



## **SUNY Office of Government Relations Newsletter**

Dear Friend,

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

Here in Albany, budget season is in full effect. The halls of the Capitol are heating up while the rest of New York State has been a frozen, snowy tundra. The SUNY Office of Government Relations is keeping a steady rhythm through it all.

February was all about raising SUNY's priorities and commitment to SUNY's Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), capital needs, community colleges, hospitals, and climate initiatives with policymakers in Albany and Washington D.C.! The team also was out in full force at the NYS Association of Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic & Asian Legislative Caucus Weekend in Albany. Our team has been strategizing, advocating, and engaging with key partners to ensure SUNY's needs remain front and center throughout the budget process.

As always, our extended appreciation to Governor Hochul, Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, the State Legislature, and our Congressional delegation for your constant support of SUNY.

We will continue to focus on advocating for SUNY's students, faculty, and staff, and advancing the mission that drives our work every day.

Sincerely,

Will Schwartz  
Vice Chancellor for Government Relations



**Will Schwartz**  
 Vice Chancellor for  
 Government Relations  
[Email Will](#)  
 518.949.7485



**Maria Volpe-McDermott**  
 Director of Government Relations  
[Email Maria](#)  
 518.859.3241



**Whitney Riggs**  
 Director of Federal Relations  
[Email Whitney](#)  
 518.320.1579



**Sydney Renwick**  
 Assistant Director of  
 Government Relations  
[Email Sydney](#)  
 518.971.2168



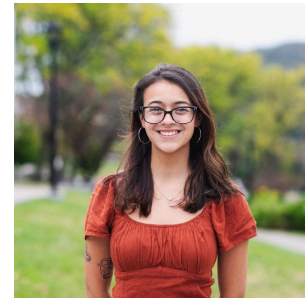
**Julie Harris**  
 Project Manager and Special  
 Assistant  
[Email Julie](#)  
 518.320.1584



**Aria Jordan**  
 Government Relations  
 Specialist  
[Email Aria](#)  
 518.320.1821



**Chelsea Jones**  
 Administrative Assistant  
[Email Chelsea](#)  
 518.320.1776



**Julia Rios**  
 OGR Graduate Fellow



Which two SUNY institutions had alumni compete in the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics?

SUNY Oswego & SUNY Plattsburgh

Monroe Community College & North Country Community College

Alfred State & University at Buffalo

SUNY Brockport & SUNY Morrisville

## LOOKING BACK ON FEBRUARY

### SUNY News Highlights

- SUNY releases **2026 SUNY Report on Long-Term Enrollment & Financial Sustainability** spotlighting SUNY's enrollment gains, improved financial sustainability, and focus on expanding programs and initiatives. [Read more](#)
- Chancellor King visits **Herkimer County Community College** as part of his **Reconnect Tour**. [Read more](#)
- Chancellor King continues his **Reconnect Tour** with visit to **Fulton-Montgomery Community College**. [Read more](#)
- Governor Hochul highlights new collaboration between **Workers' Compensation Board, SUNY, and CUNY**. [Read more](#)
- A student who received his degree through **SUNY's Office of Higher Education in Prison** shares his personal journey. [Read more](#)
- SUNY expands **EOP Scholars Program** for students pursuing careers in nursing and teaching shortage areas. [Read more](#)
- SUNY expands **SUNY's Mental Health Internship Program** that connects students with paid opportunities at OMH-licensed locations. [Read more](#)
- SUNY Albany Professor Dr. DeeDee M. Bennett Gayle is selected as the recipient of the **SUNY Leadership Institute's Dr. Hazel Dukes Fellowship**. [Read more](#)
- **SUNY Downstate Hospital's** \$1.1 billion modernization plan advances with recent demolition contract approval for the creation of its new hospital annex. [Read more](#)
- Chancellor King announces a partnership with **New York State Future Farmers of America** to expand outreach for agriculture education opportunities. [Read more](#)
- Chancellor King shares how SUNY remains a **global higher education leader** in his recent op-ed. [Read more](#)

# SUNY Research Highlights

Across the SUNY System, our campuses conduct a vast amount of groundbreaking research, producing innovations and insights with far-reaching benefits not only for New Yorkers, but for people across the globe. Here are a few recent highlights:

- Researchers collaborating between the **State University of New York at Albany** and the New York State Department of Health have discovered communication networks that help bacteria develop antibiotic resistance. [Read more](#)
- The **State University of New York at Binghamton** has been awarded \$2.5 million to develop a next-generation avian flu vaccine using yeast. [Read more](#)
- The **State University of New York at Stony Brook** received a \$1.08 million grant from the National Science Foundation to lead a new project on the impact of quantum sensor networks. [Read more](#)
- Researchers at the **State University of New York at Buffalo** have developed a new inhalable form of tuberculosis treatment that could significantly reduce the burden of current therapy. [Read more](#)
- New study from researchers at **SUNY College of Optometry** suggests myopia could be caused by how we use our eyes indoors. [Read more](#)
- Two **University at Buffalo** scientists have been chosen as part of a NASA satellite mission to improve predictions of environmental change and help mitigate natural disasters. [Read more](#)
- Scientists at **Stony Brook University** are researching the metabolic process of the Eurasian common shrew, and their findings may help us understand more about certain diseases. [Read more](#)
- A new study at **Binghamton University** has found that businesses that sufficiently prepare to defend against cyberattacks are also more likely to perform better financially. [Read more](#)
- A research team at the **University at Albany** is developing technologies powered by artificial intelligence and virtual reality designed to help vulnerable populations prepare for extreme events. [Read more](#)

## New Additions to the OGR 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.

**Aria Jordan** has joined the team as our new Government Relations Specialist and will support the Office's advocacy and campus relations efforts. Aria brings a well-rounded balance of previous experience in social policy, community engagement, and state government.

**Chelsea Jones** has joined the team as our new Administrative Assistant to assist with the Office's administrative needs. Chelsea has experience

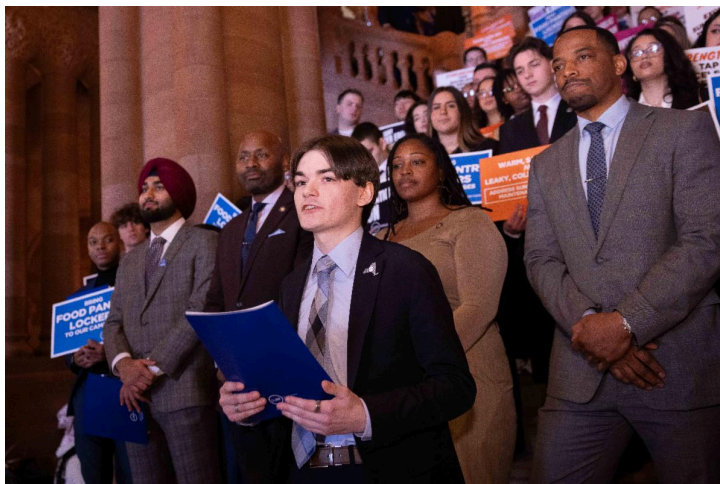
supporting executive leadership in higher education and brings strong organizational skills, strategic thinking, and a fierce commitment to public service.

**Julia Rios** has joined the team as our Graduate Fellow from the University at Albany's MPA program. Through this opportunity, Julia will gain firsthand knowledge on the intersection of higher education and government affairs.

Welcome Aria, Chelsea, and Julia!

## SUNY Student Assembly Advocacy

On February 4, SUNY Student Association (SA) President and Student Trustee Luca Rallis, along with fellow SUNY SA students, energized the halls of the Capitol to voice how the state budget impacts their student experience and advocate for stronger investments in SUNY. At the start of the morning, Will welcomed the group and prepared students on how to have a productive advocacy day.



Luca Rallis, Assemblymember Kwani O'Pharrow, Assemblymember Chantel Jackson, Assemblymember Noah Burroughs, and Senator Robert Jackson proudly joined SA's students on the Million Dollar Staircase.

## State and Federal Community College Advocacy

On February 4, Will joined community college presidents and trustees in Albany to meet with several of our strong supporters in the Legislature including Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Senate Higher Education Chair Toby Ann Stavisky, and Assembly Higher Education Chair Alicia Hyndman. The group also met with members of Governor Hochul's

education team, including Deputy Secretary for Education Maria Fernandez and Assistant Secretary for Education Danielle McMullen. The group thanked the Governor and Legislature for their continued support and discussed their budget priorities.



On February 10, more than 50 SUNY community college presidents and trustees traveled to Washington D.C for the annual Association of Community College Trustees Legislative Summit. Following the Summit, attendees met with Senator Chuck Schumer and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand to thank them for their efforts to protect funding for SUNY’s higher education priorities in FY26 — including Pell Grants, TRIO, GEAR UP, and Postsecondary Student Success Grants — and to discuss strategies to proactively strengthen support for these programs in FY27.



## 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.

The Executive Budget provides another strong foundation for SUNY and we are working to build on that momentum through increased funding for community college operating aid (\$8 million), restoring and increasing EOP (\$20.1 million), permanently ending the hospital debt sweep and adding the Jacobs School of Medicine, and increasing critical maintenance (\$405 million) and research capital (\$460 million) funding. Learn more about our budget requests [here](#). We look forward to working together with the Governor and Legislature to ensure another historic budget for SUNY system.



Chancellor King and Assemblymember Marianne Buttenschon



Chancellor King and Assemblymember Sarah Clark



Chancellor King and Assemblymember Brian Cunningham



Chancellor King and Senator Joe Griffo



Chancellor King and Assemblymember Donna Lupardo



Chancellor King and Senator Rachel May



On February 9, Chancellor King met with members of the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic & Asian Legislative Caucus and presented SUNY's budget priorities. Chancellor King highlighted funding for the ESF Timbuctoo Climate Institute, accompanied by Paul Hai, Director of the Timbuctoo Institute, as well as funding for the Higher Education in Prison (OHEP) initiative, accompanied by Rachel Sander, OHEP Executive Director, and Darryl Epps, OHEP Deputy Director.



## SUNY Health and Hospitals Advocacy Day

On February 10, campus representatives from the University at Buffalo's Jacobs School of Medicine, SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University, SUNY Stony Brook University, and SUNY Upstate Medical University traveled to Albany to advocate for important investments in SUNY's hospitals and health initiatives. The Executive Budget included \$100 million in operating aid for SUNY Downstate and \$150 million total for the three SUNY hospitals. Our health care staff spoke about the importance of supporting these important investments as well as permanently ending the hospital debt sweep (\$70 million), adding the Jacobs School of Medicine to such debt service relief (\$12 million), restoring \$1 million for the high needs nursing program, and restoring \$1 million for mental health services. Learn more about our health and hospital asks [here](#).





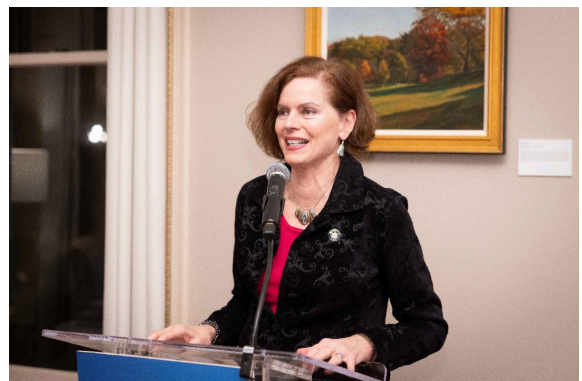
## Speaker Heastie visits SUNY Albany EOP Students

On February 10, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie visited the University at Albany to speak with EOP students, offering words of encouragement and recognition. Under Speaker Heastie's leadership, EOP has seen historic increases in funding that have allowed thousands of additional students to realize their dream of attending college. We appreciate Speaker Heastie for being a longstanding champion of EOP and for his continued support.



## SUNY LEADS Reception

On February 12, Sydney joined Chancellor King at the SUNY LEADS reception to network with the new cohort of fellows from the Black Leadership Institute; Hispanic Leadership Institute; Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander Leadership Institute; and the new Disability Support Leadership Institute. Thank you, Senator Pat Fahy, for providing warm regards to our fellows!



# NYSABPRHAL Caucus Weekend

On February 13 through 15, Chancellor King, SUNY Trustees Eunice Lewin, Camille Joseph Varlack, and Marcos Crespo, Will, Sydney, as well as other members of the SUNY team participated in the eventful 55th Annual Legislative Conference of the New York State Association of Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic & Asian Legislators (NYSABPRHAL).



On February 14, SUNY hosted a panel on the transformative impact of New York's opportunity programs including SUNY's Educational Opportunity Program (EOP). From Assemblymember Khaleel Anderson, a SEEK alum, to Messiah Royall, SUNY Albany's EOP Student Association President, students from New York State's opportunity programs are proof that opportunity transforms potential into impact. Thank you to Chancellor King, Dr. Michel Breland, CUNY's University Dean for Special Programs, Phyllis Breland, President of the Tri-State Consortium of Opportunity Programs, and our very own Cheryl Hamilton, Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Life, Opportunity Programs and Student Advocate, for participating.



Pathways to Possibilities Panel

On February 14, SUNY's Third Annual EOP Reception recognized notable EOP alumni and advocates for their commitment to uplift the program for the next generation of EOP scholars. Chancellor King and Cheryl Hamilton honored EOP legislative champion and alum Assemblymember Phara Souffrant Forrest, and Presidents Adiam Tsegai and Peter O. Nwosu for their commitment to EOP. We were thrilled to be joined by Eric Eve, the son of former Assemblymember Arthur O. Eve, whose legislation is the impetus for SUNY's Educational Opportunity Program.



EOP Reception

We were thrilled to receive a proclamation from several members of the State Legislature, including the NYSABPRHAL Chair Latrice Walker and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, recognizing SUNY’s University Center for Academic and Workforce Development’s 60th Anniversary. Chancellor King celebrated this milestone alongside Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) Leadership, EOC Executive Directors, and their students, highlighting EOC’s commitment to providing innovative programming that supports student success and upward mobility for thousands of EOC students.



UCAWD Exhibition

## Higher Education Budget Hearing

On February 24, Chancellor King testified at the Higher Education Committee’s joint budget hearing on SUNY’s budget priorities. Thank you to Chairs Liz Krueger, Gary Pretlow, Toby Ann Stavisky, and Alicia Hyndman for hosting a productive hearing on the higher education portion of the Executive Budget and for thoughtful discussion of the budget’s potential investments and impacts on SUNY students, faculty, and staff.



## SUNY EOP Advocacy Day

On February 25, we traveled up the hill with EOP directors and student ambassadors from more than 20 SUNY campuses to visit our EOP champions in the Legislature. We are fortunate to have amazing EOP staff providing supportive services across our SUNY campuses, including those who joined us on advocacy day to share their first-hand experiences. Thank you to the legislators who took the time to hear from our students and learn about the impact EOP has had on their lives.





## Campus Visits

On February 2, Chancellor King visited SUNY Poly to launch their Office of Workforce Development, which will serve as a central hub connecting students, faculty, and industry to career readiness programs, experiential learning opportunities, internships, and workforce partnerships. Chancellor King, President Winston Soboyejo, SUNY Trustee Bruce Simon, Senator Joe Griffo, Assemblymember Marianne Buttenschon, and Assemblymember Brian Miller toured some of SUNY Poly's labs and had a roundtable discussion with industry partners and students. Learn more about the visit [here](#).



On February 12, Maria joined Chancellor King, President Lisa Vollendorf, and Saratoga Springs Mayor John Safford at Empire State University to meet with students enrolled in Empire State's Direct Support Professionals (DSP) micro credential program and to highlight the initiatives Empire State offers for our

veterans including their Veteran Military Resource Center. Learn more about the visit [here](#).



## 🧠 Trivia Answer 🧠

Meet the two SUNY alumni who participated at the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics!

Chris Lillis from Monroe Community College participated in Freestyle Skiing.

Sophia Kirkby from North Country Community College participated in Double Luge.

Read more [here](#).

## LOOKING AHEAD

- Applications for the Fall semester of the SUNY Washington Internship Program are now open! [Apply](#) by **April 1**.
- On **March 17**, SUNY will be hosting a **Research Expo** in Room 711-A of the Legislative Office Building. SUNY research and innovation fuels New York's futures. Come meet our brilliant faculty and students. Light refreshments will be served!

## Keep up with SUNY and the Office of Government Relations

- Take a peek at OGR's website [here](#).
- Want to look back on OGR's archived newsletters? Check out our page [here](#).
- Interested in SUNY research and innovation? Check out our website [here](#).

[governmentrelations@suny.edu](mailto:governmentrelations@suny.edu)

518.320.1148



The State University of New York (SUNY) | H. Carl McCall SUNY Building 353 Broadway | Albany, NY 12246 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)