



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

February 20, 2025

Good afternoon, and welcome to the 2025 State of the University Address. Thank you, Trinia Holt and Ernesto Mauricio, for getting us started. Also, I would like to acknowledge – my administration, deans, faculty, staff, students, dignitaries, alumni, and Toinette – for coming out today.

It is a great time to be an Eagle!

Two thousand twenty-five promises to be another significant year for us at Coppin. We are celebrating 125 years of Eagle greatness, transformation, social change, and innovation.

For the next few moments, I want us to glance back at just a few of our countless accomplishments, to appreciate the remarkable work we have done. Work and accomplishments that will fuel our courageous flight into the future.

I am extremely proud of my administration, our students, faculty, staff and alumni. Collectively, we have expanded our academic portfolio, experienced 5% percent annual enrollment growth every year since 2021, elevated our national and state brand, completed millions in capital projects, and achieved historic milestones in student retention, graduation rates, research grant awards, fundraising, corporate partnerships, endowment growth, and alumni engagement.

Regardless of your role on this campus, we could not have accomplished these achievements and historic milestones without you and your contributions. I have seen you lead by example, placing the needs of others before yourselves, providing unwavering commitment to our community, and serving as incredible ambassadors of our beloved Coppin...and it is inspiring.

From the days of our founding in 1900, our people – who make up this institution – have always been our greatest strength and resource, and I thank you for your compassion, energy, and devotion. All of you are the reason for our success.

This year will also mark a milestone for me. Five years ago, Toinette and I were honored to be welcomed into this incredible university, and to have the opportunity to serve as your president and first lady.

Much has happened in higher education over the past five years that no one could have anticipated, and through it all we remained true to our mission and purpose.

When I arrived, I promised that we would transform our university, and despite dealing with a global pandemic, I am confident that this promise has been kept.

Collectively, we have done a remarkable job elevating our brand and reputation. For every metric that matters, our work at the national and state levels, along with the engagement of our alumni has captured the attention of numerous highly respected educational ranking organizations. As such, they are acknowledging and rewarding our work. Regardless of whether it is College Factual, Niche.com, GradReports, or Nurse.org, they all confirm that we are a university on the rise.

And the recent U.S. News and World Report HBCU rankings, also validated our work. In just four years, we have jumped 26 sister universities, soaring from 53rd (2019), 35th (2022) to 27th (2024), this is a 105% improvement, and our highest ranking ever!

Coppin State University is rewriting the rules demonstrating how one institution can serve a high percentage of Pell-eligible students, provide a quality education, improve student success, achieve national rankings, and deliver cutting-edge research in an exceptional student-centered environment. Our pride always has been and will continue to be on who we serve and educate, not who we exclude.

We are fully committed to becoming a university of choice. A university that students see as a top option, not an only option. And I am thrilled to say our collective efforts are steadily moving us towards meeting this goal.

Last year was a very busy and successful year, on the enrollment front. I want to express my deepest appreciation to our Admissions, Financial Aid, Academic Affairs, Institutional Advancement, Administration and Finance, and IT teams, collectively all of you are doing a fantastic job.

Under the leadership of Jinawa McNeil, Director of Admissions, we executed a comprehensive admissions review of our internal infrastructure, with a keen focus on policies, protocols, procedures, and technologies. We also assessed our personnel and invested in their development, as a result we became more proactive, efficient, agile, knowledgeable, and professional.

And helping to drive our enrollment efforts are our Divisions of Information Technology and Institutional Advancement. With their help, we launched our rebranding campaign and have done a better job marketing our location, incredible students, renowned faculty, amazing staff and nationally recognized academic programs. We were also successful at introducing and reintroducing Coppin State University to those who did not know us, as well as those who had an outdated perception of Coppin.

I have long viewed our campus as a living laboratory of human relations. At Coppin, we value both diversity and multiculturalism, and embrace how these unique characteristics of our students, faculty, staff and alumni strengthen our growth, advance our learning and reinforce our worth as one community. I am proud of the way we continue to ensure that diversity and multiculturalism remain a part of the Coppin DNA.

Over the past five years, we have illustrated to families and students that, regardless of their age, zip code, household income, or place of birth, at Coppin they can become a college graduate. This is the hope, nurturing, resolve and self-confidence we've instilled in our students for the past 125 years.

These efforts collectively have helped us increase our overall enrollment every year, averaging 5% enrollment growth annually - this exceeds the national average of 2-3%, and our Fall 2024 cohort, "Eagles Amplified", was our largest incoming cohort since 2011! Also, we saw a record 67 Presidential Scholars, and our youngest Eagle ever, all selected Coppin as their university of choice.

As Maryland's most affordable four-year college or university, we understand the anxiety that students and families have regarding the rising cost of education. This is one of many reasons why we have doubled-down on our commitment to make Maryland's most affordable university, even more affordability. Since Fiscal Year 2019, our tuition has remained considerably low - increasing by 10%, over six-years, while the consumer price index has increased by 23%, during this same time span. We have been able to protect tuition and fee rates against the full impact of inflation due to our ability to expand merit and need-based scholarships, providing dual enrollment incentives, and better use other university aid.

Through innovative initiatives such as our Expand Eagle Nation program, we have been able to reduce the cost-of-attendance and attract more out-of-state students. In fact, through the Expand Eagle Nation program our Fall 2024 incoming cohort included 192 new out-of-state students; more than doubling the 65 students from 2023.

And not to be out done, under the leadership of Dean Ericka Covington, we saw another increase in graduate student enrollment, which signifies a growing demand for the advanced degrees we offer. This past year, for the first-time in our history, we offered graduate assistantships. These assistantships have strengthened our competitiveness and shifted how we recruit and enroll graduate students.

Each of these strategies have positioned us for potentially more enrollment growth. In this current recruitment cycle the Office of Admissions is experiencing a historic increase in applications and admits for Fall 2025. To date, we have received over 16,000 applications for admissions (with several months to go). This compares to 5,400 applications received for the entire Fall 2024 recruitment cycle.

Of our 16,000 applicants, over 8,000 have been admitted for Fall 2025. This compares to 1,400 admitted students for Fall 2024. This is remarkable and an unquestionable indicator that everything we are doing is working.

This increase reflects our hard work, and the growing reputation of Baltimore's hometown university. While these numbers are promising, we still must close the deal on their enrolling at Coppin, and understand the growth we continue to experience will present us with a housing challenge.

And although it will not fully alleviate our housing challenge, I am thrilled to announce next week we are breaking ground on our new residence hall, which will add 350 additional beds to campus, and move us closer to my vision to have 1,500 students living on campus.

As our enrollment continues to increase, so will the demand for additional housing and additional financial support. To help our students address their financial needs, we award over \$25 million annually in financial aid, merit and need-based scholarships, and while this is impressive, we must continue working to see how we can do more.

In addition to federal financial aid and scholarships, we will explore how we can expand the number of on-campus student employment opportunities: through assistantships, work study, and through the grants we write. All these factors can better help us connect students to campus, increasing retention, student success, and graduation rates, while also reducing student loan debt.

Our enrollment is also growing due to the quality of our academics. Through innovative teaching and research, our faculty are preparing our students to live a life of significance and impact.

There is no denying that the workforce landscape is becoming more competitive and changing rapidly. Technology is transforming the way we live, learn and work, and businesses are looking for employees with transferable skills to help their organizations be successful.

To keep up with the demand, higher education must adapt, and at Coppin we are blending innovation with teaching in ways that expand the boundaries of learning. Drs. Denyce Watties-Daniels, Jayfus Tucker Doswell and Coppin student – Cotie Moss, discussed this in a recent article whereby they highlighted how we are using virtual and augmented reality to enhance the learning and training of our nursing students.

Dr. Nicole Anthony secured a \$1.2 million dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Education to support the enrollment, skill development and progression of students majoring in Special Education.

The College of Business launched the Microsoft Scholars Program. It is a yearly initiative for sophomores, juniors, and first-semester seniors, and is designed to bridge academics with experiential learning.

As a global university, I want to offer students the opportunity to study abroad. These are important life experiential learning opportunities; this is why we are committed to rebuilding a strong functioning Study Abroad program.

Our goal is to stand up our Study Abroad program by Fall 2026. The program will be housed under our new Office for Experiential Learning.

As part of our study abroad efforts we will work to help all incoming and returning students attain their passports, beginning Fall 2026. Thereby positioning them to explore the world we are preparing them to lead and make a difference. I want to thank and acknowledge the team working to make this happen: Dr. Jale Aldemir, Dr. Vaple Robinson, Dr. Claudia Nelson, Dr. James Stewart and Dr. Min Zhang.

Advancing our research to address challenges at home and abroad is the staple to the success of a research university. I have asked the directors of our research centers to join us today. Their centers coupled with the work of our research faculty are key to achieving the impact we seek to have on improving the human condition. Furthermore, their work is essential to our goal of achieving the Carnegie Classification of a Research University. But this cannot be done in isolation, that is why I want to thank our Divisions of Administration and Finance, and Information Technology, who will play a profound role in our achieving this goal.

Over the past five years, we have invested over \$62 million dollars in 21 projects, impacting every corner of our university. Each of these projects has added value, stability, and transformation to our campus. And it is important to note that these projects have been implemented and paid for in full; thus, we have done so without adding any debt to our university, but most importantly, without passing on a penny of the cost to our students.

Many of the projects we have completed were supported by funding received as a result of our strong legislative partnerships at the federal and state levels. Over the past five years, we have strengthened our legislative ground-game. We have secured over \$31 million in federal and state support to invest in our campus and surrounding community.

We have also leveraged our legislative connections to help elevate Coppin into the national spotlight making history – when we hosted Vice President Kamala Harris on campus. And I want to thank Stephanie Hall for her leadership.

As we go about elevating our university, we must remain cognizant of the financial challenges in the distance. Earlier this month, I penned a letter to the campus community outlining the budget reduction we are facing, due to the state's financial challenges.

Although our financial foundation is solid, and we were able to absorb this latest reduction, while keeping our university whole...future cuts could impact our university and operations in many ways.

Despite the current budget reduction and a prior one in 2022, we have kept our commitment - completing and fully implementing our Faculty Salary Equity Study; thus, adjusting all full-time Faculty salaries, moving them to the 75th percentile of the current market. I want to thank our Budget Office and HR teams for their leadership in making this happen. And while we are committed to doing more, for now we must turn our attention to addressing the salaries of our staff to ensure we can retain the best talent.

Coppin's influence as an anchor institution extends beyond our beautiful campus. When talking about our impact, consider this – the Maryland General Assembly selected Coppin State University to lead the West North Avenue Development Authority (WNADA), because they value our work and respect our leadership.

As the Chairperson of the West North Avenue Development Authority (WNADA), I am extremely proud of the significant strategic investments we are making in revitalizing the West North Avenue corridor. Some of our grant investments include funding the development of a grocery store, renovating housing, strengthening public safety and transportation, improving green space in

Druid Heights, and acquiring property for future large-scale mixed-use development. To date, \$14 million dollars in grant investments have been made to minority developers.

Under the leadership of Executive Director Chad Williams, and funding and support from Governor Wes Moore, and Senator Antonio Hayes, the West North Avenue Development Authority's efforts are making a meaningful impact on the environment around Coppin State University. I want to thank Mr. Chad Williams, and his entire team for their life changing work. Coppin athletics has a rich impressive legacy. A legacy that includes a national championship, and 53 division and conference championships.

Our student athletes are an amazing group of ambassadors. On the field of competition and in the classroom, they represent our beloved Coppin with integrity and honor.

Our student-athletes have led the MEAC with the highest graduation rate each year since 2021. Last year, they recorded a 3.1 GPA as a department, and I want to acknowledge our Women's Basketball team for earning a 3.6 GPA – the highest among all sports teams.

For the second straight season, softball played in the MEAC championship game, and won a school record 23 games in 2024.

Each year, the MEAC selects the most valuable and accomplished female athlete, and crowns her Woman Athlete of the Year. For the fourth consecutive year, Eagle Nation has dominated this prestigious award: Ashley Roman (2024), Mimi Coleman (2023), Catherine Lane (2022), and Salma Gonzales (2021).

Last year, 13 male athletes won individuals MEAC Championships in track, and freshmen Tennis phenom Sky Carter won the single title at the 2024 Bedford Cup. Let's give all our student athletes and the Division of Athletics a hand. Also, I need everyone to pack the "Nest" as we defeat Norfolk State for Homecoming!

Five years ago, we revamped our fundraising and marketing strategies, and vision. The outcomes have been historic. We have gotten better at telling our story, demonstrating our value proposition, and using our data and developing it into key targeted strategies.

Strategies that have helped us increase our university endowment, by 65% - to its highest level ever, and achieve historic fundraising year-after-year. Two years ago, I charged our Institutional Advancement and National Alumni Association teams with the task of developing alumni chapters beyond the city of Baltimore and the State of Maryland, and they are knocking it out of the park.

I also charged our National Alumni Association with growing our alumni base. Talking about knocking it out of the park – I want to give a huge thanks and congratulations to Second Vice President Aliah Wood – who over the past two years has recruited over 500 new Coppin Eagles to the alumni association. This is an incredible accomplishment, and our alumni association has been doing an amazing job.

Just in case you missed it, and I don't know how you could have, Eagle Nation has been spotted around town. Our new branding strategies have raised our visibility and deepen Eagle pride across the country.

When we launched our "BE MORE" Capital Campaign – it was our most ambitious and largest in our history. Our goal is to raise \$25 million dollars, and thanks to leadership our amazing Advancement team, and the support of my administration, our alumni, faculty, staff, friends and cooperate partners...to date we have raised \$23.6 million dollars!

All of these accomplishments reflect who we are, what we value, and our unwavering commitment to excellence.

Coppin, we will be a public university committed to improving the human condition, and open to all who seeks to transform their life through a quality education – from every corner of our city, state, nation and world.

In the coming years, we will work to achieve our five strategic priorities, while also:

- Attaining the Carnegie Classification as a Research University by 2028
- We will implement our Strategic Plan by Summer 2025
- Continue to strengthen our culture of assessment and quality enhancement, and ready ourselves for Middle State reaffirmation, which is critical to the existence of our university. I want to thank everyone for all your hard work, collaboration and engagement in getting us ready for our Middle State visit.
- Under the leadership of Dean Lewis and Dr. Scott we will forge ahead with our plans to transition Coppin Academy into an Early College high school.
- Under the direction of our Division of Athletics - our Eagle Golf team will take flight launching their inaugural season in Fall 2026.
- And to ensure we evolve with the changing landscape, we will put forth a cohort of undergraduate and graduate academic programs that attract students, raise our competitiveness, and meet the workforce demands of our state and nation.

Now is our time to position Coppin for the next 125 years. It should be understood that we will always protect our history, while also paying respect to those who gave so much to our beloved Coppin. Those who ensured she remained standing as a beacon of hope and a university of transformation for all of us who are here today.

It is now upon us to ensure that the legacy we leave matters. So those generations to come will know that we were here, and that we made a difference.

After nearly five years of unprecedented momentum...the state of our university is strong; our pace is still brisk, and our trajectory is still north. As “One Coppin” we continue to prove that the impossible is possible, because for us...the Sky is not the limit!

Thank you, Happy 125th Anniversary, Happy Homecoming, and Happy Black History Month.