



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



I am pleased to submit Western Kentucky University's operating budget of \$404,076,500 that begins July 1, 2025, and ends June 30, 2026. These budget plans establish the planned revenue and expenditure levels for WKU's programs and activities for the 2026 fiscal year.

Structurally Balanced Budget

This is the first structurally balanced budget without the use of one-time carry-forward funds in more than 20 years. Achieving a realigned budget took time and required deep collaboration across our university. Furthermore, WKU has achieved a balanced budget in a landscape that requires responsiveness to industry and economic pressures, including inflation, rising costs of

employee benefit programs and increasing pressures related to student enrollment. I want to thank all those who have contributed to our efforts to achieve a balanced budget, ensuring that our university continues to thrive on a firm and positive financial footing.

Budget Executive Committee

The Budget Executive Committee (BEC) is charged with making budget recommendations and represents the broader voice of faculty, staff and students in WKU's budget development process. The BEC remained well-informed throughout the budget process, and I appreciate their thoughtful recommendation prioritizing a structurally balanced budget while balancing the interests of faculty and staff. This



highlights their understanding of the university's complex budget and the importance of protecting our long-term fiscal health. The BEC recommended a 2% faculty and staff compensation pool effective January 1, 2026, which was accepted by executive leadership and is included in the budget.

Student Success


Our commitment to student success remains at the core of everything we do. Through several years of strategic, coordinated and campus-wide student success enhancements, we have seen an improvement in both the quality and persistence of our enrolled students. This past year, we achieved a record fall-to-fall retention rate of 78.3% for first-time, first-year students and saw the highest fall-to-spring retention rate in the university's history with a return rate of 85.7%. This success underscores the strength of our student success initiatives and our faculty and staff's dedication to ensuring that students who begin at WKU can persist and graduate.

Capital Investments

We have continued steady progress on our campus improvement initiatives. Last fall, we dedicated the Garrett Plaza as part of our Hilltop restoration project. In April, we raised

the last beam into place on the Hilltopper Fieldhouse, which will serve as the home of Forensics, The Big Red Marching Band and Esports and will provide valuable practice and training space for WKU Athletics. In May, we unveiled renderings for the renovation of our most iconic building, Cherry Hall. And this fall, we will welcome students into the new home of our Gordon Ford College of Business – a signature addition to our campus. I have often said that a great college of business needs a great place in which to do business. This new facility *is* that great place and will enrich business instruction and our university in a number of important ways. With its modern, flexible and open-space interior, the building is designed to empower our students by providing access to resources that prepare them for successful careers in business, including spaces that elevate applied, hands-on learning. These investments represent our institutional commitment to enhancing the student experience for decades to come.

Thank you for your review of the FY 2026 budget; I am proud of our work to continue transforming lives and elevating our communities.



Timothy C. Caboni
President