

**Governor Hochul’s FY2026 Executive Budget:
 Advancing Affordability and Excellence at the State University of New York
 Testimony by Chancellor John B. King Jr.
 February 25, 2025**

Good morning, I want to thank Chairs Pretlow and Krueger, along with Chairs Hyndman and Stavisky, for having us here today. I would also like to recognize Ranking Members Smullen and Griffo. We are so fortunate to have so many friends of SUNY on the Senate Finance Committee, Assembly Ways and Means Committee, and the Senate and Assembly Higher Education Committees. It is a privilege to come before you this morning, as we begin the 2025-26 budget process, to discuss SUNY’s progress advancing affordability and excellence on behalf of the New Yorkers we are proud to serve.

Before I begin, I also want to thank Governor Hochul, Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Assembly Speaker Heastie, and the members of the State Senate and Assembly for your confidence in SUNY and the record investments that you have made in our students, faculty, and campuses over the last two years. The SUNY Board of Trustees and I are committed to ensuring that SUNY is the nation’s best statewide public system of higher education, and the resources you are providing are integral to that success.

SUNY is On the Move

Last fall, Governor Hochul announced the great news that total enrollment increased at SUNY in Fall 2024 for the second year in a row. Over the last two years, our total enrollment has grown by 3.4%. We have seen enrollment gains in every SUNY sector for two consecutive years – marking the first time SUNY has experienced back-to-back System-wide enrollment increases in 15 years.

| SUNY FALL 2024 OVERALL ENROLLMENT Percent Change | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | Fall 2023 to Fall 2024 | Fall 2022 to Fall 2024 |
| SUNY-Wide | +2.3% | +3.4% |
| State-Operated | +2.7% | +3.3% |
| Doctoral | +2.2% | +2.4% |
| Comprehensive | +2.7% | +3.2% |
| Technology | +5.0% | +7.6% |
| Community Colleges | +1.9% | +3.7% |

We are also seeing gains for first-time undergraduates, with Fall 2024 first-year enrollment up by 0.9%. I am especially pleased to report that the share of Pell recipients increased among SUNY’s first-year students. In fact, roughly half of first-time undergraduates were Pell recipients in Fall 2024 – led by our Community Colleges and Technology Colleges, and with our University Centers and Other Doctoral

campuses increasing their share of Pell recipients by 9 percentage points over the last decade. This is truly a testament to SUNY's role as an engine of upward mobility.

SUNY is where affordability and excellence meet, and one of the most important indicators that we're on the right track in getting that message out is our annual enrollment. While we are completely focused on maintaining our momentum and building on this progress, it is clear that SUNY is on the move.

Advancing Affordability

I often say that there is a place at SUNY for every New Yorker, and maintaining SUNY's extraordinary affordability is vital to helping students and families find their perfect SUNY campus and thrive here.

One of the statistics that most reflects our SUNY values of affordability and access is that 52% of in-state undergraduate students attend SUNY entirely tuition-free thanks to state, federal, and institutional financial aid. I want to thank Governor Hochul and the Legislature for championing an expansion of the **New York State Tuition Assistance Program** that is helping more New Yorkers afford college even as we speak. As a result of the TAP expansion in the Enacted 2024-25 State Budget, families making up to \$125,000 per year are eligible for TAP grants, the threshold for independent students increased for the first time since 1986, and New York State doubled the minimum TAP grant to \$1,000. These are enormous gains on behalf of our students and families.

In addition, the state's new **Universal FAFSA** law went into effect this year – and I want to express our gratitude to Governor Hochul and many longtime legislative champions. Filling out the FAFSA opens the door to financial aid, and despite last year's federal failures in the FAFSA roll-out, I am pleased that this year appears to be going smoothly and hopeful that the new FAFSA will be even easier for students and families to complete. As a result of Universal FAFSA, all high school seniors will be expected to complete the FAFSA or DREAM Act application or submit a waiver saying they are aware of the financial aid available but do not want their share. This important law – in place in nearly a dozen other states – will go a long way toward creating a culture of FAFSA completion statewide. As we head into the spring, we are looking forward to the continued collaboration of K-12 districts and will need crucial leadership from the New York State Education Department.

Thank you again for all of the steps the Legislature has taken to advance affordability at public colleges and universities, and I look forward to working with you and Governor Hochul to continue this progress.

Promoting Excellence

Since I became Chancellor, there have been four pillars driving our work: student success; research and scholarship; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and economic development and upward mobility. I want to highlight just a few of the areas of progress that are building SUNY's reputation, helping us attract and support extraordinary students and faculty, and delivering on the promise of a well-prepared citizenry and workforce for New York State.

One of our most important student success initiatives is to **scale up ASAP and ACE**, the nation's most effective, evidence-based strategies for helping students earn their degree. ASAP – for community

colleges – and ACE – for four-year campuses – have been proven through randomized controlled trials in multiple states to dramatically improve retention and completion. Thanks to the SUNY Transformation Fund in the Enacted 2023-24 State Budget, 25 SUNY campuses are implementing ASAP and ACE. We intentionally began with a smaller initial cohort of students last year and grew substantially this fall, with 4,270 SUNY students now enrolled. I am pleased to report that we are already seeing promising early results in both spring-to-fall persistence and credit attainment.

SUNY is also **expanding student support to help every student succeed**. For the first time ever, thanks to your support SUNY is investing \$10 million per year in services for students with disabilities at all State-operated campuses. New investment is also making it possible to provide enhanced mental health support – including more counselors, longer clinic hours, and tele-mental health services where needed – at State-operated campuses (\$10 million per year) and across all Community Colleges (\$3 million per year). In addition, students experiencing food insecurity can now count on a food pantry at every SUNY campus, with \$1 million per year in State funding to support food pantries and other basic needs strategies at our State-operated campuses. SUNY has also required all campuses to appoint a Homeless Liaison to ensure that students experiencing housing insecurity receive all available support.

Governor Hochul has charged SUNY with **doubling research**, and we are seeing extraordinary progress – from artificial intelligence to quantum, climate action to biotech, health advances to semiconductors. SUNY is especially proud of the launch of the Empire AI research center for the public good, housed at the University at Buffalo and involving SUNY’s four University Centers as well as a consortium of leading public and independent universities. SUNY researchers are already using Empire AI’s computing power to study antisemitism and social media, climate change, the root cause of diseases, and how to improve vaccination. We are also cementing New York as America’s leading semiconductor R&D hub with the designation of NY CREATES — a partnership between SUNY, Empire State Development, and industry — as the location of the first National Semiconductor Technology Center facility in the nation.

I want to emphasize our unwavering commitment to ensuring that our campuses are safe places to teach and learn, and that they foster inclusive communities at a time in our nation’s history when it is extremely difficult – but vital – to do so. From our founding, SUNY’s mission has been “to provide to the people of New York educational services of the highest quality, with the broadest possible access, fully representative of all segments of the population.” We have no intention of backing away from that mission and its inherent **commitment to a diverse and inclusive university and society**. As part of our ambitious [Civics & Service Agenda](#), SUNY is committed to improving civic discourse – including through an update to our General Education Framework that will make civic discourse a core competency expected of all students. There is no place at SUNY for antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of discrimination and harassment, and SUNY required all faculty and staff System-wide to participate in training this fall on the protections in Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. We also announced grants to 23 campuses to create or enhance interfaith prayer, reflection, and meditation spaces. These spaces are important in helping all members of the campus community feel respected and seen, and this is a need I have frequently heard from students and faculty on my campus visits.

A final area of advancing SUNY’s excellence is our progress towards the goal that every SUNY undergraduate will participate in a **high-quality internship** or other experiential learning opportunity. According to one recent report from the Strada Education Network, students who have just one internship in college are 50% less likely to be underemployed after graduation than peers who did not

have internships. Thanks to increased State investment in SUNY, we have been able to allocate \$14.5 million across all State-operated campuses to fund paid internships and wraparound support. In addition, SUNY students are helping their peers and near-peers complete the FAFSA through our FAFSA Completion Corps; supporting veteran students through the Veterans Enrollment and Support Internship Program; advancing climate action and sustainability in the SUNY Climate Corps; conducting groundbreaking research through the Chancellor’s Summer Research Excellence Fund; and establishing an initiative for Educational Opportunity Program participants to intern with State agencies – among many other internship programs. Last fall, SUNY launched Governor Hochul’s Empire State Service Corps – funding 500 paid service positions for SUNY students in areas like K-12 tutoring, peer mental health support, addressing food insecurity, and climate action. Two thousand students applied for 500 slots this year, and we want to grow the program so even more students can benefit.

Governor Hochul’s FY2026 Executive Budget: Building an Even Stronger Future

Governor Hochul and the Legislature’s historic investments in SUNY over the past two years have been vital to keeping SUNY affordable and advancing our excellence. The record \$277 million increase has provided 20%-plus funding increases to every single State-operated campus – funding mental health services, support for students with disabilities, internships, food pantries, and other academic and support services, and addressing the first year of increased costs under the State-approved collective bargaining agreement that is providing fair and well-deserved salary increases for our excellent faculty and staff. For community colleges, the 2024-25 Enacted State Budget included the first operating funding increase in nearly a decade. SUNY is dedicating this \$8 million increase to expand programs that prepare students for essential health care careers and to fund additional student mental health services.

I want to highlight just a few components that we are grateful to Governor Hochul for including in the FY2026 Executive Budget and eager to work with our partners in the Legislature to advance:

- The Executive Budget includes **\$114 million in additional support for our State-operated campuses**, which fulfills the SUNY Board’s request to cover the incremental costs of the State-approved collective bargaining agreement. As I mentioned, this comes on top of \$277 million in increased operating aid over the last two years, and is absolutely essential for maintaining SUNY’s momentum.
- We are especially thrilled about Governor Hochul’s NYS Opportunity Promise. Building on successful programs in Massachusetts and Michigan, Governor Hochul’s proposal will provide **free tuition, fees, books, and supplies for adults ages 25-55 who pursue an associate degree at our community colleges in high-demand fields** like health care, advanced manufacturing, IT and cybersecurity, and sustainability. Adults without a college degree will be able to attend full- or part-time under the Governor’s plan. This investment is in addition to maintenance of the **100% Community College Funding Floor**, which will avoid approximately \$76 million in lost Direct State Tax Support in 2025-26.
- The Governor also announced plans to **expand the nationally recognized ASAP and ACE retention and completion programs** that SUNY launched in spring 2024 and that I described

earlier. Thanks to Governor Hochul's budget, we will be able to sustain these programs and scale them on the path to 10,000 students in the next two years.

- In addition, the Executive Budget includes **\$550 million for critical maintenance upgrades for State-operated campuses and \$130 million for the Community College capital funding match**. The Governor has also proposed a **\$25 million SUNY Green Energy Loan Fund** that will help transform SUNY's buildings to be more energy efficient.
- To help SUNY double research, Governor Hochul is proposing the **\$200 million New York State Innovation Fund for capital investments in cutting-edge laboratory facilities** and research activities at our most research-intensive campuses. The Innovation Fund will help attract additional outstanding faculty and catalyze groundbreaking research – an area that the SUNY Board of Trustees emphasized in its budget recommendations.
- And the Executive Budget makes historic capital investments in SUNY's hospitals. The budget provides an additional **\$450 million in capital funding for SUNY Downstate's hospital**, bringing to \$750 million the total available to develop a sustainable future for the hospital in partnership with the Downstate Community Advisory Board. The budget also allocates \$100 million to cover SUNY Downstate hospital's operating deficit for a second year during this transition. And **for Upstate Medical, the Governor has committed \$200 million** to start design, planning, and construction to deliver needed services to the region by expanding Upstate's emergency department, modernizing and upgrading the burn unit, and adding operating room capacity.

Finally, I want to recognize the many questions we are all grappling with as we work to navigate the directives coming from the new federal administration. Let me just say that our institutions have the unique power to bring Americans together across all lines of difference – geography and race, religion and income, politics and nationality. Students who live together, who learn together, who talk to each other will have a better chance of understanding each other and finding commonalities throughout their lives.

That is why I continue to wake up every morning believing deeply in the unique power of higher education to strengthen the lives of our students and the health of our democracy. And I go to sleep each night proud of the work we are doing to tangibly deliver on these aspirations for the students we are privileged to serve.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.