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Subject: A message from SUNY Chancellor John B. King to Campus Presidents

To: SUNY Center for Professional Development List

Sharing the following message from SUNY Chancellor John B. King to Campus Presidents:

Dear Presidents,

Over the past week, we have seen a rush of executive orders and presidential actions that have touched on virtually every aspect of our society – from immigration enforcement to climate change; gender identity to the future of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The reality is that we do not yet know what many of these directives will mean for our campuses and our students, and we anticipate extensive litigation that will over time clarify their reach and implications.

Yet as we begin the spring semester, many students and faculty have expressed deep uncertainty about the impact of these changes in policy on their education at SUNY. Many students who are undocumented or who are from mixed-status families are justifiably fearful for their future. Some of our LGBTQ+ students feel like their very identity is being denied by their government. Dedicated researchers have been told that grants they have spent years toiling over are suddenly terminated.

Let me be clear about where we stand: SUNY is proud to count as a member of our community every one of our students, our faculty, and our staff members – no matter their religion, their nation of origin or immigration status, their gender, their race or ethnicity, their sexual orientation or gender identity, or their political beliefs. We are proud of the groundbreaking research our campuses are leading – from international economic development to advanced battery power to eliminating health disparities.

From our founding, SUNY's mission has been “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.” We have no intention of backing away from that mission and its inherent commitment to a diverse and inclusive university and society.

I also want to underscore the practical steps that campuses can and should be taking.

As you know, the federal government has rescinded the longstanding “sensitive areas” policy that generally prevented immigration enforcement from occurring on college campuses and in our hospitals. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that NYS Executive Order 170.1, which has been continued by Governor Hochul, requires a judicial warrant or judicial order – not an administrative warrant – for execution of civil arrests by federal immigration authorities within State facilities, including SUNY campuses.

In addition, as we noted in the guidance provided to State-operated campuses and the resource documents shared with community colleges, existing SUNY Board of Trustees policy states that: “The University will continue its long-standing practice of vigorously defending the privacy rights of students and requiring a subpoena, court order, search warrant, or other applicable exception to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (such as a health and safety emergency or student waiver), prior to releasing information to law enforcement about a student or group of students. This includes information about national origin, religion, and immigration status.”

If students on your campus have concerns about immigration-related issues, please encourage them to call the New York State Office for New Americans hotline at 1-800-566-7636 to access answers to immigration and naturalization questions and for referrals to free legal help and programs.

In the coming weeks and months, there will no doubt be more federal changes that impact our campuses and our students, and more clarity about the policies that have already been put in place. We will work together to understand and navigate this changing landscape – to find the opportunities where we can, and to address the challenges.

I continue to wake up every morning believing deeply in the unique power of public higher education to strengthen the lives of our students and the health of our democracy. And I go to sleep each night proud of the work we are doing together at SUNY to tangibly deliver on these aspirations for the students we are privileged to serve.

Thank you as always for your leadership and your service.

Sincerely,

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