

**Minutes**  
**SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University**  
**Council Meeting**  
**Virtual Via Zoom**

**February 11, 2025**  
**10:00 am – 11:30 am**

**Council Members Present**

Rev. Kirkpatrick Cohall, Chair  
Michael Connors, Esq.  
Dr. Mirian Zavala  
Marlene Dietrich Heath  
Dr. Constance Shames  
Isaac Vigman, Voting Student Member

**Downstate Administration Present**

Dr. Wayne J. Riley, President  
James Grecco  
Dr. Richard Miller  
Dr. David Christini  
Dr. Carla Boutin-Foster  
Dr. Anika Daniels-Osaze  
Dr. Jeffrey Putman  
Ellen Watson  
James Gerontzos

Council Chair Reverend Dr. Kirkpatrick Cohall called the meeting to order, and the minutes from the previous meeting were approved by consensus. The Chair noted the continuing issue of Council vacancies.

**REPORT FROM THE PRESIDENT**

Wayne J. Riley, M.D., MPH, MBA, MACP, President of SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University, provided an institutional update and strategic outlook. His remarks addressed national policy developments affecting higher education, healthcare, and research, as well as internal initiatives and campus priorities.

Dr. Riley reviewed recent geopolitical tensions and executive orders from the Trump Administration with potential impacts on academic medical centers. He emphasized that Downstate continues to uphold the principles of free speech and academic expression while maintaining expectations for responsible conduct. He affirmed that Downstate supports respectful discourse and provides parallel forums for differing viewpoints.

Addressing federal actions aimed at limiting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) activities, Dr. Riley reaffirmed that Downstate will maintain its DEI programs, offices, and titles in compliance with state law and SUNY directives. He highlighted the work of Jeff Birnbaum, M.D., MPH, Director of Downstate's HEAT Program – recognized by The New York Times and national media for advancing inclusive care for LGBTQ+ and transgender patients – and acknowledged Carla Boutin-Foster, M.D., MSc, Associate Vice President for Institutional Equity, for leading compliance and education efforts related to Title IX and discrimination policies.

Regarding hospital operations, Dr. Riley noted that forthcoming federal efforts to restructure Medicaid funding could have serious implications for safety-net hospitals and institutions like Downstate, potentially reducing reimbursements, affecting residency positions, and limiting services to the community. Despite these concerns, enrollment across Downstate's academic programs remains steady, and no significant declines are expected for the 2025-2026 academic year.

Dr. Riley also reported on the work of the Community Advisory Board convened by Governor Hochul to assess the transformation of University Hospital at Downstate. The board includes gubernatorial and legislative appointees, along with community and healthcare representatives. Chancellor John B. King, Jr. participated as the SUNY representative; Dr. Enitza George, M.D., MBA, MSAI, Chair of Family and Community Medicine, also sat on the committee.

### **Roundtable Discussion**

Senior Vice President for Human Resources and Chief of Staff Jamie J. Grecco led a discussion with Jeffrey Putman, Ed.D., Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs; David J. Christini, Ph.D., Senior Vice President for Research and Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, and

Dr. Boutin-Foster. The conversation focused on the intersection of federal policy, institutional planning, and operational continuity.

Changes to Title IX and immigration policies were discussed, with potential effects on student enrollment and campus operations. Downstate continues to monitor the possible removal of temporary protective status for certain students, which could affect their ability to remain in the country and attend classes. Dr. Putman raised questions regarding campus procedures should federal law-enforcement agents appear on site. Mr. Grecco noted that state policy requires federal officials to present a judicial warrant to access records or information from state institutions and that all such matters are referred to the SUNY Office of General Counsel. Faculty, staff, and students are instructed not to engage directly with federal agents.

Mr. Grecco also reported that congressional leaders are preparing a reconciliation bill expected to impose significant Medicaid reductions through a block-grant structure. Participants expressed concern about the potential impact on healthcare delivery, clinical education, and financial stability, describing the proposed changes as likely to create operational challenges for academic medical centers and safety-net hospitals.

With regard to NIH funding, the group discussed the administration's executive order reducing indirect cost-recovery rates to 15 percent. Dr. Christini noted that such an abrupt reduction would seriously impair research operations nationwide, limiting institutions' ability to maintain laboratories, equipment, and infrastructure. Although a federal injunction has temporarily halted implementation, the situation remains uncertain and poses substantial financial risk. Several Downstate grants have been flagged or placed at risk due to new restrictions on DEI-related funding, including a \$1.5 million HRSA award that supports scholarships for students from underrepresented backgrounds in the health professions. Dr. Riley noted that he had participated in national discussions convened by the Association of Academic Medical Centers to discuss emergency responses.

Dr. Boutin-Foster summarized Downstate's approach to equity as one of continuity, mission alignment, and adherence to state law while monitoring ongoing litigation and policy changes at the federal level. She emphasized

that New York State continues to provide a supportive framework for maintaining diversity and inclusion goals.

## **Finance Report**

Richard Miller, Ph.D., Chief Financial Officer and Senior Vice President for Finance and Administration, provided an overview of the institution's financial position.

Dr. Miller reported that cash flow remains stable, with balanced performance across the academic and hospital sectors. While state appropriations and tuition revenues have held steady, hospital operations continue to face structural challenges stemming from reimbursement pressures and uncompensated care. The University has tightened expenditure controls and prioritized investments that support academic programs, compliance, and patient care. Key initiatives include:

- Strengthening hospital billing and revenue-cycle management;
- Reviewing cost allocations to ensure appropriate distribution between academic and clinical enterprises;
- Advancing grant-management systems to reduce delays in research funding; and
- Monitoring state budget proposals for potential impacts on capital projects and workforce funding.

Dr. Miller reaffirmed that, despite external financial pressures, Downstate remains solvent and strategically positioned to sustain core operations through prudent fiscal management and continued advocacy at both the state and federal levels.

#

There being no further business, Reverend Cohall made a motion to conclude the meeting.