



THE NEW YORK STATE PUBLIC EMPLOYEES FEDERATION TESTIMONY

Higher Education Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
2026-2027 Executive Budget Proposal
February 24, 2026

Testimony by Wayne Spence

Good afternoon, Chairpersons Krueger, Pretlow, Stavisky, Hyndman and other honorable members of the Legislature. My name is Wayne Spence, and I am the president of the 56,000-member strong New York State Public Employees Federation (PEF). I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about Governor Hochul's 2026-27 Executive Budget. Our union is composed of professional, scientific and technical experts who provide critical services to the residents and taxpayers of New York State, including nurses at the state's three SUNY hospitals (Downstate, Upstate, Stony Brook), the staff at the State Education Department and the entities overseen by the Cultural Education Center – the State Museum, the State Archives and the State Library. PEF members take a great deal of pride in their work and the care they provide to New Yorkers.

PEF is pleased with many of the proposals advanced by Governor Hochul in her Executive Budget. However, PEF has concerns with several proposals, including the transfer of licensure oversight from the State Education Department to the New York State Department of Health. We urge the Legislature to accept the Governor's proposal to revitalize the State Museum.

2026-27 Executive Budget Proposals

A. Operating Support for the Cultural Education Center – (New York State Museum, State Archives and State Library) – State Operations Budget (S.9000/A.10000).

Governor Hochul and legislative leaders enacted a long-overdue and significant capital improvement plan for the New York State Museum in 2025. However, the Office of Cultural Education (OCE), the entity that maintains the State Museum, the State Library and the State Archives, has been operating at a deficit for years. The State Education Department had requested an infusion of \$12 million to support the operating needs of the OCE, including the New York State Museum, and PEF supported this request.

Stabilizing OCE's funding is critical to maintaining the current professional staff as renovations begin at the State Museum and as the state works to maintain and update the state's collections and exhibits. It is anticipated that upon completion, the renovated New

York State Museum will be more attractive to visitors and will deliver an experience that will keep visitors coming back.

As a destination location for students and visitors from across the globe that attracts more than 750,000 visitors a year, and as a world-class research facility that serves the entire state and beyond, the New York State Museum should be a showcase facility along with the New York State Capitol and Empire State Plaza. This investment, coupled with the capital money incorporated as part of the “Championing Albany’s Promise” initiative, will generate increased tourism revenue for the state, the city of Albany and local businesses.

PEF BUDGET REQUEST

Capital Plan: *SUPPORT* the Governor’s Capital Plan Reappropriation for “Championing Albany’s Promise.”

Operating Aid: *SUPPORT* the \$12 million increase in operating aid to the SED budget for the Cultural Education Center to address years of stagnant state support.

B. \$100 Million in Operating Aid for SUNY Downstate

With your help, we were able to stop the proposed closure announced several years ago and invest a billion dollars in capital funding for upgrades at SUNY Downstate. For the third year in a row, the Governor has proposed to support the operations of SUNY Downstate with \$100 million.

We believe it was very short sighted to try to undercut one of the premier health care workforce training systems in the nation – the public hospitals operated by the State University of New York. These teaching hospitals provide critical care services to their communities, as well as high quality and affordable training for doctors, nurses and other health care professionals. We should be investing in these institutions, not closing them down.

While we acknowledge that SUNY Downstate continues to face significant financial headwinds due to the nature of the clientele it serves – i.e., indigent, uninsured, underinsured and migrant populations, we do not understand why the state continues to spend billions of taxpayer dollars to support private hospitals as its own public hospitals continue to struggle.

C. \$150 Million in Capital for SUNY Hospitals (\$50 Million Each to Downstate, Upstate, Stony Brook)

PEF believes the state should be focused on investing significant operating and capital resources into the SUNY hospitals to expand their educational capacity for underrepresented populations, and to provide clinical experiences linked to serving high-need populations, especially at SUNY Downstate.

While there have been recent large investments in Downstate and Upstate, they had previously suffered from disinvestment over the last decade. While private facilities are often upgraded and expanded, the SUNY hospitals are often crumbling and in need of investment. In addition, they serve a clientele that is often not able to pay for the services rendered, causing additional financial pressure on the hospital.

This \$150 million would go a long way toward improving the facilities and quality of care that can be provided by SUNY hospitals. This represents a good faith effort of the state's commitment to serving all of its residents.

PEF BUDGET REQUEST: *SUPPORT* the proposed funding for SUNY Downstate, Upstate, and Stony Brook at the levels in the Executive budget.

D. Expansion of the New York Opportunity Promise Scholarship

PEF supports the Governor's proposal to expand the program to allow those aged 25 to 55 to pursue an associate's degree in nursing at SUNY or CUNY (free tuition, fees, books, supplies), even if they already have a postsecondary degree. We believe that this proposal will further help alleviate the nurse shortage in New York.

PEF BUDGET REQUEST: SUPPORT S.9006/A.10006 Part C.

E. Transfer Physicians, Physician Assistants and Specialist Assistants Licensure

Oversight from SED to DOH: (S.9007/A.10007 – PART N)

While not technically contained in the Education Budget, this proposal would shift oversight and licensure from the State Education Department to the Department of Health for physicians, physician assistants and specialist assistants. This proposal raises concerns as the Department of Health operates directly under the Executive Department, while the State Education Department operates under the New York State Board of Regents.

The New York State Office of the Professions currently regulates more than 50 different health care and other professions, including physicians, physician assistants and specialist assistants. The Office of Professions serves as the sole licensure authority for all of these professions, each of which is regulated separately by a board of their peers.

PEF is unaware of any issues with the current protocols and procedures required for licensing these professionals through the existing process at the State Education Department. In the future, PEF is concerned that this change could open up the regulation of these professions to unnecessary political influence or expediency. Additionally, moving the oversight for some titles from one agency to another could result in confusion for the professionals covered and/or a misalignment in licensure standards or practices between professions.

Despite being understaffed for over a decade, SED has done a good job managing the professions and PEF sees no reason to transfer this responsibility as the other health care professions remain regulated under SED.

PEF BUDGET REQUEST: REJECT the transfer of health care professions from the Office of Professions at the State Education Department to the New York State Department of Health.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on these important matters.

Respectfully Submitted,

Wayne Spence

President, New York State Public Employees Federation