, undergraduates, faculty, staff, and the administration of the Graduate Center; generate a space of discussion on Graduate Center issues; project the students’ voice in Graduate Center affairs; and provide students with valuable resources for advancing their professional careers and enjoying their personal time; **therefore, let it be**

RESOLVED, that the USS and the DGSC encourage CUNY students to pressure [Governor Andrew Cuomo](#) and state officials to increase funding for mental health support services in light of the pandemic and provide transparent budgets for current mental health funding; and

RESOLVED, that the USS and DGSC call upon the City of New York and the [New York Convention and Visitors Bureau \(NYCVB\)](#) to [shut down their famed "NYC Attraction No 1" The Vessel at Hudson Yards](#), suspending all visitation until safety mechanisms are installed that prevent any future suicide attempts; and

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RESOLVED, that the USS and DGSC call upon the [New York Convention and Visitors Bureau](#) (NYCVB) to remove The Vessel at Hudson Yards from their "[Top Ten Best Attractions in NYC](#)" list until it is deemed safe by the New York City Department of Buildings; and

RESOLVED, that the City University of New York publicly support the USS and DGSC in demanding Elected Officials who service the \$25 Billion neighborhood of Hudson Yards: Senator Hoylman, Assembly Member Dick Gottfried, and City Council Speaker Corey Johnson to support keeping The Vessel closed to the public until it is secured as a safe tourist attraction and not a life-threatening public health risk; and

RESOLVED, that the USS and DGSC call upon [Bill Perkins](#), City Council Member for District 9 encompassing Central Harlem, Morningside Heights, Upper West Side, East Harlem, [Corey Johnson](#), Speaker of NYC Council and Council Member for District 3 (Hudson Yards), [Scott Stringer](#), NYC Comptroller, [Jumaane Williams](#) and the Office of the Public Advocate for the City of New York, and [Gayle A. Brewer](#), Manhattan Borough President, to publicly hold *The Related Companies* accountable to the New York City Council and the public in implementing the preventive steps it planned to take to the board before reopening the sculpture to visitors, and to guarantee the creation of a task force for its reopening comprised of stakeholders, mental health professionals and advocates, community members and CUNY students to ensure there is public accountability and oversight in the safe reopening of the Vessel; and

RESOLVED, that the USS and DGSC call upon the City of New York, to publicly hold Related Companies accountable to the New York City Council and the public in implementing the preventive steps it planned to take to the board before reopening the sculpture to visitors. Additionally, the students of CUNY call upon Jumaane Williams to guarantee the creation of a task force for its reopening comprised of stakeholders, mental health professionals and advocates, community members and CUNY students that hold public community forums, town hall meetings, and workshops to ensure there is public accountability and oversight in the safe reopening of the Vessel; and

RESOLVED, that the USS and DGSC call upon the chairman of Manhattan's Community Board 4, [Lowell Kern](#), to keep his word that The Vessel remain closed indefinitely and hold Related Companies accountable to the community board and the public in implementing the [preventive steps it planned to take to the board before reopening the sculpture to visitors](#). Additionally, the students of CUNY call upon Lowell Kern and Manhattan Community Board 4 to guarantee the creation of a task force for its reopening comprised of stakeholders, mental health professionals and advocates, community members and CUNY students that hold public community forums, town hall meetings, and workshops to ensure there is public accountability and oversight in the safe reopening of the Vessel; and

RESOLVED, that [Stephen Ross, billionaire founder of the Related Companies](#), Hudson Yards' co-developer and the proprietor of The Vessel, [Related Companies](#) be held publicly accountable to install a copper commemorative plaque at the entrance of The Vessel commemorating the three

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suicide victims whose lives were taken too soon and reinvest the \$1.2 Billion designated for the “TEA” back into the Harlem community; and

RESOLVED, that the proprietor of The Vessel, the [Related Companies](#) be charged with distributing mental health awareness resources to each and every visitor to The Vessel from the time of reopening, onward; and

RESOLVED, that 10% of the annual gross income for all commercial retailers and headquarters at Hudson Yards be taxed and allocated equally to the CUNY Graduate School of Public Health & Health Policy and to the CUNY Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College, CUNY School of Medicine, all campuses housed in Harlem along with CUNY’s oldest institution, the City College of New York, who together would be charged with a community-based initiative expanding mental health services that would prioritize CUNY students and low-income residents of Harlem; and

RESOLVED, that the USS and DGSC urge the CUNY Office of Academic Affairs and Office of Student Affairs to enact a policy mandating uniform mental health resources and hotlines (see below) permanently be included and continuously updated in all syllabi across the CUNY college and university system beginning in the Fall of 2021; and

RESOLVED, that the USS and DGSC call upon CUNY colleges that currently use Chat Bot, AI technology, or other software for student engagement to further utilize these programs in the service of student mental health by providing students with accessible mental healthcare professionals and hotlines. Additionally, mental health services and resources for students will be prominently featured and kept updated on all learning platforms regularly accessed by students, such as CUNYFirst and Blackboard; and

RESOLVED, the USS and the DGSC call on CUNY and its Board of Trustees to ensure that the \$5 Million allocation for health and wellness services be doubled to \$10 million out of the \$250 Million in CARES Act funding, ensuring such services are available to all students regardless of legal status or health insurance through monitoring and evaluation of such programs, demonstrate its ongoing commitment the mental health and wellbeing of all CUNY students. At this critical inflection point a year after the dawn of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the cost of increased mental health services and resources should not be borne by our students for whom such services are designed to benefit, but by the institution at which we pay our tuition each semester; and

RESOLVED that the the USS and the DGSC call upon the CUNY Board of Trustees (appointed by the Mayor and Governor) and our City Council members to sign on to a collective letter to the offices of NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio and NY State Governor Andrew Cuomo in solidarity with CUNY students mandating a tuition freeze and reversal of the “health and wellness fee” at CUNY. Furthermore, we call on the CUNY Board of Trustees and our representatives, as well as our city council members to pressure Governor Cuomo and the state to halt and reverse a decade of austerity measures that have

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increased the cost of a quality higher education for CUNY students, 42% of whom live in households earning less than \$20,000 per year, with the horizon of returning to a [free and publicly-funded CUNY](#); and

RESOLVED, that the the USS and the DGSC call upon the CUNY Board of Trustees (appointed by the Mayor and Governor) and our City Council members to sign on to a collective letter to the offices of NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio and NY State Governor Andrew Cuomo in solidarity with CUNY students and their families to hold New York City's wealthiest elite ([New York City alone houses more billionaires than almost any country in the world with 113 billionaires](#)) to reinvest in the working-class BIPOC communities, starting with Harlem. We demand that this letter includes the Board of Trustees endorsement in calling on Governor Cuomo and all state legislators to pass the [Invest in Our New York Act](#), [Cancel Rent \(Salazar/Niou\) \(S8802/A10826\)](#), [Eviction Moratorium \(Myrie/Reyes\) \(S8667/A10827\)](#), and [Housing Access Voucher Program \(Kavanagh/Cymbrowitz\) \(S7628A/A9657\)](#); and let it be

FINALLY RESOLVED, that the the University Student Senate and the Doctoral and Graduate Students' Council call upon the U.S. Congress and our New York State Senators Charles "Chuck" Schumer (D-NY) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) to join [U.S. Senators Chuck Grassley \(R-Iowa\) and Patrick Leahy \(D-Vt.\) in reviving and championing the passage of their bi-partisan bill](#), the [EB-5 Reform and Integrity Act of 2019 \(S. 2540\)](#): REAUTHORIZING AND REFORMING THE EB-5 REGIONAL CENTER PROGRAM, thereby ensuring transparency, accountability and oversight of capital as envisioned in the Immigration Act of 1990, and ensuring full investment in the urban communities for which the funds were intended - communities that our CUNY students call home.

Resources for Support

If you or someone you know is considering suicide, [there are resources to help.](#)