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The Honorable Linda McMahon
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20202

November 19, 2026

Dear Madam Secretary:

This letter is The Pennsylvania State University's response to your August 3, 2026, call to action. In it, we describe for the American people our commitments to rigorous teaching, impactful research, and national service.

Penn State is a multi-campus, land-grant, public research university. Our mission is to offer access to education and public service across Pennsylvania, through undergraduate, graduate, professional, continuing, and extension education and through our work with private-sector, educational, and government partners. That mission rests on three things: teaching, research, and service, carried out with responsible stewardship of the public's trust and the public's resources.

We have organized this response around the seven questions in your letter.

1. Admissions transparency and merit

Penn State enrolled 83,499 students this fall across University Park, the Commonwealth Campuses, World Campus, and our graduate and professional schools. Undergraduates make up more than four of every five of those students, and their admission is based on merit. First-year applications are evaluated through an automated, formula-based review. Race and ethnicity are not considered; the most important factor in our review is the applicant's academic record.

We publish the minimum high school course requirements for first-year admission, including additional mathematics preparation for majors in business, engineering, the sciences, and related fields, and the Undergraduate Admissions Office explains how applications are reviewed on its public website. Our accreditor, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), requires that admissions materials and practices be honest and accurate and that admission policies be clearly stated, ethical, and consistent with institutional mission. Our most recent accreditation self-study documents how the University meets those standards.

Penn State received a record number of undergraduate applications for fall 2026. At University Park and in programs with limited enrollment, demand exceeds capacity, so meeting the published minimum requirements does not by itself assure admission. Beyond those requirements, the decision rests chiefly on the academic record: the courses taken in grades nine through eleven, the grades earned, and the level of those courses, along with standardized test scores for applicants who choose to submit them. Penn State sets no minimum grade point average or test score. Applications are generally reviewed for admission to a campus rather than to a specific major. Mathematics performance receives closer attention for mathematics and science programs, and some programs, such as Nursing and Architecture, are more selective because their enrollment is limited.

2. Free exchange of ideas and protection against disruption

Penn State holds two commitments that reinforce each other. We protect the widest possible exchange of ideas, and we protect the conditions that allow students, faculty, staff, and visitors to learn, teach, conduct research, speak, gather, and work without harassment, intimidation, violence, or material disruption. A university does its best work when every idea can be heard and tested, and when students can attend class, faculty can teach and conduct research, and invited speakers can be heard. Penn State protects both.

Protecting open inquiry. As a public university, Penn State protects speech even when the ideas expressed are contested, unpopular, or offensive. That commitment is set out in University policy:

- **AC47, General Standards of Professional Ethics**, sets expectations for faculty conduct.
- **AC64, Academic Freedom**, protects freedom in teaching, research, publication, and professional activity.
- **AD02A**, the supplemental policy on speeches, rallies, and demonstrations.
- **AD51, Use of Outdoor Areas for Expressive Activities**, states that "a university is inherently a marketplace of ideas" and protects the right of groups and individuals to express divergent viewpoints.
- **AD92, Political Campaign Activities**, protects the political expression of students and employees as private citizens while barring the University, and employees acting in an official capacity, from supporting or opposing candidates for office.
- **AD103, Visitor Rights and Responsibilities**, sets forth the conduct expectations for visitors to campus.

Student fee funding for events sponsored by student organizations is allocated by student-run committees, such as the University Park Allocation Committee, which must make their decisions on a viewpoint-neutral basis. Recognized student organizations may also invite speakers without student fee funding, and individuals may engage in protected expression in designated outdoor areas of campus without a student group's sponsorship. Permitting a

speaker, event, or demonstration never implies that the University endorses the views expressed.

Policy alone does not build a culture of open inquiry, so we also teach it. The Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost maintains a public free speech and expression website with the University's principles, legal obligations, and answers to common questions. Materials on the First Amendment, academic freedom, campus speakers, and protest rights are used in academic leadership programs, in presentations to the University Faculty Senate, and in New Student Orientation. These materials explain to students the difference between discomfort and danger and the role of counter-speech.

Penn State also has deep capacity in civic learning and dialogue across difference. This work includes the McCourtney Institute for Democracy; World in Conversation, which runs structured dialogue across difference; the News Literacy Initiative; Penn State Votes and the Civic Education Collaborative, which provide nonpartisan voter education; the James Jimirro Open for Debate Series of the Presidential Leadership Academy; and Student Affairs civic life programs.

Preventing harassment, violence, and disruption. Peaceful protest, dissent, and counter-speech are protected. Threats, violence, targeted harassment, property damage, physical obstruction, and substantial disruption of classes, research, lectures, or University operations are not. A protester may disagree forcefully with a speaker. A protester may not use violence, true threats, or obstruction to keep others from attending class, entering buildings, conducting research, or hearing an invited speaker.

These rules apply whatever the viewpoint. They are enforced through:

- **AD57, Use of University Property**, which provides a basis for addressing encampments, unauthorized structures, and uses of property that interfere with University functions.
- **AD68 (University Access), AD70 (Emergency Management), and PS02 (Weapons and Fireworks)**, which support event security and facility protection.
- **The Student Code of Conduct, AD88 (Code of Responsible Conduct), and AD91 (Discrimination and Harassment)**, which hold individuals accountable for conduct that crosses the line.
- **AD104, Trespass Warning Policy**, for continued noncompliance with policy or lawful direction.

For events likely to draw heightened interest or demonstrations, the University uses a coordinated planning process in which University Police and Public Safety plays a central role. That process covers threat and risk assessment, event-specific staffing, crowd management, traffic and access control, emergency management, coordination with outside agencies, and continuity plans for instruction, research, student services, athletics, and health care. Planning and resource decisions rest on objective factors: venue, expected crowd size, logistics, and credible safety concerns. They never rest on agreement or disagreement with the views being expressed.

Penn State promises clear conduct standards, advance planning, viewpoint-neutral enforcement, and accountability when conduct crosses from expression into harassment, threats, violence, or obstruction. Even with those standards in place, no institution can promise that no one will ever try to disrupt a class, a lecture, or a campus event.

Institutional restraint. Penn State has not adopted a formal statement of institutional neutrality. The University does expect its leaders to practice institutional restraint when speaking for the institution on public controversies, and they have done so consistently.

3. Intellectual pluralism, faculty hiring and evaluation, and research in the public interest

A research university does its work through critical debate: claims are tested, evidence is weighed, and ideas compete on their merits. Penn State's commitment to intellectual pluralism follows from its commitment to academic freedom and to the pursuit of truth in every discipline.

Pluralism in academic units. Academic freedom under AC64 protects faculty in teaching, research, and publication, whatever conclusions their scholarship reaches. Policies on conflict of commitment and conflict of interest (AC80 and HR91) keep faculty and staff outside activities and financial interests transparent. University Libraries maintains its own intellectual freedom policies (UL-AD02 and UL-AD03). In our accreditation self-study, the University documents that learning experiences in every modality and setting are characterized by rigor and coherence.

Faculty hiring. Faculty searches seek candidates who are accomplished or promising scholars, committed to student success, and prepared to turn knowledge into public benefit. We expect every faculty member to help sustain an intellectually open community: to create conditions in which students can pursue questions freely and rigorously, weigh evidence carefully, disagree with reason, and work with people who hold different views. We hold ourselves to that standard and are working to make it a consistent part of how every search is conducted and how every new faculty member is prepared.

Faculty evaluation. Promotion, tenure, and annual reviews judge academic and professional merit, not ideological viewpoint. Each college and campus sets its criteria in line with the University's mission. Our accreditation self-study documents that faculty qualifications and expectations are governed by published, clear, and fair criteria and procedures. The University also tracks the faculty climate through the COACHE Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey and faculty exit surveys, and it uses the results to find areas to improve.

A research enterprise that serves the American people. Advancing knowledge in service of the public is the purpose of a land-grant university. Penn State's research is funded by federal and state sponsors, U.S. industry, and U.S. foundations. The University's own research investments are directed at positioning our faculty to compete successfully for that support. In fiscal year 2025–26, Penn State spent $1.48 billion on research, $932.7 million of it from federal sponsors. The largest federal sponsor was the Department of War, at

$460.3 million. Penn State enrolled 11,876 graduate students in fall 2026. In FY2026, Penn State research produced more than 61,000 publications and more than 807,000 citations, and 15.3 percent of its papers ranked among the world's top 10 percent most cited.

Sections 6 and 7 describe how the University protects that enterprise and directs it toward national security, workforce, and economic needs.

4. Affordability, cost containment, pricing transparency, and the value of a degree

Penn State is working to lower the cost of a degree from both directions: limiting what students and families pay as much as possible, and reducing what it costs the University to operate so that more of every dollar supports students' education.

Holding the line on tuition. For 2027–28, the Board of Trustees froze in-state undergraduate tuition at the Commonwealth Campuses for a fifth consecutive year, at $6,912 to $7,694 per semester. At University Park, in-state undergraduate tuition will rise 2.5 percent, to $10,700 per semester, below the current rate of inflation, and the increase in on-campus housing and dining rates is the lowest in nine years. What Pennsylvania families pay also depends on state support. This year the General Assembly approved the Commonwealth's first performance-based funding allocation for the state-related universities, the first increase in Penn State's state education funding in seven years. We welcome state support tied to agreed measures of student success, and we will continue to make the case for consistent investment.

A lower-cost path to a Penn State degree. Penn State's Commonwealth Campuses across Pennsylvania give families a more affordable route to the same degree. Outside University Park, Penn State has twenty Commonwealth Campuses. Seven will close after the spring 2027 semester, and thirteen will continue, including the five largest: Abington, Altoona, Behrend, Berks, and Harrisburg. The campuses serve rural, urban, and suburban communities, most of them commuters, so students can live at home, and in-state tuition is well below that at University Park. Through the 2+2 model, a student can begin at any campus and finish at the campus that offers the chosen major without reapplying. Even students in majors offered at only one location can complete their first two years at lower cost.

The campuses also shorten the time it takes to earn a degree, and with it the cost:

- **Dual enrollment.** Commonwealth Campuses offer dual-enrollment courses with school districts in their regions, so high school students can earn Penn State credit before they graduate, with a focus on paths into business, the health fields, and technology. Dual enrollment shortens the time to a degree and lowers its overall cost.
- **Transfer from community colleges.** Every Commonwealth Campus has program-to-program articulation agreements with community and regional colleges. Penn State Harrisburg, for example, places an adviser at Harrisburg Area Community College a couple of times a week to keep courses aligned and help associate degree graduates move into bachelor's programs.

- **Integrated undergraduate and graduate degrees.** Through its campus dedicated to graduate and professional study, Penn State pairs select undergraduate programs with professional master's degrees, with some courses counting toward both. These programs can shorten the path to the master's by at least one semester.
- **Access to courses on other campuses.** The Digital Learning Cooperative lets students take courses that are not offered on their own campus, online and either live or self-paced. Students can stay at the campus that is more affordable for them and keep making progress toward their degree.
- **Credit for what students already know.** Under the University's prior learning assessment policy, students can earn credit for transfer coursework, standard examinations, and portfolios documenting work experience or military training.
- **Lower textbook costs.** Penn State was an early adopter of open and affordable educational resources. At some campuses, as many as 25 percent of courses routinely use low- or no-cost materials.

Early-warning practices tell students early in the semester how they are doing in their courses, and limits on course retakes help keep them on track to finish.

Containing costs. Since 2022 the University has undertaken a sustained effort to reduce administrative and operating costs:

- **Shared services.** Through its Optimized Service Teams, Penn State consolidated finance staff from across colleges and units into a shared services model involving several hundred employees. A parallel information technology consolidation, which moves IT from a distributed model to shared services, is expected to be completed in early 2027. Facilities, enrollment management, IT, finance, and auxiliary services at the Commonwealth Campuses are now managed as one portfolio rather than duplicated campus by campus.
- **A leaner physical footprint.** Penn State is closing seven of its twenty Commonwealth Campuses where enrollment has declined sharply, which is expected to save more than $40 million a year and remove a substantial deferred-maintenance burden. Academic programs from those campuses are moving to other Penn State locations so students can finish their degrees without losing time or credits. Lease consolidations and renegotiations have cut lease and operating costs by about $3 million a year since 2022.
- **Capital discipline.** Proposed construction must pass a Project Decision Review Board with defined approval gates for program need, scope, funding, and long-term operating cost. Independent estimators validate project costs, designs are judged on total cost of ownership, and renovation of existing buildings is preferred over new construction where it serves the need.
- **Getting out of businesses that are not core.** The University has used ground leases to bring in private partners for hotels and student housing; the recent public-private partnership (P3) housing project at University Park transferred about $300 million in development costs and associated risk to the private partner. Penn State is working to

transfer operation of the State College Regional Airport to the Centre County Airport Authority, subject to approvals, and is disposing of surplus properties, including the seven closing campuses. In October 2026, the University completed the transfer of its public media station, WPSU, to WHYY, which has assumed the cost of operating it; the station had relied on an annual University subsidy of $3.4 million.

Pricing transparency. Families can see what a Penn State degree will cost before they enroll. The University publishes its cost of attendance and provides a net price calculator, a college cost calculator, an estimated cost of attendance with each financial aid offer, a loan debt summary, and a consumer guide to how aid works. Penn State's Public Accountability Report includes a section on affordability, and our accreditor requires that the University give students accurate and complete information about expenses, aid, loans, repayment, and refunds.

Philanthropy for students. Private support has long been a pillar of affordability. In fiscal year 2025–26, donors committed a record $662.7 million in new gifts to Penn State, a significant portion of which was to endow scholarships for students. Most scholarship gifts are endowed, which means only a portion of each gift reaches students in any given year, and the support continues in perpetuity.

Degrees that pay off. The call asks that every academic program equip students to repay their loans. The Academic Portfolio and Program Review (APPR), described in Section 7, reviews programs against workforce and labor-market data and informs recommendations to create, change, or close programs. Earnings and employment data for Penn State graduates are publicly available through the We Earn dashboard, the Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes Explorer, and the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard.

Students who start here finish here. Among first-time, full-time students seeking bachelor’s degrees at any Penn State campus, 86.8 percent of those who entered in 2024 returned for a second year. The six-year graduation rate reached 74.5 percent for students who entered in 2019, and the four-year rate reached 60.5 percent for those who entered in 2021, up 7.9 percentage points from the 2013 entering class. Graduation and retention data by campus and student group are published in the University’s Data Digest.

5. Rigor in the age of AI, grade integrity, and excellence in teaching

A Penn State grade, and a Penn State degree, should be credible evidence of what a student knows and can do. Our approach to rigor starts from that principle. Grades must reflect students' demonstrated achievement of clearly defined course and program outcomes, and artificial intelligence must not weaken the link between the grade and the learning.

Rigor when AI can produce the work. AI can make students more capable while making it harder to tell what they themselves know. A polished essay no longer proves its author can build the argument. Penn State's answer is a principle its Vice Provost for Artificial Intelligence has framed as "understanding before reliance": students should use AI where it advances learning and professional preparation, but the University must retain credible

evidence that graduates have the knowledge and judgment their degrees certify. In practice, that means:

- **Assessment that makes learning visible.** Through its Assessment in the Age of AI initiative, the University helps faculty design assessments built on reasoning, process, verification, applied work, and direct demonstration, so that grades rest on evidence AI cannot supply. The University is also developing guidance on proctoring and examining program-level evaluations and microcredentials that are not susceptible to grade inflation.
- **Faculty judgment, clearly communicated.** Whether AI is appropriate depends on the discipline and the learning goal. Faculty retain responsibility for course expectations, and University guidance helps them communicate clearly when AI use is permitted, limited, or prohibited; and a Joint Standing Committee on Effective and Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education Instruction brings faculty governance into the work.
- **Academic integrity with consistent enforcement.** Penn State appointed its first assistant dean for academic integrity and created the Academic Integrity Responsibilities Office, which is centralizing the adjudication of integrity cases so that standards are applied consistently and cases are resolved promptly. The University's approach does not rely on AI detection; it relies on assessment that shows what students can do.
- **AI literacy.** The Penn State AI Literacy Framework and AI Essentials teach students the capabilities and limits of AI, how to verify its output, and their responsibility for work submitted in their names.
- **Investment in faculty capacity.** The AI Center of Excellence in Teaching and Learning awarded 46 competitive grants totaling $384,355 in its first round to faculty redesigning courses and assessments, with each recipient required to evaluate and share results. The AI-Aware Faculty Leaders Program, an AI and Teaching Summit, and a teaching community for faculty who choose to limit technology in their courses support the same goal. These investments do not assume that more AI use is better.

Grade inflation. Penn State does not judge rigor by whether grades fit a set distribution. A 2017 University Faculty Senate committee report concluded that University-wide grade averages can mislead, because they mix differences in course content, student preparation, and grading practice, and it recommended that academic leaders review grade data at the department, college, and campus level, where context is understood. Our priority is that students learn the material and meet the intended outcomes, particularly in demanding gateway courses that lead into majors. Improving outcomes in those courses means stronger teaching and support, never lower standards or credit without demonstrated learning.

Excellence in teaching. Rigor depends on teaching, and Penn State evaluates and rewards teaching seriously:

- In 2021 the University Faculty Senate approved a Faculty Teaching Assessment Framework, implemented beginning in 2023, that replaced reliance on student ratings with multiple sources of evidence: student feedback, peer review at least once every five years for full-time faculty, and faculty self-reflection, weighed against four elements of effective teaching: effective design, effective instruction, inclusive and ethical pedagogy, and reflective and evolving practice. A standing faculty-administration committee oversees its consistency.
- New incentives reward teaching. The Provost Award for Pedagogical Innovation and Excellence recognizes faculty whose innovations improve student learning, and an Opportunity Grant program, now in its third year, awards more than $500,000 a year, in grants of up to $25,000, for the professional development of teaching faculty. In 2026 the University also recognized 19 educators through nine undergraduate teaching awards, along with three graduate awards.
- Penn State's career and promotion structure for teaching faculty earned the University a 2019 Delphi Award, given that year to two institutions nationwide.
- The Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence supports anyone who teaches Penn State students, on every campus and in every mode, and it is joined by Teaching and Learning with Technology and by college and campus teaching centers, among them the Leonhard Center in Engineering, the Grove Center in Science, and the Dutton Institute in Earth and Mineral Sciences.

6. Protecting academic programs from foreign influence and securing the research enterprise

Penn State is a global university, and it intends to remain one. Open collaboration with the world's best scientists and scholars strengthens American research and American competitiveness, a point federal sponsors themselves recognize. But openness depends on control. The University retains control over its curriculum, academic standards, governance, and compliance, and it protects sensitive research from those who would misuse it.

Academic programs. Penn State closed its Confucius Institute in 2014, well before such closures were widely called for. The University has no campus in any foreign country of concern, as federal law defines that term (a list that includes China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea), and is not registered to do business in any country other than the United States. Curriculum and academic standards are set by Penn State faculty through the University's own governance. Penn State complies with all federal and state requirements for reporting gifts and contracts from foreign sources.

A dedicated research security program. On the recommendation of a University Task Force on International Security and Compliance, Penn State established a formal, centralized Research Security Program aligned with National Security Presidential Memorandum 33 and with the research security provisions of recent National Defense Authorization Acts, the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022, and the SBIR and STTR Extension

Act of 2022. A full-time research security and export control team in the Office for Research Protections conducts security reviews and risk mitigation and coordinates with legal counsel, information security, global programs, and sponsored programs. Its safeguards include:

- **Secure research computing.** In January 2026, Penn State's LionSHIELD enclave for Controlled Unclassified Information earned Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification Level 2 through an independent third-party (C3PAO) assessment, with the maximum Supplier Performance Risk System score of 110.
- **Export control.** Every sponsored project is screened for export-controlled information. Where technology control plans are required, access is restricted to U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents; Penn State does not grant nationality-based waivers. Export compliance staff monitor those plans, including through laboratory visits.
- **Screening of visitors and collaborators.** Foreign visitors arriving on J-1 or H-1B visas are reviewed by the Office for Research Protections before arrival, including restricted-party screening. The University maintains resources for enhanced due diligence screening of collaborators, particularly those in foreign countries of concern, and is automating the screening of proposals involving those countries, with an interim control already in place.
- **Disclosure and conflict of interest.** Since 2012, all researchers have been required to disclose significant financial interests, including those involving foreign entities, for review by a Conflict of Interest Committee. Outside professional activity is limited to 40 hours a month, and activities such as private consulting, expert witness work, and board service must be disclosed; and since 2021 activities that can indicate foreign talent recruitment, such as appointments at other institutions or running a laboratory abroad, require prior approval. University policy prohibits participation in malign foreign talent recruitment programs.
- **Training and travel.** Research security training is required of covered individuals on every federally funded proposal, and the electronic proposal approval system verifies completion before submission. All international University business travel has been registered for more than ten years through the Global Safety Network, which includes export compliance review.
- **Physical security.** University Police and Public Safety supports the protection of research facilities through access control, security assessments, and emergency response planning.

Defense research. Penn State's largest defense research unit, the Applied Research Laboratory, is a University Affiliated Research Center that employs only U.S. citizens and maintains an integrated program for safeguarding classified and controlled information under federal industrial security standards. As a cleared defense contractor, the University is inspected regularly by the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency. Senior University officials maintain close working relationships with the FBI, NCIS, and other

counterintelligence partners; they collaborate with those agencies on emerging threats and receive regular briefings from them.

Penn State will keep investing in research security as threats evolve.

7. Answering the national call: security, workforce, and prosperity

Penn State has served the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the nation since its founding in 1855. As one of the nation's original land-grant institutions, we carry that public purpose into how we educate students, direct research, and serve Pennsylvania's communities.

American security. The Applied Research Laboratory, described in Section 6, is the center of the University's defense work, and the Department of War is our largest federal research sponsor. In September 2026 Penn State launched its National Security Institute, which moves laboratory discoveries into practical tools for national defense in fields that include space resiliency, cybersecurity, quantum science, biotechnology, robotics, and advanced manufacturing. Penn State's security contributions also include research in materials, critical minerals, and nuclear science that supports onshoring; Reserve Officers' Training Corps programs; services for veterans; and work on food security and natural disaster prediction and mitigation. Our international research partnerships serve the same end. Crop pests, animal disease, and public health threats do not stop at borders, and work with trusted partners abroad helps detect and contain them before they reach American farms and communities.

Penn State also educates the people who keep communities safe. Associate and bachelor's degree programs in criminal justice, cybersecurity, information technology, and forensic science prepare graduates to protect physical and digital security in communities and industries. These programs are taught by a mix of faculty and practitioners who have worked in the fields our graduates enter, and students often complete internships and work-based learning in the communities around our campuses. Student, industry, and market demand make them growth areas for the University.

Urgent workforce needs. In 2024 the University launched the Academic Program and Portfolio Review (APPR) to align its academic programs with student needs, its land-grant mission, and workforce demand. With Hanover Research as an outside partner, the first phase gathered data on Penn State's programs and the communities it serves and produced reports on portfolio optimization, Pennsylvania workforce development, and the fit between campus programs and employment trends. Beginning in December 2025, deans and chancellors convened expert teams, including faculty, to review bachelor's and associate degree programs against that workforce data and against enrollment, credit hour, faculty, and degree data. The review is evolving into a centralized, strengthened workforce-needs assessment that is part of new program proposals, increasingly supplemented with Lightcast labor-market data on employer demand, emerging occupations, and changing skill requirements. It informs new program development, program changes, and closure recommendations. The final APPR recommendations, released in October 2026 after a nearly year-long review of all 403 of the University's baccalaureate and associate degree

programs, call for closing 47 programs in the coming years; 24 of those will continue to be offered through another college within Penn State. The 784 students enrolled in the affected programs, about 1.1 percent of undergraduates, will be supported through teach-out plans, and programs flagged for further review will be reviewed within the next year.

The Commonwealth Campuses bring that responsiveness close to employers. Campus leaders work directly with local business and community leaders, and the University adds certificates and degrees as regional needs change, from nursing and health programs offered across the state to a two-year Mining Technology program at a single campus created for a specific industry need. Dual-enrollment courses at the Commonwealth Campuses steer high school students toward high-demand fields (Section 4). Since 2022, a more open approach to sponsorship agreements with product and service providers has also increased internship opportunities with corporate partners and job opportunities for recent graduates.

Because most Commonwealth Campus students are Pennsylvania residents who stay in the communities where they live, their education has an immediate effect on those communities. Many degree programs build work-based learning into the curriculum so graduates can contribute as soon as they finish. At Penn State Schuylkill, for example, students combine four years of coursework with three full-time work experiences and career development training, drawing on more than 200 local employers in health care, industry, transportation safety, business, real estate, social services, and local government. They graduate with both a diploma and a résumé.

Workforce training beyond degrees. Penn State has offered continuing education since 1896, when it began bringing current knowledge of agriculture, dairy farming, and food production to farmers who could not come to campus. Today, Penn State's Continuing Education and Workforce Development program offers more than 150 short courses and certification-preparation programs that address immediate and emerging workforce needs. They include active shooter and emergency medical training; advanced manufacturing, production and inventory certification, programmable logic controller training, rapid prototyping, and plastics technology for Pennsylvania manufacturers; and training in cybersecurity and artificial intelligence.

National prosperity. Penn State research creates economic value through industry partnerships, the transfer of University inventions, and the companies our faculty, students, and alumni start. Over the past decade the University has worked with more than 2,000 companies, and industry investment in Penn State research grew 11 percent in fiscal year 2025–26. In May 2026, Westinghouse and Penn State signed a five-year agreement to advance microreactor technology that includes 40 paid summer internships, and 85 students supported by CHIMES, a Penn State-led semiconductor packaging center, now work in the semiconductor industry. In 2024, Penn State researchers disclosed 232 inventions, the University received 35 U.S. patents and executed 38 licenses and options, and five companies were formed around Penn State technology. Since 2015, Invent Penn State's network of 24 innovation spaces across the Commonwealth has helped launch 739 Pennsylvania companies and create more than 1,000 jobs.

Closing

Public confidence in American higher education rests on transparency and results. That is the standard Penn State holds itself to, and it is the standard this response is meant to meet. Most of the commitments described here are long-standing, and many are being strengthened now. This response is posted on the University's website, as you requested. We welcome continued dialogue with the Department, and with colleagues across higher education, about how best to meet the challenges this call to action raises.

Sincerely,

Neeli Bendapudi, President