



The State University  
of New York

## **Joint Legislative Hearing on Higher Education**

**Senate Standing Committee on Finance  
Assembly Standing Committee on Ways and Means  
Senate Standing Committee on Higher Education  
and  
Assembly Standing Committee on Higher Education**

**Testimony Provided by Dr. John B. King, Jr.  
Chancellor, State University of New York  
February 8, 2024**

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Good morning, Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Stavisky, and Fahy, and Ranking Members O’Mara, Ra, Griffo, and Smullen. I am John B. King, Jr., and I have the privilege of serving as the 15th Chancellor for the State University of New York (SUNY).

I appreciate the opportunity to join you today alongside my friend and colleague Chancellor Matos Rodríguez. There are no greater testaments to the power of public higher education than SUNY and CUNY, and we owe an incredible debt of gratitude to the Senators and Assemblymembers in this room, to your colleagues in the Legislature, and especially to Governor Kathy Hochul, who—like you—is a true champion of higher education as a catalyst for economic opportunity and upward mobility.

This is my second appearance before you as SUNY Chancellor. Having left New York to serve as Deputy Secretary and then U.S. Secretary of Education in the Obama Administration, it was an honor to return to New York State to assume this role just over a year ago. In that time, I’ve prioritized visiting each of our 64 campuses: meeting with students, faculty, staff, community leaders, and employer partners; seeing firsthand our extraordinary successes; and confronting our needs and opportunities. I come before you today filled with tremendous pride in our System and—most importantly—in the students we are privileged to serve and the faculty and staff making extraordinary, life-changing contributions on our campuses every single day.

## **SUNY Is On the Move**

With the support of Governor Hochul and our champions in the Legislature, SUNY continues to make remarkable progress on multiple fronts. We are making it clear that there is a place at SUNY for every New Yorker. SUNY campuses are climbing in national rankings and—even more importantly—being recognized as powerhouses of social mobility among the nation’s selective colleges and universities. SUNY continues to sit at the heart of New York State’s strategy for economic development, with its education, training programs, and cutting-edge research boosting diverse areas of emerging commerce such as the semiconductor industry, artificial intelligence, renewable energy and battery technology, bioengineering, advanced manufacturing, and many more.

For the first time in a decade, SUNY enrollment is up, and it is up across every sector of our System. Importantly, while the overall enrollment gain from Fall 2022 to Fall 2023 was 1.1%, we

saw a much larger 4.3% increase in first-time undergraduate enrollment—a leading indicator of future growth:

UNDERGRADUATE FIRST-TIME ENROLLMENT	
Percent Change from Fall 2022 to Fall 2023	
SUNY-wide	+4.3%
State-operated	+4.6%
Doctoral	+3.2%
Comprehensive	+2.6%
Technology	+13.3%

*Source: SUNY System Administration  
Office of Institutional Research and Data  
Analytics November 15, 2023*

Our gains in enrollment fuel and are in turn fueled by the four pillars the SUNY Board of Trustees and I have established: student success; research and scholarship; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and economic development and upward mobility:

- **Student Success:** SUNY is committed to leading the nation in students’ access to and successful attainment of degrees and certificates and committed to doing so for every group of students we serve. In addition to expanding enrollment and recruitment, we are scaling proven strategies for retention and completion—which I will describe in a moment. We are also ensuring that students have the wraparound supports they need to thrive, from meeting basic needs like food security to investing in student mental health support to naming a homeless liaison on every SUNY campus. College affordability is a vital component of student success, and I am proud of our extraordinary value and of the fact that 52% of full-time in-state undergraduates attend SUNY tuition-free thanks to federal, institutional, and state financial aid, which this Legislature has consistently championed.
- **Research and Scholarship:** SUNY is making strides toward meeting Governor Hochul’s vital and ambitious charge to double research. We are laying the groundwork to establish New York’s leadership in AI, biotech, semiconductor packaging, and sustainability and renewable energy—among so many other areas. We are moving forward with massive research wins, including Stony Brook University’s development of a new \$700-million climate change and resilience campus on Governors Island, a new \$10-billion public-private partnership to support next-generation semiconductor research and development at the Albany NanoTech complex, and the announcement just last week of a National Science Foundation grant to Binghamton University that will deliver up to \$160 million for its battery-manufacturing and innovation hub.

- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** While some states seek to turn back the clock on diversity, SUNY and New York State are committed to doing even more. We are strengthening recruitment pipelines for all students from all backgrounds, including students who are the first in their families to attend college, Pell-eligible students, veterans, AmeriCorps alumni, students who have overcome adversity, students from communities and high schools typically underrepresented in college, and working adults. We are investing in faculty diversity, continuing the extraordinarily successful Hispanic Leadership Institute, and launching the inaugural SUNY Black Leadership Institute. In addition, we have incorporated diversity, equity, and inclusion into the general education framework—building essential knowledge without requiring extra courses or costs for our students.

At this difficult moment for our nation and the world, I also want to emphasize the ways SUNY promotes campus safety and an inclusive climate by standing up to racism, xenophobia, antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of hate. In the wake of Hamas’s horrific terrorist attack on Israel on October 7th, SUNY has prioritized the safety of our students while creating space for the learning and dialogue that are the hallmarks of higher education. We are extraordinarily clear, every day, that there is no room for antisemitism or Islamophobia on our campuses. Among other ongoing activities, we have provided extensive guidance and trainings to campuses on their responsibilities under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other state and federal laws, we have expanded the presence of University Police to ensure students can travel safely to Shabbat services and that vigils and protests occur peacefully, we have reminded campuses of the need to inform students about how to report any concerns, and we have emphasized the importance of fully investigating any reported bias incidents.

- **Economic Development and Upward Mobility:** SUNY is proudly working with government and employer partners to make targeted investments in workforce development in high-demand sectors. We are committed to Governor Hochul’s goal to increase the healthcare workforce by 20% and proud to have worked with the Legislature last year on a groundbreaking bill to expand the nursing pipeline through high-quality simulation experiences. This year, we launched a Healthcare Workforce Task Force to identify additional opportunities for strategic growth of this critical workforce. We are also expanding internship opportunities across SUNY with the goal to ultimately reach every SUNY student. In addition to historic investment in internships for our campuses, we have launched Systemwide internship programs including the Chancellor’s Summer Research Excellence Fund, the SUNY Climate Corps, and the Veterans Enrollment and Support Internship Program. Finally, SUNY is committed to scaling credit for prior learning and expanding our microcredential offerings. An enormous boon to these efforts is the TAP expansion for short-term workforce programs, which SUNY proudly began implementing this semester in 283 programs across 32 campuses.

I also want to emphasize SUNY's commitment to excellence in operational and fiscal stewardship on behalf of the students and taxpayers we serve, which anchors our success and enables us to provide extraordinary value. Fiscal sustainability requires both ongoing revenue increases and continuous attention to operational efficiency, along with the difficult decisions necessary to ensure financial health.

This includes the hard task of dealing with current structural imbalances on some campuses. This academic year, SUNY Potsdam and SUNY Fredonia have made tough, important, and forward-looking decisions as those campus communities develop plans to refine their offerings, meet changing student demand, and build strong futures. We also recently saw an innovative plan at Clinton Community College to move to the campus of SUNY Plattsburgh which, while maintaining Clinton's separate identity, will allow the campus to shift dollars from facilities costs to investments in student academic opportunities and support.

### **The 2023-24 Enacted Budget: Turning Investment Into Impact**

Let me turn now to the ways in which SUNY students, faculty, staff, and the broader SUNY community are benefiting from the investments made by the Executive and the Legislature in last year's historic budget—which provided the largest operating aid increase for SUNY in more than 20 years.

The 2023-24 Enacted Budget included **\$163 million in increased Direct State Support for our State-operated campuses**, with commitments in the State Financial Plan of an additional \$54 million in each of the next two fiscal years. We remain incredibly grateful for these resources, and are investing them to advance SUNY's progress:

- SUNY prioritized ensuring that all SUNY State-operated campuses received a significant funding increase, since every campus has both needs and growth opportunities. This amounts to a double-digit percentage increase in Direct State Tax support for all State-operated campuses. These resources, on top of other funds, are allowing SUNY to add faculty across the System: indeed, State-operated campuses hired approximately 700 faculty members across all disciplines in Fall 2023.
- We dedicated approximately \$40 million in recurring annual State investment to address critical needs and enhance the student experience—informed by the direct experiences of our students and observations from faculty and staff that were shared on so many of my campus visits. This includes first-ever dedicated operating funding for student mental health services, services for students with disabilities, addressing food insecurity, providing access to paid internships, and expanding research opportunities.
- Support from the Legislature also provided \$3 million to take the first step towards eliminating the fees charged to graduate students who work on-campus. Many of our campuses have worked for years to mitigate fees for the graduate students who contribute so much to our campuses, and we appreciate the additional support to accelerate fee mitigation, which we hope to continue.

The Enacted Budget also maintained the **100% Community College Funding Floor**. SUNY's community colleges are essential pathways to economic mobility and workforce attainment for New Yorkers. From short-term workforce credentials to transfer programs that ultimately lead to bachelor's degrees, our Community Colleges are deeply interwoven with their communities, employers, and labor partners. The Community College Funding Floor preserved \$79 million in State support that would have otherwise been lost in 2023-24.

In addition, the **\$75 million SUNY Transformation Fund** is already making an extraordinary difference across our campuses by enabling them to invest in proven programs crucial to students' long-term success. Major areas of investment include:

- 25 campuses are adopting ASAP and ACE—the nation's leading models for increasing student retention and completion. Pioneered at CUNY and proven through randomized controlled trials to be both high-impact and cost-effective, ASAP and ACE will improve student success starting with at least 3,750 SUNY students.
- 20 campuses are strengthening transfer pathways through stronger advisement, more partnerships between community colleges and four-year campuses, and strategies to streamline the transfer process, including through dual-admissions agreements.
- 40 campuses are accelerating economic opportunity through education and training programs in areas of the greatest economic need and workforce potential. These include exciting programs in health careers, green jobs, advanced manufacturing, and other emerging and high-demand fields.

Finally, we are grateful for the continued investment in **SUNY's capital needs**. This includes approximately \$1.6 billion in the 2023-24 budget to provide state-of-the-art facilities, support digital transformation, and modernize capital operations. The Enacted Budget also recognized the importance of debt service relief for our hospitals, with \$67 million in support.

On behalf of SUNY, I want to thank you for these resources and for your confidence in public higher education. While my testimony has focused on the impact of these resources on our students, I want to take a moment to also reflect on the way they contribute to SUNY's **economic impact on New York State**. The Rockefeller Institute of Government recently updated their estimates, finding that SUNY added \$31 billion in economic activity to New York State in 2020-21, equal to 1.9% of that year's total state gross product. This reflects an 8% increase since 2016. Perhaps most notably, for every \$1 of state funding invested in SUNY, the state enjoys nearly \$9 in economic return.

### **The 2024-25 State Budget: Accelerating SUNY's Momentum**

In that context, let me now turn to Governor Hochul's 2024-25 Executive Budget. As the Governor described in her budget address, this will be an extremely challenging year due to the state's fiscal conditions. Nevertheless, the 2024-25 Executive Budget makes significant and crucial investments in SUNY's future, and I want to reiterate our gratitude for this extremely positive start to the budget process.

Among the many highlights for SUNY are:

- **Increased and Ongoing Operating Support for All SUNY Campuses:** The Executive Budget fulfills the State’s commitment to an additional \$54 million increase in operating funds for State-operated campuses, building on last year’s \$163 million increase that I described earlier. In addition, the Executive Budget maintains the 100% Community College Funding Floor, which—in 2024-2025—will avoid \$85 million in lost direct state tax support for community colleges. These resources are essential investments in our students and campuses.
- **Capital Investment:** The Executive Budget invests \$650 million to address SUNY’s capital needs—including critical maintenance and opportunities for new capital investment. The budget envisions \$550 million of these resources for critical maintenance, and I am pleased that our updated process for allocating critical maintenance funds does more to prioritize student demand and campus growth, as well as sustainability. In addition, the budget includes \$100 million for flexible capital funding for new construction, programmatic, or critical maintenance projects.
- **Empire AI:** Governor Hochul’s Empire AI initiative will position New York as a national leader in AI research and economic development. SUNY is proud to be a founding partner of this new consortium, which will have a direct positive impact on our researchers and students. Our four University Centers—the University at Albany, Binghamton University, the University at Buffalo, and Stony Brook University—will harness the power of AI to expand research through this consortium, and we are especially grateful that UB has been selected as the host site.
- **A Stronger SUNY Downstate:** Downstate Health Sciences University is a gem of the SUNY System. It is an extraordinary incubator for a diverse healthcare workforce, New York City’s only public academic medical center, and a vital healthcare provider in the heart of Brooklyn. However, Downstate’s hospital building has weathered years of financial instability and fallen into disrepair. Fewer than half its beds are used regularly, it floods often, has major HVAC issues, and suffers under many other limitations. As part of a plan for a stronger Downstate, I am deeply grateful for the Governor’s willingness to make a \$300 million capital investment at SUNY Downstate, to cover the hospital’s substantial deficits during the transition, and to provide more modest operating support going forward. We are working with the community to pursue a path that will advance the future of Downstate’s unique role in preparing excellent, diverse health care professionals; preserve in-patient services to be performed by SUNY Downstate staff in partnership with other hospitals; sustain and expand outpatient services to fill healthcare gaps and ensure surrounding communities have quality health care; and address the significant health disparities facing New Yorkers.
- **Universal FAFSA Completion:** The Executive Budget’s Article VII language includes an incredibly powerful proposal to make FAFSA completion universal for high school

seniors. New Yorkers leave \$200 million per year in federal financial aid on the table by not completing the FAFSA, and state after state has shown that making the FAFSA universal expands college access and helps families receive financial aid. Governor Hochul's plan envisions every high school senior either completing the FAFSA, submitting their NYS Dream Act application, or signing a waiver passing on the opportunity to apply. No matter which choice they make, all students will still be able to graduate.

- **SUNY Service Corps:** The Executive Budget provides \$2.75 million for SUNY to launch the Empire State Service Corps in partnership with Lieutenant Governor Delgado. This program—modeled after a similar effort in California—will allow hundreds of SUNY students to engage with local community-based organizations and deepen their learning in the process.

Again, I want to emphasize that these are vital investments and SUNY is so appreciative for such a strong and forward-looking Executive Budget. Thank you again for your steadfast support for SUNY, your commitment to public higher education, and the opportunity to join you today. I look forward to working together to enact the 2024-25 Executive Budget and to invest in the future of SUNY's students and the communities we are privileged to serve.