

Good afternoon. My name is Kristin Esterberg, and I am the president of SUNY Potsdam. Celebrating our bicentennial this year, SUNY Potsdam is the oldest campus in the SUNY system. Looking back to our founding as St. Lawrence Academy in 1816, local residents pooled their meager earnings to found the college. Later, they lobbied fiercely for us to join the normal school system and, later, SUNY. Our success is in no small part attributed to the support we have received from our community, and our growth has helped our North Country community flourish.

The 13 campuses in the comprehensive sector provide access to a rigorous four-year degree experience to 90,000 students from working families across New York State. Dotted throughout the state, we are typically the economic and cultural anchors of our communities, and we are careful stewards of the state's investment in us.

Investing in SUNY *is* investing in the North Country. In Potsdam and Canton, SUNY campuses are the largest employers in our communities, along with the hospital. A key economic driver, SUNY Potsdam contributes over \$375 million directly and indirectly to the region's economy, just as the other comprehensive campuses contribute to their regions.

From 2010-2014, the State of New York invested in a new performing arts center for SUNY Potsdam, one of three designated arts campuses in the SUNY system. Over that four-year period, the center brought over 300 jobs to the region—an important boost to a region with the highest unemployment rate in New York (currently 6 percent). Completed in 2014, that facility has brought cultural performances to thousands of community members and schoolchildren, enabling SUNY Potsdam to serve as the culture and arts hub of one of the poorest counties in New York State.

We match the public investment in us with private funding. For example, through a generous \$1 million gift from an alumna, SUNY Potsdam created SUNY's first Center for Applied Learning in 2015. A newly announced SUNY Performance Investment Fund grant of \$750,000 to the Center is enabling us to scale up, with our partner at SUNY Oneonta, and serve as an incubator for best practices across the system, with the ultimate aim of improving student retention and ensuring that every student has access to a high quality internship, study abroad, service learning, or faculty-student research opportunity.

Even as we strive to maintain efficiency and keep costs low (our campus saves approximately \$180,000 each year through shared services with SUNY Canton), we need state support more than ever to serve an increasingly diverse and economically vulnerable student population. Approximately 17 percent of SUNY Potsdam's students come from New York City, and another 32 come from the North Country—one of the poorest regions in the state. Nearly 40 percent of our 4,000 students are diverse: African American, Latino, Native American. 44 percent of our students receive Pell grants, a measure of their economic vulnerability, and almost half receive TAP awards. In our freshman class, half had an estimated family contribution (EFC) of between \$0 and \$2,999, according to their FAFSA. Our campus provides \$2,775,011 in financial assistance, including \$883,558 in private scholarships and awards.

Continued state investment in our SUNY campuses is critical to meet the increased costs associated with negotiated salary increases, increases in library materials and technology, and the need to provide enhanced academic and financial support so that every student has the ability to succeed. For Potsdam, the cost of unfunded negotiated salary increases is about \$750,000 each year. Projected increases in the minimum wage will have substantial impact on our student employment. We are grateful for the state's ongoing commitment to public higher education, yet we know that increased investment is critical for the continued vitality of our students, our campuses, and our regions.