January 29, 2015

To the Members of the John Jay College Community:

We were all saddened by the recent passing of Mario Cuomo, 3-term governor of New York State. Born to immigrant parents, Mario Cuomo achieved greatness through hard work and education, and dedicated his life to public service. He was a statesman, an eloquent communicator, a policy and political trailblazer and a passionate advocate for social justice, a true role model for our students. Governor Mario Cuomo led by example.

While many tributes of the former governor reference his national speeches in 1984, and his opposition to the death penalty, he leaves a much larger or significant legacy especially for the John Jay community.

Through Governor Mario Cuomo’s enterprise and leadership, Haaren High School (originally the De Witt Clinton High School) was acquired, under a special financing arrangement, and renovated for John Jay College. The project started in summer 1986 and was completed in September 1988, in time for the start of classes. The Governor visited John Jay and met with then-President Gerald Lynch and members of the John Jay and CUNY community to celebrate this accomplishment. The opening of this new building boosted the morale of the John Jay community and the profile of the College. Haaren Hall signaled the beginning of the transformation of our academic institution. And it laid the foundation for our newest, state-of-the art building in 2011 that now anchors our campus.

Mario Cuomo will long be remembered for achievements that expanded health care coverage, advanced educational opportunities and increased law enforcement assistance to localities. In recognition of our expertise, he frequently came to John Jay to announce criminal justice proposals and initiatives. At one conference in June 1989, he appeared with former Mayor Edward Koch to propose an Anti-Crime Bill for NY State.

Mario Cuomo acknowledged our commitment to professionalizing police and personnel in criminal justice agencies and our international reputation. On October 29, 1993, he signed an agreement of understanding between Estado Libre Asociado De Puerto Rico Policía De Puerto Rico and John Jay College of Criminal Justice calling for John Jay to develop a program of educational instruction leading to an Associate of Science Degree in Police Science at the police academy in Gurabo—one that meets the standards of the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle State Association.

In announcing this ground-breaking agreement, Governor Cuomo said, “leaders and top law enforcement officials of two great communities that have long had a special and productive relationship, meet to execute an historic agreement that will extend our mutual cooperation in law enforcement. New York’s premier institution of higher learning in the field of public safety, the John
Jay College of Criminal Justice, is entering into a partnership with the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to train and educate the officers of the Police Department of that beautiful island. We applaud and celebrate this historic event.”

This project, attaining wide-spread recognition, graduated more than 4300 cadets, many of whom pursued baccalaureate studies after graduation. It allowed us to spread our wings beyond the mainland United States and demonstrate capacity to replicate our rigorous curriculum. Today, the College soars and continues to extend its scope and world-wide influence through conferences, exchange programs, John Jay Online and other initiatives.

In October 2013, we hosted Mario Cuomo and his wife Matilda at our annual gala saluting student veterans. We honored their daughter, Maria Cuomo Cole for her work in safeguarding the social safety net, especially for veterans, through her organization HELP USA. It was a special privilege to watch as Mario and Matilda Cuomo beamed with pride as we played a video in tribute to Maria and she spoke to the audience about how much her parents had inspired her work. With the passing of Governor Mario Cuomo, we will treasure this tender moment between a father and mother and their daughter.

At this time, we reflect on these and other cherished memories and accomplishments of Mario Cuomo. John Jay is a changed institution because he understood and supported our unique mission to promote justice. With his passing, New York has lost a beloved son but his ideals live on. We extend heartfelt condolences to his loving wife of 60 years, Matilda, and his family, including current New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, Maria Cuomo Cole, Dr. Margaret I. Cuomo, Madeline Cuomo O'Donohue, Christopher Cuomo, their grandchildren and the rest of the Cuomo family.

I am pleased to note that one of the Trustees of the John Jay College Foundation, Richard Girgenti, served as the Director of Criminal Justice and the Commissioner of the Division of Criminal Justice in the Cuomo administration. He offers his tribute to the Governor here. I also provide links to videos that document Governor Mario Cuomo’s speeches and public remarks at John Jay College. This will provide rich detail and context about the historic relationship between John Jay College and our late Governor.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Travis
President