

CUNY union members arrested at Cuomo's door

By Conor Skelding, POLITICO

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Police arrested dozens of members of the City University's faculty union Thursday evening outside Gov. Andrew Cuomo's Manhattan office.

The union, the Professional Staff Congress, had staged a "die-in," linking arms and laying down in front of the entrance to 633 Third Avenue. They chanted, "C-U-N-Y! Don't let CUNY die!"

The union, which has worked without a contract since 2011, was protesting Cuomo's executive budget, which proposed shifting \$485 million in annual CUNY costs from the state to the city, with \$240 million to settle CUNY's labor contracts contingent on the shift. Cuomo's office has since said neither the city nor CUNY will lose one cent, and that CUNY has a wasteful administration which must be restructured.

"Faculty and staff are leaving. We can't recruit them," PSC treasurer Michael Fabricant told POLITICO New York after the arrests began. Between that and rising tuition, he said, CUNY is suffering from "declining quality and declining access."

Fabricant said police arrested "over 40" union members, as well as City Council Higher Education Committee Chair Inez Barron and several students.

The union had publicized its plans to seek arrest and the police were prepared, with dozens of members of the Strategic Response Group and two Department of Corrections buses. A member of the Technical Assistance Response Unit recorded each arrest with a handheld video camera.

The protesters began to block the doors at 4:59 p.m. After giving them two orders to disperse at 5:08 p.m., police began arrests at 5:10 p.m.

The New York City Police Department's public information office did not immediately respond to an email inquiring how many people police had arrested and what police charged them with.

Across Third Avenue, hundreds more PSC members and supporters rallied and chanted.

Cuomo spokeswoman Dani Lever called the demonstration "appalling."

"It is appalling that the faculty union and for-hire political advocacy groups are knowingly misleading their members and the public to score cheap political points. We have said repeatedly and unequivocally that CUNY will receive its full \$1.6 billion in state aid this year," she wrote in a statement.

"Further, the Governor has urged CUNY and its faculty union to resolve their current contract negotiations. The fact that these groups are ignoring reality is alarming, irresponsible, and a flagrant disregard for the students they claim to advocate for. Rather than using unfounded and untruthful scare tactics to lie to the public, they should support the Governor's fight to direct more funding to students instead of administrative costs," she wrote.

Another union, District Council 37, which represents non-professional CUNY employees, took a less boisterous measure Thursday. That union delivered to the governor a petition with "more than 5,000" signatures, spokesman Rudy Orozco said Thursday. Its members have been without a contract since 2010.

A CUNY spokesman, Mike Arena, referred POLITICO New York to a statement released by chancellor James Milliken on Wednesday. "[T]he Governor has provided assurances that there will be no reductions to CUNY's budget and we are grateful for that commitment," Milliken said.