

***Governor Hochul's FY2027 Executive Budget:
Delivering Affordable Excellence at the Nation's Largest
Comprehensive State System of Public Higher Education***

**Testimony by Chancellor John B. King Jr.
February 24, 2026**

Good morning. I would like to thank Senate Finance Committee Chair Krueger, Assembly Ways and Means Committee Chair Pretlow, Senate Higher Education Chair Stavisky, Assembly Higher Education Chair Hyndman, the Ranking Members, and the members of the Senate Finance Committee, Assembly Ways and Means Committee, and the Senate and Assembly Higher Education Committees for the opportunity to appear before you today.

Before I begin, I also want to recognize Governor Hochul, Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Assembly Speaker Heastie, and all of the members of the State Senate and Assembly for their confidence in SUNY and the record investments in our students, faculty, and campuses over the last three 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 Delivers Affordable Excellence

As I come before you today, our nation faces a historic affordability crisis. In this moment, public higher education has never been more important as an engine of upward mobility, driver of groundbreaking discoveries and innovation, and cornerstone of our democracy. SUNY proudly stands at the intersection of these aspirations, and our commitment to affordable excellence is what makes SUNY's progress possible.

By freezing in-state tuition, providing free community college to adults in high-demand fields through SUNY Reconnect, and demonstrating the economic value of a college degree, SUNY is vital to New York State's affordability strategy. On every campus every day, we help students from every background – including the 85% of our students who are eligible for State or federal need-based aid – graduate with real-world skills and career prospects, and without a mountain of debt.

Over the last three years, SUNY has achieved back-to-back-to-back enrollment gains across every sector of the SUNY System – from our community colleges to our comprehensive campuses, agriculture and technology schools, and doctoral-granting institutions. This is the first time that has happened since 2007, -08, -09.

Dedicated increases in State operating and capital support are essential to this progress, and to our continued success. As a result, our students and campuses are thriving, and we are delivering on the promise of SUNY's four pillars: student success; research and scholarship; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and economic development and upward mobility.

On **student success**, we have implemented ASAP and ACE – the nation's leading college retention and completion initiatives – for more than 7,000 SUNY students across 34 campuses, and we are building on these efforts with a System-wide academic momentum campaign. As Rachel Rose, a first-generation ACE student at SUNY Oswego, told me: Before ACE, "it was overwhelming to navigate everything on my own

– both academically and personally.” Rachel says ACE has become her community, that the support has helped her stay on track academically, and that she feels “like she’s capable of thriving here.”

Student success extends beyond academics – from helping meet our students’ basic needs like addressing food and housing insecurity, to expanding childcare and mental health supports. It also includes helping students build their civil discourse and civic muscles. I am especially proud of Governor Hochul’s Empire State Service Corps, which enables more than 500 SUNY students to participate in paid public service internships in their campus communities. At our Empire State Service Corps Summit in December, I met Gus Miller – a first-year student in SUNY Alfred State’s Autobody Repair program. As a member of the Service Corps’ SNAP & Basic Needs cohort, Gus led efforts to set up a student pantry extension on Alfred State’s Wellsville campus, and he supported a Pop-Up Pantry to distribute food to 300 families in the community. Our students are incredibly inspiring, and programs like the Empire State Service Corps show the enormous potential of the next generation of New Yorkers.

When it comes to **research and scholarship**, SUNY remains committed to Governor Hochul’s goal to double research expenditures – even in the midst of the current administration in Washington’s efforts to dismantle the 80-year partnership between federal research agencies and institutions of higher education. The Governor’s Empire AI initiative is an especially promising opportunity for SUNY researchers to shine as they advance the public good – from pursuing life-saving medical cures to making the Internet safer. Researchers at the State University of New York at Albany, Binghamton, Buffalo, and Stony Brook, along with researchers at SUNY Poly, ESF, Upstate, Downstate, and other campuses, are driving the future in AI, quantum, semiconductors, sustainability, energy storage, and biotech – among so many other fields. At UAlbany’s RNA Institute, for example, Dr. Thomas Begley is matching cancer patients with newly developed treatments. His lab does this through software that allows them to analyze big data sets and identify patients who would benefit from specific therapies. Dr. Begley says UAlbany’s work will help “personalized medicine get even better.”

At the heart of SUNY’s affordable excellence is our extraordinary faculty and staff. We are fortunate to channel their expertise across our campuses through a suite of Faculty Fellows programs that recognize and amplify faculty leadership. Dozens of faculty members are supporting their peers through programs like the Civil Discourse and Civic Education & Engagement Fellows, AI for the Public Good Fellows, Sustainability Fellows, Accessibility Fellows, DEI Fellows, and Academic Momentum Fellows.

Next, our commitment to **diversity, equity, and inclusion** is strong and unwavering. As I often say, DEI is literally written in SUNY’s DNA. In creating SUNY more than 75 years ago, this Legislature established our mission “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 in a complete range of academic, professional and vocational postsecondary programs including such additional activities in pursuit of these objectives as are necessary or customary.” Our commitment is explicit in our SUNY LEADS leadership institutes, which have been championed by our partners in the Legislature. It is integral to the requirement that every campus have a Chief Diversity Officer. It is at the heart of our dedication to ensuring that every campus is safe and inclusive for all students: that we see and support every first-generation college student, every Pell recipient, every student with a disability, every student veteran, every LGBTQ+ student, every student parent... and that we reject in word and deed racism, sexism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, and every form of discrimination and harassment. That is why, this year, SUNY expanded our mandatory Title VI training to include not only faculty and staff System-

wide, but also every student organization leader at our State-operated campuses. We also require all campuses to appoint a Title VI Coordinator.

One of New York State's hallmark programs that exemplifies our creed that there is a place at SUNY for every New Yorker – and that is a source of great pride at SUNY as well as to its longstanding legislative alumni and champions – is our Educational Opportunity Program. EOP provides life-changing opportunities to students from low-income backgrounds who did not receive the preparation to succeed academically in their K-12 schooling. But with the right support and community, EOP students thrive. I recently spent time with Rome City School District Superintendent Nerlande Anselme. Nerlande perfectly captured the generational power of EOP when she noted: "If it wasn't for EOP, I wouldn't be where I am. It's why I am also encouraging my child to attend a SUNY." And that's why we are working so hard to increase investment in EOP.

And finally, **economic development and upward mobility**. At SUNY, we are proud of our vast footprint across the state – with nearly every New Yorker living within 30 miles of one of our 64 campuses, and \$31 billion in total economic impact as of the 2020-21 academic year. But what matters most is *how* we are using this unique reach to connect students to careers, grow the economy, and serve as a powerful engine of upward mobility.

Governor Hochul's SUNY Reconnect program is a perfect example, by providing free community college tuition, fees, books, and supplies to eligible adults working to pursue their aspirations. Governor Hochul and I visited with SUNY Reconnect participants at Suffolk County Community College in the fall, and we had the pleasure of meeting Jackie Montiglio – a mom of two young daughters who is studying to become an occupational therapy assistant. Jackie's weeknights now consist of doing her homework alongside her daughters. "We're all working together to know that knowledge is power," she said. "It doesn't matter what age you are, you have to finish your goals."

Another essential component of SUNY's commitment to upward mobility is our work to ensure the value of every college degree. I am especially excited about our ambitious goal to provide an internship or other experiential learning opportunity for every undergraduate student, as well as our ongoing work to embed industry-recognized certificates into a wide range of degree programs. At SUNY, we value a rich liberal arts education and we want every student – whether they're pursuing arts and humanities, the social sciences, STEM, or any other field – to leave our campuses with a clear path to economic opportunity and the skills for career success.

Lastly, I want to underscore that SUNY's progress in all of these areas is built on our **commitment to financial sustainability**. Let me be very clear: I believe in every one of our campuses and every sector of the SUNY System. In order to thrive for the long-term, our campuses need the resources to succeed – and I am proud that together, with historic operating support provided by the Governor and the Legislature, we have provided a more-than-30% increase in Direct State Tax Support to every single one of our State-operated campuses over the last three years – as well as implemented strategies to ensure academic and fiscal health. That means our academic programs need to meet the needs and aspirations of our students, and our spending cannot exceed our resources. I appreciate the tough decisions that campus leaders sometimes must make as a result, and our fidelity to fiscal stewardship is the context in which we seek your annual budget support.

Governor Hochul's FY2027 Executive Budget

The SUNY Board of Trustees and I are profoundly grateful to Governor Hochul and the Legislature for three years of historic investments in SUNY. As I have described, these investments are translating into more opportunity for our students and a stronger workforce and citizenry for our state. As you continue to work on the FY2027 budget, I want to highlight just a few of Governor Hochul's key proposals:

- The Executive Budget **maintains the SUNY tuition freeze** by increasing State-operated campus operating funding by \$54 million. Right now, 54% of resident undergraduate students attend SUNY tuition-free – thanks to our ability to maintain a low tuition level, alongside State, federal, and institutional financial aid. Increased operating support makes this possible. I will also note that the State has begun the process of negotiating collective bargaining agreements with our unions. Any salary increases that the State negotiates for our employees are well-deserved, and we will need additional support beyond this \$54 million in the State budget to pay for them.
- The Executive Budget also maintains the **Community College 100 percent Funding Floor** to prevent SUNY community colleges from losing nearly \$65 million in State funding. In addition, I am especially pleased that Governor Hochul is proposing to invest \$8.5 million to **expand SUNY Reconnect** to provide free community college to eligible adult learners preparing for careers in logistics, air traffic control and transportation, and emergency management, as well as to make it easier for adult learners to pursue nursing if they already have a prior degree. Increased operating aid – \$8 million in each of the last two years – has been critical to our ability to expand these high-demand programs, like advanced manufacturing and nursing and other allied health fields.
- As I mentioned, SUNY has implemented **ASAP and ACE as part of our college retention and completion strategy**. The Executive Budget invests an additional \$8 million to bring these programs to a total of 10,000 SUNY students by Fall 2026.
- Next, since we launched the Empire State Service Corps, we have received approximately four applications for every available slot. I am thrilled that Governor Hochul is proposing to **double the Empire State Service Corps** to 1,000 SUNY students, as part of the **SUNY Career Connect** investment in additional paid, career-connected internships.
- The Executive Budget also includes \$595 million in **critical maintenance capital funding**, an increase over the traditional \$550 million allocation. While we are grateful, the reality is that SUNY currently has \$10 billion in unmet critical maintenance needs. Recent infrastructure failures included the need for temporary shower trailers at SUNY Buffalo State, a multi-day heating shut-off at SUNY Purchase that started in our dorms and ultimately closed academic buildings, and electric outages at SUNY ESF, all while we are still recovering from the 2024 flash flooding at Stony Brook. That is why the SUNY Board of Trustees requested \$1 billion in critical maintenance funding for FY2027 – including shovel-ready building improvements, emergency avoidance, and security upgrades – as part of a dedicated multi-year capital funding plan.
- Finally, we are appreciative of the Executive Budget's **support for SUNY's hospitals**, including \$100 million in operating aid for SUNY Downstate Hospital while the Governor's \$1.1 billion

capital investment for modernizing the hospital is implemented, along with \$50 million in capital funding for each of SUNY's three hospitals.

Working together, I am confident that this year's budget can sustain and accelerate the affordable excellence for which SUNY is renowned. In so doing, New York will continue to cement its national leadership as a state that recognizes the unique value of public higher education, that advances the economic security of its families, and that is at the forefront of the pursuit of discovery.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.