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October 3, 2007

Chancellor Matthew Goldstein  
The City University of New York  
535 East 80th Street  
New York, NY 10075

Chancellor Joel Klein  
New York City Department of Education  
52 Chambers Street, Room 320  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chancellors Goldstein and Klein:

We are writing to express our opposition to Hunter College's proposal to acquire the Julia Richman Education Complex (JREC) from the New York City Department of Education (DOE). We recognize the very real needs of the City University of New York (CUNY) and Hunter to expand and modernize their science education facilities, including the creation of a CUNY Graduate School for Public Health and new facilities for Hunter's Nursing School. However, we do not believe the plan being offered to construct a facility to house these programs on the JREC site serves the long-term interests of CUNY, the DOE, the rapidly expanding population of families with children in Manhattan, or the taxpayers of the State of New York.

We are addressing this letter to both Chancellors, but will start with our concerns about the proposal from the perspective of issues for CUNY and then follow with our concerns about the proposal from the perspective of issues for the Department of Education.

We want to be clear that our opposition to this one proposal in no way detracts from our continued strong support for Hunter College and the entire CUNY system, and fully understand that the college has a desperate need for additional facilities in order to meet the requirements of its growing, talented, and diverse student population. We fully appreciate CUNY's desire to construct state-of-the-art science facilities that will enable it to train future generations of health care and science professionals. However, we believe that Hunter's current plan for locating these facilities is shortsighted and is a poor use of the limited real estate and other public resources available to meet the needs of both CUNY and the DOE.

We have also been informed that the proposal would take at least 10 years to be completed, with new facilities unavailable until 2017 or later.

Our understanding of the Hunter proposal is that CUNY would sell its Brookdale campus—which can support nearly 1.2 million square feet of space as-of-right under existing zoning—to a private developer. The deal would require the developer to absorb the cost of building a replacement facility for the six JREC schools at the Brookdale site, at an estimated cost of \$150 million. The yet to be determined purchase price of the site would be dependent on the final outcome of ULURP and re-zoning negotiations with the City. It is our understanding that Hunter would need a minimum of \$300 million to complete construction of the science facility at the JREC site (of which \$78 million has been appropriated through the CUNY Capital plan through the State budget). Under the City’s zoning code, any new building on the current JREC site cannot exceed 560,000 square feet—much less than is required to house all the uses put forward by Hunter. Hunter has stated that the new building would house all the programs currently at the Brookdale campus, plus the new CUNY Graduate School of Public Health, plus the 175,000 square feet of instructional space needed to make up for the college’s current deficit.

However, according to analyses conducted by real estate experts, simply replacing the current programs at the Brookdale campus and meeting the 175,000 square foot deficit would leave less than 10,000 square feet available for other uses. So, as we understand the facts, the construction of the new facilities at both sites would require at least \$450 million, a ULURP and rezoning process, and 10 years of time, and would still not have adequate space for the Hunter science labs, the new Graduate School, and the new Nursing School.

In contrast, if Hunter constructed a similarly-sized new science facility on its Brookdale campus, it would still have more than 500,000 square feet of development rights available that could be used for the School of Public Health, a new Nursing School and other growth needs.

Hunter has repeatedly argued that it is absolutely essential for its new science facility to be closely proximate to its 68<sup>th</sup> Street buildings. We understand that Hunter prefers to have a new building that is walking distance from its main campus, but many universities across New York City and the nation face similar challenges and have buildings that are spread miles apart. These universities provide shuttle services for their students, and work to carefully schedule classes, to enable students to efficiently utilize their time. The location of the Brookdale campus, which is closely proximate to a number of major teaching hospitals and the new East River Science Park, will also enhance the ability of Hunter to develop internship and research opportunities for its science and health students. A *preference* by one CUNY school for expansion convenient to its existing campus is simply not a sufficient rationale to spend excessive amounts of money beyond what it would cost to build on the Brookdale site, sell off CUNY property that the larger university system may very well need for additional purposes in the future, and uproot six outstanding public schools.

We will now turn to our concerns regarding the loss of public schools at the existing JREC site.

The complex, home to four high schools, a pre-K to 8<sup>th</sup> grade school, and a middle school for children with autism, has been described by the Gates Foundation as the best model of its kind in the country. Educating an extremely diverse group of close to 2,000 young people each year, including children living in the immediate community, the children of parents working at local institutions, graduates of East Side middle schools, and young people from across New York City, JREC is a nationally recognized model of successful urban education reform. Many of the young people studying at

the complex are low-income children of color from communities historically underserved by the public education system, whose parents specifically chose to send their children to JREC because of its educational excellence, demonstrated by graduation and college attendance rates that surpass both city and state averages, and reputation for providing a safe, welcoming, and supportive environment.

Magnet schools that serve children from all backgrounds, such as the six located at JREC, are among the few public institutions left in our increasingly segregated city that proactively work to combat the dangerous effects of de facto discrimination and inequitable access to opportunity. Removing six schools from the Upper East Side that serve children of all races and backgrounds would send exactly the wrong message to our young people and the larger community.

Much of the extraordinary success of JREC is clearly the result of the innovation, dedication, and tireless work of the schools' teachers, leadership, and families. However, the importance of JREC's strong relationships with the community in which it is located cannot be underestimated. JREC is situated in the heart of a thriving residential neighborhood that has embraced both the students attending the schools and public spaces within the building itself. The Upper East Side provides a wide range of exceptional educational, cultural, volunteer, and corporate resources to JREC students; JREC's leadership has spent more than a decade developing relationships with local institutions that provide countless unique internship and volunteer opportunities. During the last decade, more than \$30 million dollars in public funds, along with substantial additional funding from local and national foundations, has been invested in the complex. This financial support has enabled the JREC's leadership to transform the facility from one that was crumbling into one that is now state-of-the-art. The building includes an adolescent health center run by Mount Sinai Hospital, a 1500 seat auditorium with a professional sound system, two gymnasiums, a swimming pool, superior art facilities, a new library, and numerous other common spaces that significantly enhance the quality of the education provided. Many of the facilities are open to the neighborhood and are frequently used by community organizations. The idea that JREC could simply be uprooted and replicated in a new building in a different community is preposterous.

The level of community support for JREC has become particularly evident since Hunter's proposal to relocate the schools became public last year. Our offices have been overwhelmed by letters, calls, and emails from constituents expressing both their love of the complex and their outrage that anyone is considering removing the schools from their community. Hundreds of local residents have attended numerous Community Board 8 meetings to oppose the proposal. A large number of concerned neighborhood residents came together earlier this year to form a new community group called Neighborhood Friends of JREC specifically to fight to prevent the relocation of the facility.

Furthermore, we are deeply disturbed that the DOE is even considering removing *any* school seats from the East Side of Manhattan. The East Side has the fastest growing number of under-five and school-age children in the entire city. Most of the existing schools in the area are operating well beyond capacity, and have already been forced to convert their libraries, computer and science labs, and other important facilities into classroom space. **The School Construction Authority's 2006 report on enrollment projections estimates that the population of elementary and middle students in School District 2, which includes the JREC site, will increase by 18.5% by 2015. District 2 is one of only two districts in the city that is projected to see an overall increase in student population, resulting in the need for an additional 3,150 elementary and middle school seats.** We appreciate the DOE's plans to add an additional 830 seats in District 2 at PS 59 and the new school that will be created once PS 59 students return to their new facility. However, these efforts will not even begin to meet the current and future demand for school space on the East Side.

More than 20% of students at JREC already come from the surrounding neighborhoods, a percentage that is likely to increase as the demand for school seats increases and more and more parents learn about the exceptional education opportunities available. If JREC were demolished, Community Board 8 would lose more than half of its public high school seats. In contrast, there are already 10 public schools within a 20 block radius of Hunter's Brookdale campus. It simply does not make sense for the DOE to dispose of a state-of-the-art school that can accommodate more than 2000 students in an area where it cannot afford to acquire the new real estate it will need to meet the demand of a rapidly growing student age population.

We are confident that a solution can be found that meets the needs of Hunter College while preserving our East Side schools. We are happy to work with Hunter and CUNY to develop alternative plans to meet Hunter's very legitimate need for new facilities, and are fully committed to help obtain the government support necessary to make these alternative plans a reality. Please do not hesitate to contact us to discuss this matter in further detail.

Sincerely,



Liz Krueger  
State Senator



Micah Z. Kellner  
State Assemblymember

cc: Hon. Betsy Gotbaum, NYC Public Advocate  
Hon. William Thompson, NYC Comptroller  
Hon. Scott Stringer, Manhattan Borough President  
Hon. Carolyn Maloney, Congressmember  
Hon. Tom Duane, State Senator  
Hon. Jonathan Bing, State Assemblymember  
Hon. Deborah Glick, State Assemblymember  
Hon. Catherine Nolan, State Assemblymember  
Hon. Jessica Lappin, City Councilmember  
Hon. Daniel Garodnick, City Councilmember  
Hon. Robert Jackson, City Councilmember  
Jennifer Rabb, President, Hunter College  
Jamie Smarr, NYC School Construction Authority  
Iris Weinshall, Vice Chancellor for Facilities Planning and Construction, CUNY  
David Liston, Chair, Manhattan Community Board 8  
Lyle Frank, Chair, Manhattan Community Board 6