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2015/16 Executive Budget Testimony

Joint Legislative Public Hearing

**New York State Assembly Committees on Ways & Means and Higher Education
New York State Senate Committees on Finance and Higher Education**

President Donald P. Christian, SUNY New Paltz

Thank you for this opportunity to provide campus perspective and examples that support Chancellor Zimpher's forward-looking budget request. I am pleased and honored that two of our distinguished New Paltz alumni, Assemblymember Kevin Cahill and Senator Ken LaValle, have risen to such prominent positions of public service and play a pivotal role in shaping the state's higher education agenda.

I echo President Stenger's strong endorsement of an extension of the rational tuition policy and maintenance of effort.

Since 2011, SUNY's comprehensive colleges have reinvested more than 40 percent of rational tuition dollars in promoting access. We will maintain our commitment to affordability, particularly for the State's highest-need students. Here's why this matters: a young American whose family income is \$90,000 or more has a one in two chance of earning a college degree. But an American from a family with income of \$30,000 or less has only a one in 17 chance of earning a college degree. The average family income for the 500 Educational Opportunity Program students at New Paltz is about \$23,000. These students face especially harsh financial challenges, but we need to recognize that very few New Paltz students have no financial need.

SUNY students in 2015 are lucky never to have experienced the unpredictable spikes in tuition that occurred commonly before 2011. In those years, what should have been several consecutive years of incremental, predictable tuition increases were bundled into one legislative act.

They also have the benefit of seeing how their tuition has led to major changes at New Paltz, a highly ranked, top-quality public institution, named by Kiplingers as one of 100 Best Values in Public Colleges and ranked highly by others for our excellent return on investment.

With rational tuition, New Paltz increased student financial aid annually to this year's total of about \$2.2 million. This investment helps keep student loan debt of New Paltz graduates below the national average, and makes an education possible for some students who otherwise could not afford it.

Faculty are at the heart of the academic experience. From 2011 to 2014, we added a net 42 new faculty at New Paltz, along with new support staff in key areas like services for transfer and veteran students. This 13 percent increase in new faculty targeted areas of greatest student demand, helping us increase course offerings, keep class sizes from burgeoning, and support student progress and timely graduation.

We have added faculty in growth fields such as our new mechanical engineering program and our burgeoning 3D printing initiative. We launched our mechanical engineering program in response to longstanding concerns among Hudson Valley manufacturers about a shortage of mechanical engineers – underscoring our commitment to link our academic programs to regional needs.

We do not have space and facilities for the expected growth in our mechanical engineering program, but we are planning a new engineering hub, thanks to capital support from the NYSUNY2020 Challenge Grant program. That space will also house our 3D printing program that supports Hudson Valley business and entrepreneurs with prototyping, design, testing, and fabrication. Collaboration with industry provides our engineering, art, and business students remarkable opportunities to apply what they have learned in the classroom to real-world problems and opportunities – precisely the kind of applied learning that SUNY seeks for all students.

This year, we have about 500 more students in STEM majors at New Paltz than in 2009 – a remarkable growth of more than 70 percent in 5 years. Rational tuition has let us add faculty and equipment to support this growth, but we do not have space for these students and programs: Our classrooms and laboratories are strained, and many are outdated. I would be in deep despair about providing our students with high-quality learning experiences if I could not look out my office window to see steel rising for our new, \$48 million science building.

I am also watching the \$36 million transformation of a 1960s-era building into a modern, high-performance building that will bring many student services under one roof – ending what our students have called “the New Paltz shuffle.” This building will also include engineering labs and new space for two growing academic departments.

These were two top priorities in our 2008-2013 capital plan. The enrollment growth and student support these buildings provide underscore the critical importance of continuing investment in SUNY facilities. A multi-year capital plan for both new construction and critical maintenance ensured a framework for thoughtful, strategic planning aligned with key areas of growth and opportunity.

Of course, capital investment is not the only thing we need. I speak with students about what we have done for them with new tuition revenue, to explain why I advocate for an extension of rational tuition to 2020. But I also share my worry that **their** increasing tuition has not been matched by increased investment from the State. If the Legislature grows the performance funding available through the Executive Budget – and commits to that investment for five years – SUNY can expand its positive impact on New York State and its continued economic resurgence.

Here are examples of how we would invest increased tuition and taxpayer support: Even though we have added faculty in STEM fields, we need more faculty and support staff to sustain high-quality offerings in rapidly growing areas like biochemistry and engineering, as well as other key fields like digital media, communication disorders, special education, and disaster mental health.

A great education that prepares students to thrive in and contribute to a 21st-century society and economy includes more than great classes with great professors. It requires out-of-classroom experiences like internships, study abroad, research projects, and service learning that let students apply classroom lessons to the real world. All of these require faculty and staff time, attention, and energy, state-of-the-art facilities, and operating funds. We have invested in growing such programs, but bringing them to scale requires deeper investment than we can make with current resources.

New Paltz recently earned a prestigious national award from the Institute for International Education that recognized our success at expanding study abroad opportunities for our EOP students. Study abroad prepares students to navigate a complex, diverse, global world, and colleges across the U.S. struggle to include economically disadvantaged and historically underrepresented students in study abroad. Our success is the result of tremendous collaboration between our EOP program and our Center for International Programs. We are proud of this success, but it does not involve as many of our EOP students as we would like. New resources would let us bring a successful program like this to scale. This point also underscores the critical importance of continued and expanded funding for university-wide programs such as EOP.

Finally, I will highlight a program developed by our education faculty and graduate students in literacy to increase reading skills of disadvantaged youth in Newburgh. Our assessments show dramatic increases in reading capability, along with awakened academic interests. One mother told us of her surprise that suddenly all

her young son wants to talk about is human rights -- the subject of one of his reading assignments. At the same time, the 15 graduate students engaged in this program gain important training beyond the classroom. Our partner in this endeavor, a Newburgh philanthropist and entrepreneur, told me recently that to really make a difference in Newburgh, we should have 200 university students working with these youth, not 15. Additional state funding would let us expand such a program to make a momentous impact on the state's educational pipeline and the academic future of New York's urban youth.

Thank you for this opportunity to share these thoughts with you.