



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

February 19, 2026

Good afternoon, and welcome to the 2026 State of the University Address. **Coco and Solomon** you did an incredible job getting us started. Let's give our champions a round of applause.

Happy Homecoming, Coppin! It is an exciting time to be at Coppin State University, and I appreciate everyone coming out today.

Acknowledge: My Cabinet, our Deans, our Faculty Senate and Staff Senate Leadership, Presidential Scholars, Fanny Jackson Coppin Scholars, Honor's Program Scholars, SGA, and Royal Court.

Just as we envisioned five years ago... as "One Coppin," we are growing beyond boundaries. We are today at a defining moment in the history of our university. The sacrifices, decisions, and actions we have taken post COVID 19, have given rise to a university that is more unified and driven. Our accomplishments are numerous, because we chose to stand together, and it is profoundly important that we do not digress in the ideas, commitment, and vision that has gotten us here. During the next few moments, we will revisit our collective accomplishments of 2025. Many of them are historical and have changed the trajectory of our beloved Coppin for decades to come.

As Baltimore's hometown university, we soared into 2025, boldly. Although it was a time of great uncertainty across the state and nation, we never lost sight of who we are, our mission, and the promise we have stood on, for over 125 years.

Who could forget how Baltimore celebrated with us. In April, at our birthday party a few friends came out to show their support, and if that was not enough, several iconic Baltimore landmarks including City Hall, the Ravens stadium, and the Orioles Warehouse were illuminated in blue and gold to honor this historic milestone.

Our role as a public university has never been more important. Universities like Coppin are critical to developing a strong functioning society. It is universities like Coppin who embrace the responsibility to educate students from all economic backgrounds regardless of their zip code and household income.

Our commitment to improving the human condition is unmatched. Students we educate receive a significant return on their investment and are positioned to elevate their lives, while making great contributions in communities, around the world.

Academic quality will always serve as the standard for an outstanding public university. At Coppin, we entered 2025 continuing our uncompromising and unprecedented promise to academic quality by enhancing our teaching and research excellence. Over and beyond our state appropriation, and HBCU funding for academic affairs, last year we secured an additional \$1.1 million and invested those dollars in library e-resources, enhancing the semiconductor workforce, expanding forensic education, microplastics research, and visionary work around reimagining classroom designs to enhance teaching, learning and engagement.

Join me in congratulating these incredible faculty members who received this institutional grant funding— Ms. LaTrice Curtis, Dr. Emmanuel Atta-Obeng, Dr. Min Zhang, Dr. Anita Weisburger, and Dr. Jacob Adeyeye. I also want to acknowledge Dr. Angela Williams for her leadership and support of these initiatives.

These investments strengthen our core academic foundation, while also ensuring Coppin continues to evolve as a first-in-class 21st century university devoted to advancing student learning.

One of our signature academic programs is our Bachelor of Science in Social Work. Our faculty works to ensure our students receive educational content and preparation that are not only consistent with expectations of social work practice, but they also prepare our students to meet the needs of the communities they will serve.

The excellence of our program is validated by the accreditation from the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). Please join me in acknowledging our social work faculty for successfully earning their CSWE reaccreditation – lead by Dr. Melissa Buckley.

In a liberal arts education, the arts will always play an important role. This past fall, on this stage, we were treated to an original play which was inspiring, riveting, and relatable. “She a Gem” is about four girls who go through a metamorphosis in their lives, and throughout this process they discover, and embrace becoming a gem. Toinette and I enjoyed every moment of the play. I want to acknowledge Coppin faculty and playwright - Josh Wilder, and Coppin performers – Shekima Yardbray, Andrea Dixon and Jada Thomas.

Plays like “She a Gem” are a powerful way to amplify cultural value, institutional character and to foster a sense of community identity. This is also the case when we honor someone by placing their name on a campus building.

As we celebrate the 100th year of Black History Month, it is befitting that we dedicated several campus facilities in honor of three African American trailblazers: the Margaret Peters Tennis Complex – an alum of Coppin, Ms. Peters and her sister won 14 double tennis titles between 1938 – 1954.

The Katherine Johnson Science & Technology Building – Ms. Johnson a brilliant mathematician not only helped America win the space race but subsequently changed our nation and the landscape of higher education, and the Henrietta Lacks Health & Human Services Building – Ms. Lacks’ stolen cells, in 1951, continues to revolutionize science and medicine around the world, to this day.

The essence and resolve of these incredible women are embodied in every student, faculty, staff, and alumni who walks these hallowed grounds. Their achievements, sacrifices, courage and legacies exemplify our mission and purpose.

A mission and purpose that drives our pursuit as a student-centered university. I am proud of the many ways we focus on helping our students be their best. Since arriving, I have heard on numerous occasions, students stress the importance of their health and mental well-being. Unlike generations before them, this generation works out more frequently, eats healthier, and includes behaviors like meditation into their daily routine; thus, helping them to find harmony and balance.

In response to these discussions, we have taken several deliberate actions to better meet the needs of our students. Under the leadership of Morgan Newton, we have completely upgraded our campus fitness center. New equipment, flooring, televisions, and branding, has – resulting in a 400% increase in student use.

Also, we have expanded our sports clubs. When we launched our club swimming team, 12 amazing students immediately joined, and they have been competing at a high level.

In keeping with our commitment to health and wellness, Eagle Nation showed up and showed out to participate in the *4th Annual First Lady's Wellness Walk & Amazing Race*. It was a fun-filled educational event focused on breast cancer awareness. Through educational programming students were equipped with tools to lead healthier, and more fulfilling lives. It is important to note that both women and men are at risk. As a university grounded in service and empowerment, and I want to thank Toinette for helping us raise awareness. I want to acknowledge everyone who helped make this program possible.

Nationally, approximately 60% of college students report they struggle with mental health. And while the numbers vary from university to university, at Coppin we are working to ensure our students find support at every turn.

Thanks to the leadership of Dr. Beverly O’Bryant and Ms. Julie Manley we entered into a groundbreaking partnership with the Boris Henson Foundation and Kate Spade New York. Taraji P. Henson, founder of the Boris Henson Foundation, joined us on campus to introduce the SheCare Wellness Pods.

The SheCare Wellness Pods are designed to offer a safe and nurturing environment where students can prioritize their mental well-being. The Pods are equipped with essential resources and tools to empower students to effectively manage their stress, anxiety, and mental health. Our actions across every division on campus reflects our serious commitment to our students, and I thank everyone for leaning into this important work.

Our important work and commitment do not stop with our students. Two years ago, I stood before you and launched our “Live Near the Nest” initiative. When Coppin State University launched this initiative, it made Maryland history, the \$50,000 down payment assistance is the largest of its kind ever established in the State of Maryland.

Statewide, about 51% of Black households in Maryland own their homes, in Baltimore City, Black homeownership drops to approximately 43%, this is significantly below the national average. Initiatives like Live Near the Nest help narrow these gaps by turning renters into homeowners.

For five Coppin State community members, the initiative has transformed the dream of homeownership into reality. Join me in congratulating Dr. Christopher Robinson, Khadijah Ali-Coleman, Matthew & Gilliann Kenerly, and Jameika Blount on becoming first-time homeowners through our “Live Near the Nest” initiative. I want to thank Stephanie Hall and our external partners for their leadership and support of this life-changing initiative.

You have heard me say it before - Coppin State is where scholars and champions are made. The feeling of lifting a conference championship trophy is a magical one. It is a crystalizing moment when everything you have been working for comes to fruition. For a moment, time stops and you realize you are #1 – the best. For the second time in three years, our Lady Eagles’ Volleyball team has been crowned MEAC Champions!

The 2025 MEAC Volleyball champions also captured Coach of the Year, Player of the Year, Defensive Player of the Year, and Rookie of the Year.

Let’s also congratulate our men’s track & field team, on finishing 2nd at the MECA Outdoor Championships. (And if you have never seen Solomon run...don’t blink – you will miss it!)

Beginning Fall 2026, thanks to the leadership of Athletic Director Derek Carter, we will be the first HBCU to bring NCAA Division I men’s and women’s golf to Baltimore. The addition of our golf program will be our first new DI sport in over a decade. The golf program will be led by coach Elam Ruff.

Although Coach Ruff is in the process of completing his rosters, the players he has signed are bringing their “A-game” and putting the MEAC on notice.

And speaking of notice, everyone is noticing that Coppin puts on the best gala in Maryland. At the 2025 gala, elegance met purpose as 723 supporters stepped out for an unforgettable evening of glam, entertainment, and celebration of Baltimore’s hometown university.

Gala attendees were encouraged to reflect on why they chose to attend the event. They understood their presence symbolized their belief in the mission, purpose, progress, and promise of Coppin State University. I called on them to commit to and support our relentless pursuit of excellence. And Eagle Nation responded, raising over \$530,000 in one night - helping us exceed our \$25 million capital campaign, raising more than \$26.5 million in total. I want to thank everyone who contributed to this historic milestone.

Our record-breaking fundraising also reflects the hard work and leadership of our Institutional Advancement team in collaboration with our alums and so many across campus. I want to acknowledge our entire Institutional Advancement team and National Alumni Association leadership.

Last year, we also secured the largest single donation in Coppin's history - \$6.2 million from CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield.

Great strides continue to be made in the growth of our university endowment. And in a time when endowments are critical to a university's stability, together, we have increased our endowment by 126% – from \$11.6 million in 2021 to over \$25 million in 2025. This is a record for the university. Our success in fundraising and engagement is yet another clear sign that Eagle Nation, and our friends are with us, and they value the direction in which our university is headed.

At the start of 2025, we set ambitious enrollment and retention goals. Over the past several years, in both enrollment and retention, we have continued to buck state and national trends.

Eagle Nation consider this: Nationally, college enrollment has decreased at a rate of 1.5% each year since 2011. However, thanks to the work of so many across campus, and especially our Admissions Team, last Fall we welcomed a record-breaking cohort, enrolling more than 1,000 new undergraduate students. This is our largest incoming cohort in over 25 years.

Our fall 2025 incoming class reflected Baltimore's high-spirited energy and embodies Coppin's enduring commitment to scholarship, and community impact. They arrived not only from across Charm city, but also from as far as California and several international destinations, bringing multicultural perspectives and global ambition to The Nest. With their energy, curiosity, and academic credentials - it was a no brainer why I name this class "Eagle Domination."

This class helped make Coppin the fastest growing college or university in Greater Baltimore. In one year, we grew a remarkable 29.6%. Topping Notre Dame of Maryland University, Morgan State University, Loyola University Maryland, University of Maryland Baltimore, Towson University, Johns Hopkins University, University of Baltimore and UMBC – just to name a few.

We are not just breaking enrollment records, our conversations, strategies, and actions to improve the success and retention of our students are continuing to pay dividends. Thanks to everyone across campus, especially our EAC team, we have again increased our first-to-second year retention. To date, our retention rate stands at 75% that is the highest in the history of our university.

Our current 75% retention rate exceeds the historic retention rate we set last year and is nearly a 22% increase in retention since we established the EAC. Take a bow, Coppin because what you are doing is unprecedented in the history of our university.

I am extremely proud of our work around male enrollment. Male enrollment in higher education has been declining annually since the 1970s. While colleges and universities nationwide and across the state have experienced double-digit declines, at Coppin we have increased our male enrollment by more than 53% since 2021, making us Maryland's number one HBCU for male enrollment growth.

These historic achievements are fueled by quality academic programs, a strong student-centered culture and a growing demand for the Coppin experience. Currently, we have over 700 students living in off-campus partnership housing. Our efforts to expand on-campus housing will remain a priority.

To help alleviate some of our housing crunch, last summer, we broke ground on our new residence hall. Construction has been delayed due to unforeseen demolition challenges. These challenges have pushed back the opening of our new hall by approximately four months.

Team Coppin, we should be proud of our progress. Our 2025 accomplishments represent more historic success across every corner of our university; and despite the consistent uncertainty at both the state and national levels, the picture is clear, because of you - the state of our university remains strong! And it is from these achievements that we will continue formulating behaviors, and ideals that equip us to be better tomorrow than we are today.

And our future will be guided by our new strategic plan ***Courageously Soaring***. The plan is an ambitious visionary framework that will serve as an evolving roadmap over the next five years. Rooted in a rich legacy of access, excellence, and impact, the plan outlines our five strategic priorities:

- Become a University of Choice;
- Improve the holistic development and completion rates of our students;
- Strengthen our brand and reputation as a leader in urban higher education;
- Become a great university at which to work; and
- Enhance our teaching and research excellence

The plan was co-led by Provost Chanta Haywood and Associate Vice President James Stewart, and shaped by our shared governance committees and the campus community, the plan reflects our shared vision and values for our beloved Coppin. These are our shared priorities, and we will achieve them...together!

A crucial component of our success is our technological infrastructure. The work of our Division of Information Technology has resulted in a reputation that is highly respected across the state and nation. Our IT team was featured in the *2025 Horizon Report: Data & Analytics Edition* as a model for streamlining software onboarding processes and prioritizing cybersecurity and accessibility.

In our pursuit of modernizing the university experience, our IT team is leading us in a statewide mandate to ensure every aspect of our campus is digitally accessible.

We are required to meet this state mandate by April 2026, and thanks to Vice President Dionne Curbeam and her incredible team, Coppin is on pace to do just that. However, it is important to note that everyone must continue to provide the support IT needs so that we can achieve our goal. As we look to the future, no goal is more important than securing our Middle-State reaffirmation. In just a few weeks from now, on March 22nd, we will begin our Middle-States Commission on Higher Education reaffirmation process. We have spent the past few years getting ready. Accreditation is profoundly important and demonstrates external validation that Coppin State University upholds the Middle-State standards in all respects – academic programs, faculty and staff expertise, campus services, finances, governance, and more.

In the coming days, we will have more conversations about Middle-states, and you will see signage and educational information throughout campus about the process, as well as key university data. I strongly encourage you to familiarize yourself with this data.

For two days, the peer reviewers will be on campus and I invite all of the campus community to engage them in conversations as they are opportunities to highlight our successes, question our challenges, and inspire ideas for innovating how we continue to embody and embrace our place as a leader in higher education, and I am extremely confident that the middle-states team will be impressed with our body of work.

I want to thank Provost Chanta Haywood, Dean Sadie Gregory, Berly Harris, Dr. Rolande Murray, and Clarice Tate, for heading our Middle-state writing team; I also want to thank each committee chair and committee member for their leadership, engagement and expertise throughout this process.

The landscape of higher education is rapidly evolving and in response - a few weeks ago, I held a meeting with a small number of university leaders to discuss Artificial Intelligence and to begin and continue conversations across campus as to how we will harness this technology for Discovery, Community enhancements, and to Improve the Human Condition. As a university we must think about:

1. How we reimagine our current academic programs, enhance what we teach and how our students learn – using AI.
2. Are there Interdisciplinary research opportunities to ignite AI innovation and develop unfound solutions?
3. How do we balance innovation, progress and the professional responsibility of AI on our campus?
4. Can AI help us be more efficient across areas such as:
 - Human Resources
 - Financial Services
 - Student Financial Aid
 - Student Success

These will be important conversations and together we will develop parameters, expectations, ideas, and opportunities as to how AI will be used across our campus. I believe it is crucial for higher education, and universities like Coppin to position ourselves as a contributor in developing the narrative of how AI shapes our world. The opportunity is ours to seize, and I have full confidence in our ability to do so.

Over the past year, we have been working to expand the health services we provide on our campus. I believe oral health plays an essential role in our physical, emotional, and mental well-being. This is why Coppin State University and Howard University School of Dentistry have partnered to bring dental services to campus, beginning Fall 2026.

Located adjacent to the Health Center, the Coppin Dental Center will be a state-of-the-art facility where access, quality and affordability are combined in a nurturing environment. Dental services will be free to all registered Coppin State University students. The Coppin Dental Center will accept the insurance of all faculty, staff, and surrounding community members. Dental services will be provided under the supervision of Dr. Lenora Caldwell who is a leader in her field and has over 30 years of extensive knowledge in every facet of oral health care.

I want to thank Dr. Ann-Marie Waterman, Dean Joan Tilghman, Ms. Stephaine Hall, Mr. Sam Patterson, VP Steve Danik, and our Howard University partners for helping bring this vision to fruition.

Team Coppin, everything we are accomplishing has been done by the power of one...“One Coppin.” Let us remain committed to our noble mission. Let us be inspired by that which is in our reach, and the great ambition of our university. As “One Coppin” let us never stray from our promise to - "nurture potential...transform lives”.

Thank you, let's have a great Homecoming, and Go Eagles!