



# 2021-22 Executive Budget Testimony

Chancellor Jim Malatras

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  
*February 4, 2021*

Good morning Chairpersons Krueger, Weinstein, Stavisky, and Glick, all members of the Senate and Assembly, as well as their staff. As a former legislative staffer, I appreciate all that you do to put together these hearings.

I am Jim Malatras, the 14<sup>th</sup> Chancellor of the State University of New York. I'm honored to be the first SUNY graduate to serve as chancellor. On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to discuss the 2021-22 Executive Budget.

We have provided our full budget submission to the members for consideration. Today, I would like to briefly address several of those issues.

### **Student Access & Success**

Students are the lifeblood of SUNY. Even in tough economic times as a result of the pandemic, it is critical to protect key access programs such as TAP, EOP, and EOC. We made this our top priority and are happy that the Governor has held these critical programs harmless in the Executive Budget. We are heartened by the Legislature's strong and unwavering support for these programs as well.

The pandemic has greatly strained our students and every dollar matters. That's why we did not raise tuition this year, though we would like to continue to have the authority to make reasonable increases in the future, and support the Executive's extension of the predictable tuition program.

Our research and doctoral universities are second to none and have done amazing work, from developing the world's number one ranked COVID-19 saliva test, to developing the next generation of lithium-ion batteries to help combat climate change. We support the Executive's budget proposal to provide flexible tuition for these institutions to continue to invest in world-leading research while ensuring access for not just disadvantaged students, but all SUNY students.

Because of your investment in SUNY, resident tuition is significantly lower than most other states, and with the extension of predictable tuition we will keep it that way and avoid the unforeseen staggering increases of the past.

### **Enhancing Student Support**

Because of the global health crisis, students are struggling with social and physical isolation, economic anxiety, and academic normalcy. In September, SUNY rolled out a comprehensive mental health and wellness program called ReachOutSUNY, expanding mental health and wellness services for every student. But to ensure students have access, we'd like to invest more in the program—including additional telehealth and peer-to-peer counseling.

Students are also struggling with everyday expenses. Thanks to Governor Cuomo, New York State is combatting food insecurity by expanding SNAP benefits to 75,000 SUNY and CUNY income-eligible college students. But, only 23% of our eligible students take advantage of this important program. To increase use of the program we now are automatically helping enroll all EOC students into SNAP. That's nearly 10,000 students. Although this is an important step forward, we're always looking for additional investment and support to meet the nutritional demands of our students.

## **Meeting the Challenge of Defeating COVID-19 and Future Infectious Diseases**

We must continue to rise to the challenge of defeating COVID.

First, SUNY has produced tests and PPE that are helping to defeat this virus. We want to continue our work and welcome your support of a new "SUNY COVID Response Fund" to help expand critical healthcare capacity, increase testing capacity, and to expand much-needed PPE manufacturing.

Second, we must support the critical demand for additional healthcare staff. We've seen a 21% increase in applications this year at our four medical schools. New York State needs over 250,000 additional nurses by 2028, and we can meet that demand, but lack the necessary clinical space—especially at our community colleges. Therefore, we respectfully request \$20 million to expand our clinical spaces to meet the growing demand.

In addition, we are facing urgent staffing challenges at our hospitals. We are requesting authorization to temporarily provide additional financial incentives to retain healthcare staff at our SUNY Hospitals.

## **SUNY Will Meet Workforce Demand in a Post-COVID World**

Now more than ever, new jobs require some type of post-secondary credentialing, yet millions of New Yorkers—many who are struggling for the next job or career opportunity—have not completed college. It's projected that 70% of all new jobs in the U.S. will require post-secondary education by 2027. Currently, more than 2.2 million New Yorkers between the ages of 25 to 44 have no degree.

The pandemic has caused real harm to our institutions. Our enrollment overall is down 5.3% year-over-year. However, while the pandemic may have exacerbated the challenges, it did not create them. Overall, our enrollment has declined 16% over the past 10 years.

We must adapt to the changing economic landscape. This has only been accelerated by the pandemic. This challenge presents an opportunity, but we need your help. We've announced a new campaign called *SUNY For All* where we focus on every segment of New York. We launched a SUNY Online Training Center that offers 20 free college preparation and certifications in high demand industries, like healthcare and advanced manufacturing to those underemployed or unemployed. Graduates are automatically accepted with no application fee

into any of our 30 community colleges and two of our four-year colleges. The Governor has called for the expansion of the program and we'd welcome the Legislature's support.

Second, we want to focus on emerging industries that provide well-paying jobs. One area is green jobs. Thanks to Governor Cuomo and the Legislature, the state has created ambitious goals to reduce our carbon footprint and SUNY can fuel the needed workforce for the state. The state's \$20 million offshore wind training institute is a huge step forward and we'd like to build on that momentum by creating the SUNY Clean Energy Workforce Academy, mobilizing colleges from all corners of the State to create academic, apprenticeship, and training programs that focus on sustainability and clean energy workforce areas in their direct locations; fast tracking prospective students to provide them the credentials necessary to meet emerging workforce needs.

Finally, we must keep up with our competitors if we are to thrive. For instance, more than 50,000 New Yorkers are enrolled in online programs outside of New York in many cases because SUNY cannot offer the modern programs they want. Getting those students back will help with our enrollment challenges. Yet program approval for high demand areas are met with a lengthy process. On average it takes 221 days before receiving final approval for new programs. In comparison, 35 other states have no state-level approval, and in states that are similar in composition to New York State the approval process ranges from approximately 40 days (Massachusetts) to 60 days (Maryland). We are already accredited by independent bodies and have a robust internal review. But we would like to work to modernize the process in New York to reverse our significant disadvantage, which results in lost revenue for SUNY programs that benefit students, and for New York.

### **Real and Meaningful Programs to Enhance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

But we're not just confronting COVID and its many effects. The stress of cultural and political division has frayed the social fabric of this nation and SUNY isn't immune from the impact of it. We have a lot of work to do to make SUNY more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. Recently, we've appointed several phenomenal diverse college presidents at Old Westbury, Monroe Community College, and Upstate Medical University. We must strengthen our career ladders for our diverse faculty members. But we need to do more. With your help we will continue to invest in other areas as well, like the recently created Hispanic Leadership Institute. And we're finalizing an action plan that will focus on things such as developing curriculum towards racial equity and strengthening the role of the chief diversity officer on every campus.

### **SUNY Will Lead the Way**

We're happy that the Executive Budget includes substantial restoration of offsets caused by the collapse of revenue as well as capital investments. Your continued investment in SUNY has paid dividends for millions of New Yorkers. According to the Opportunity Study, 13 SUNY institutions rank among the best in advancing economic and social mobility. While many things today are uncertain, SUNY is not. We thank you for your support. I would be happy to answer any questions.