



## SUNY Office of Government Relations Newsletter

February 2025

Dear Friend,

Welcome to the February edition of the SUNY Office of Government Relations Newsletter!

February has been a month of advocacy and progress. We have been working tirelessly to ensure SUNY's priorities are front and center with policymakers in Albany and Washington, D.C. Collectively, our efforts are focused on advancing the needs of SUNY students, faculty, and staff.

Thank you for your continued support. Our work would not be possible without the steadfast support of Governor Hochul, the State Legislature, and members of the NYS Congressional Delegation. We look forward to building on this momentum and keeping you informed in the coming months.

Sincerely,

Will Schwartz  
Vice Chancellor for Government Relations



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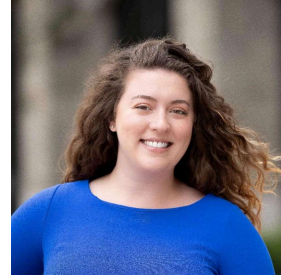
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## SUNY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS

- SUNY Honored Black History Month. [Read more](#)
- Governor Hochul announced a \$90 million plan to expand the historic Empire AI Consortium. [Read more](#)
- Governor Hochul announced \$1.1 million to support adult learners in high-demand fields across 22 community colleges. [Read more](#)
- Governor Hochul announced \$150 million for investments in clean water, clean air, and green jobs environmental bond act funding to SUNY campuses, including Binghamton University, University at Buffalo, SUNY Oswego, and Stony Brook University. [Read more](#)
- Governor Hochul announced \$200 million to boost energy efficiency at SUNY Old Westbury. [Read more](#)
- SUNY Student Assembly advocates for increased operating aid, greater investment in community colleges, and \$10 million to address mental health concerns. [Read more](#)

- SUNY released an update to their Long-Term Enrollment and Financial Sustainability Report outlining the SUNY system's progress over the past year stabilizing campus finances, expanding student access and success, and continuing to expand SUNY's leadership in areas including groundbreaking research. [Read more](#)

## LOOKING BACK ON FEBRUARY

### New Additions to the GR Team!

We are thrilled to introduce some new faces to the Government Relations team who will help further our mission of strengthening SUNY's presence and impact in Albany and Washington, D.C.

**Whitney Riggs** has joined the SUNY OGR team as our new Director of Federal Relations and will help lead SUNY's federal affairs strategies in Washington, D.C.

In Albany, **Julie Harris** has joined the SUNY OGR team to assist with project management and coordinating the administrative needs of the team.

Welcome Whitney and Julie!



**Whitney Riggs**  
*Director of Federal Relations*



**Julie Harris**  
*Project Manager and Special Assistant*

## SUNY Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) Advocacy Day

On February 4, we travelled up the hill to visit our EOP champions in the State Legislature.

We are fortunate to have amazing EOP staff providing services across our SUNY campuses, including several who joined us on advocacy day: Ariel Lizzi, Director of Educational Opportunity Programs at Onondaga Community College, Melissa Cedeno, Director of the Educational Opportunity Program at

University at Albany, Lisa Thomas, Director of the Educational Opportunity Program at Finger Lakes Community College, Debra Joseph-McEwen, Director of the Educational Opportunity Program at Cayuga Community College, Salina Billi, Director of the Educational Opportunity Program at Mohawk Valley Community College, and our very own Cheryl Hamilton, Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Life, Opportunity Programs, & Student Advocate.

Also pictured below is Jan Dorman, Director of the Senate Higher Education Committee, and Isis McIntosh-Green, Chief of Staff to Assemblymember Latrice Walker. Assemblymember Walker is a proud EOP alum. The presence of EOP alums in the State Legislature is a great testament to the value of the program.





## Legislative Meetings

As we move through this important time of year, SUNY is thankful for the continued partnership with our colleagues in the New York State Legislature. We look forward to working together through the state's April 1 budget deadline and beyond to ensure the success of public higher education in New York.



Chancellor King and Vice Chancellor Will Schwartz with Senator April Baskin



Chancellor King and Senator Leroy Comrie



Chancellor King, Executive Director of SUNY Office of Higher Education in Prison Rachel Sander, and Vice Chancellor Will Schwartz with Senator Cordell Cleare



Chancellor King with Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal and Assemblymember Micah Lasher



Chancellor King and Vice Chancellor Will Schwartz met with Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes, pictured above, and accompanied her to the Assembly Chamber to meet with students from the Associated Medical Schools of New York (AMSNY) Scholars in Medicine and Science Program, pictured below. This program

supports students who have demonstrated commitments to improving health disparities and health inequities through medicine, scientific research, and advocacy. Among the schools represented that day were the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at University at Buffalo, the Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University, and SUNY Upstate Medical University.



## **Public Good U: Strengthening the Case for Public Higher Education**

We attended the Public Good U Conference from February 7 to 9, which centered around the critical role of public higher education as a public good in the 21st century. Now more than ever, it is crucial for leaders in higher education to unite and discuss ways to address new challenges, support our students, and enhance our democracy. Senator Pat Fahy and Assemblymember John McDonald joined us and participated in an insightful discussion, moderated by Trustee Keith Landa, about why higher education matters so much in today's society. We thank them for their time and contributions!



## Higher Education Committee Reception

On February 10, Chancellor King hosted a Higher Education Committee Reception in the Gallery of the H. Carl McCall SUNY Building. We were thrilled to welcome members from the Assembly and Senate Higher Education Committees. Chairs Stavisky and Hyndman provided remarks giving us a preview of where things are going for higher education in this year's budget and their focuses for the 2025 legislative session. Thank you to all who attended!





## SUNY in Washington, D.C.

On February 12, Chancellor King travelled to D.C. to meet with our federal representatives to discuss key issues impacting higher education and the growing importance of research and development. In this period of federal transition, SUNY remains focused on keeping the lines of communication open with our national leaders.



Chancellor King with Representative Gillen, Representative LaLota, Representative Espaillat, Representative Morelle, and Representative Riley



Chancellor King met with Leader Schumer to discuss SUNY's critical research funding. We are thankful for his continued advocacy for SUNY and leadership in protecting research dollars at public universities.

## **SUNY Student Assembly Advocacy Day**

On February 12, SUNY SA President and Student Trustee Gio Harvey and students from the SUNY Student Assembly (SA) travelled to Albany to advocate on behalf of students from all of our 64 campuses. They were inspired by Senator Robert Jackson and Senator Toby Ann Stavisky, who offered words of encouragement and emphasized their strong support for students and higher education.

A special shoutout to our very own intern, Alice Russo, who serves as SUNY SA's Senior Director of Government Relations and successfully scheduled 84 meetings with legislators and their staff throughout the day!





## **BPRHA Caucus Weekend**

On February 14 through 16, Chancellor King and members of the SUNY team participated in the 54th Annual Legislative Conference of the New York State Association of Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic & Asian Legislators (BPRHA).

## **Higher Education in Prison Workshop**

Education changes lives, regardless of where you start the journey. Chancellor King was joined by legislators, SUNY's Deputy and Executive Director of the Higher Education in Prison program, DOCCS Commissioner Daniel Martuscello III and Dr. Ronald Day, Senior Vice President of Programs at Fortune Society. From our panelists' personal testimonies to policy insights, the workshop highlighted the crucial discussion about the need to support the transformation program. Thank you to Assemblymembers Monique Chandler-Waterman, and Larinda Hooks, and our distinguished emcee, Assemblymember Eddie Gibbs.



## Chairwoman's Reception

Thank you to The New York State Association of Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Legislative Chairwoman Latrice Walker for inviting us to the Chairwoman's Reception.



## UCAWD Exhibit

Chancellor King was thrilled to see the dynamic work of SUNY's University Center for Academic and Workforce Development (UCAWD), which includes our Educational Opportunity Centers (EOCs) and ATTAIN Labs. From Buffalo's EOC students building a wall from scratch to Manhattan's EOC students monitoring Chancellor King's blood pressure, SUNY's EOCs provide skills in emerging careers that enhance upward mobility and a more equitable future for all New Yorkers. Thank you to our legislative advocates, Assemblymembers Landon Dais, Brian Cunningham, and Charls Fall, and our esteemed leader in the Senate, Majority Leader Andrea Stewart Cousins. We would also like to recognize New York City Councilmember Mercedes Narcisse, Chair of the Committee on Hospitals, and Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine for their commitment to EOCs.

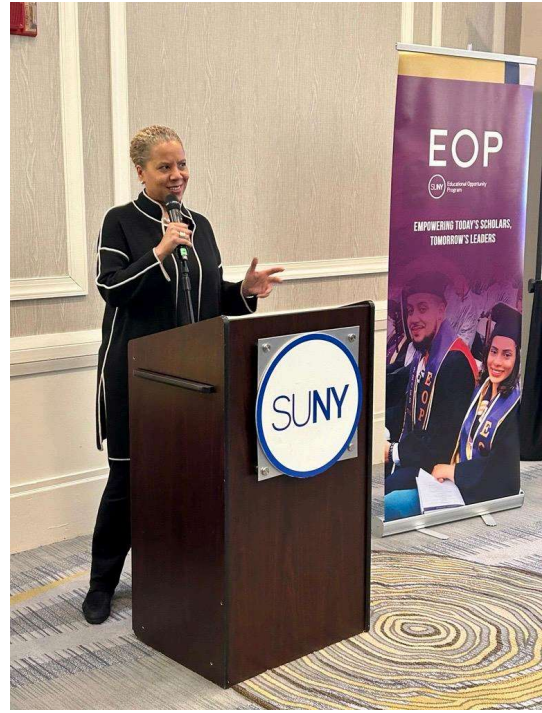


Pictured above: SUNY Associate Provost and Director of theUCAWD Lisa Jackson, Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, SUNY Deputy Chief Operating Officer and Executive Director of the Black Leadership Institute Tamara Frazier, New York City Council Member Mercedes Narcisse, Brooklyn EOC Executive Director Dr. Gerald Maitre, Assemblymember Charles Fall, Manhattan EOC Executive Director Anthony Watson, and students.

## EOP Reception

EOP Alumni and advocates continue to steward educational opportunities for the next generation. Chancellor King was thrilled to be joined by Speaker Carl Heastie, recipient of the Arthur O. Eve Award, Senator Lea Webb, recipient of the EOP Champion award, and Senator Jackson. We thank them for their continued leadership as they advocate for expanded access to higher education and creating opportunities for academic excellence for our EOP students.





## Hudson Valley Community College Visit

On February 19, OGR Team bundled up and paid a visit to Hudson Valley Community College. Thank you to our colleagues, notably Chief Operating Officer Kate Better, for a great tour of the campus. We checked out the Capital Region Workforce Development office, situated right in the center of campus, as well as the Gene Haas Center for Advanced Manufacturing and the Dental Lab.



## University at Albany Visit

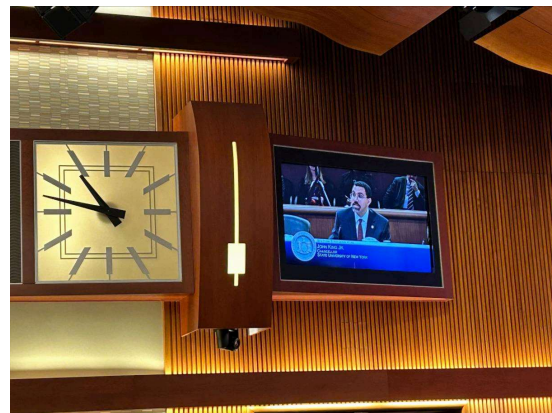
The OGR Team had the privilege of joining the University at Albany's Vice President for Government and Community Relations Sheila Seery on an insightful tour showcasing the university's groundbreaking advancements in

AI innovation, RNA research, and weather technology. We explored state-of-the-art facilities and learned about cutting-edge projects that are shaping UAlbany to be the leader in the future of these industries



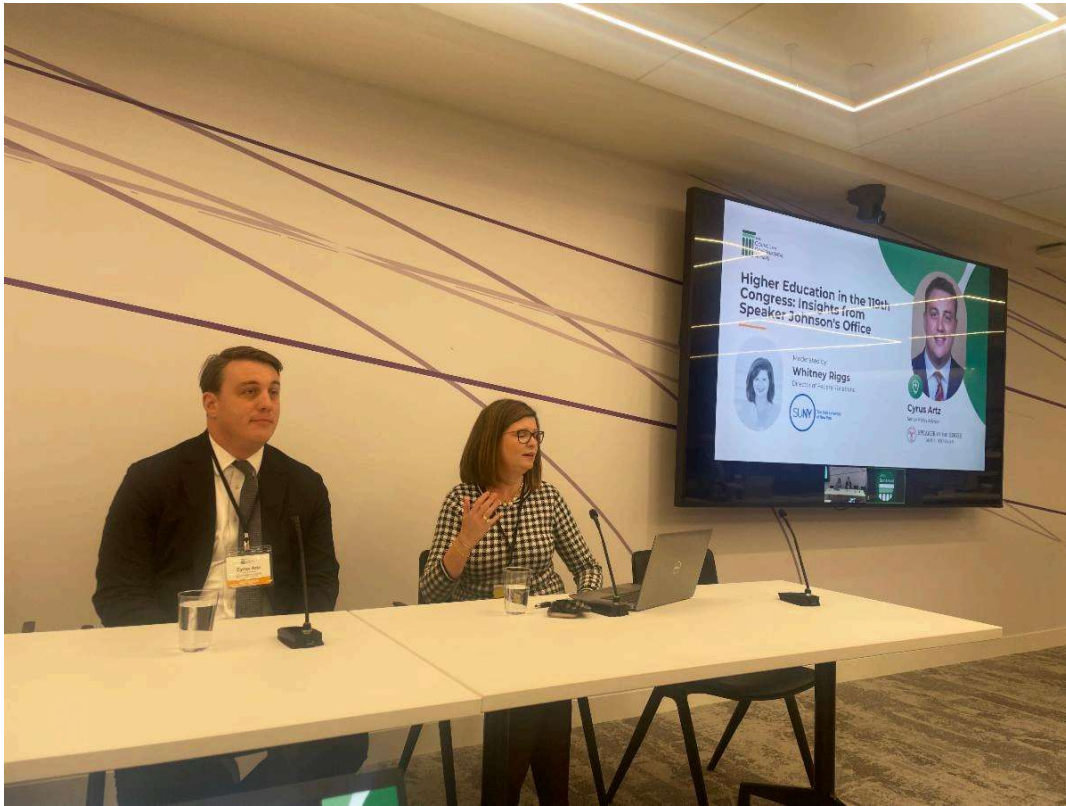
## Higher Education Budget Hearing

Chancellor King testified at the Higher Education Committee's joint budget hearing, advocating for SUNY's critical budgetary needs.



## Association of Public and Land Grant Universities (APLU) Conference

Pictured below is SUNY Director of Federal Relations Whitney Riggs in action moderating a panel at the recent APLU conference. The topic was Higher Education in the 199th Congress: Insights from Speaker Johnson's Office.



## **U.S. Department of Commerce and U.S. Department of Agriculture**

In February, SUNY Director of Federal Relations, Whitney Riggs, joined several community college presidents, provosts, and trustees for meetings with agency officials from the U.S. Department of Commerce (USDOC) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). At USDOC, the group discussed the importance of the CHIPS and Science Act to our local economies and workforce development opportunities for community colleges with a particular focus on advanced manufacturing, cybersecurity, AI and IT. At USDA, the group learned more about opportunities for rural community colleges to engage with USDA's Rural Development Innovation Center which supports enhancing the quality of life for rural America.



## **SUNY Legislative Alumni Breakfast**

On February 26, Chancellor King hosted the SUNY Legislative Alumni Breakfast to celebrate our SUNY alumni serving in the State Legislature. We are deeply grateful for their endless advocacy on behalf of SUNY and dedication to accessible higher education. We appreciate each and every one

of our 62 of our proud SUNY alumni in the State Legislature, who are represented in our **alumni poster!** Thank you again to all who attended. We look forward to seeing you sporting your SUNY socks around Albany!



## Looking Forward to March

- Please join us for our **SOMOS Panel** on Advancing Access, Equity & Opportunity: Launching SUNY's First Spanish-Language Degree Program at Empire State University, **Saturday, March 8, 1-2:15 PM** at the **Empire State Plaza**.
- Governor Hochul has opened applications for the **Empire State Summer Service Corps Program**. Applications close March 20. [Read more](#)
- We encourage members and staff to check out our **SUNY Research Expo** on **Tuesday, March 18, 9-10:30 AM** in **Room 944-A** of the **Legislative Office Building**. Light refreshments will be served!
- SUNY Brockport's **Washington Internship Program** Fall & Spring semester application deadline is April 1. This is an amazing opportunity for students to build professional networks and develop real-world skills in the nation's capital. [Read more](#)

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