

Good morning Chair Topper and members of the Council.

My name is Michael Fowler. I'm a third-year student studying Political Science, and this year, I have the honor of serving as the President of Penn State's Lion Caucus. This organization serves as the student arm of the Penn State Office of Government and Community Relations and as the student voice to elected officials in the municipal, state, and federal government.

On behalf of the Penn State student body, I would like to welcome you and thank you for your time here at Penn State to discuss this issue that's essential to the continued success of over 90,000 current Penn State students, future Penn State students, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

To begin, I wanted to talk about why I, an out-of-state student, chose Penn State over other higher education institutions.

Penn State is unlike any other University in the commonwealth, and I attribute this success and status to three main aspects of the culture of the University and network surrounding it.

First, the network. Penn State boasts the largest living alumni network in the world at nearly 800,000 members, with the largest dues-paid alumni association at nearly 200,000 members. With this breadth of impact across industries, regions, and countries around the world, the Penn State connection is one of, if not the strongest, of any higher education institution. With this large of an impact on the workforce in every major industry, Penn State can connect any student with any career that interests them, regardless of the geographic location that they desire.

Secondly, the opportunities at Penn State are created and curated in order to give each student the opportunity to forge their own path. Knowing the major program I wished to pursue, I pursued countless opportunities in academics and extracurriculars that could help strengthen my passions, skills, and leadership abilities throughout my college career, such as sitting before you today representing my friends and peers. While I am grateful to have taken advantage of these opportunities quickly, any student who may be unsure of their path is in a position to explore a plethora of classes and majors in academia, and forge their own journey outside the classroom through over 1,100 student organization, which are critical to helping any student find their home at Penn State.

Lastly, the Penn State community is incomparable to any other university in the Commonwealth, and in the world. There's nothing like seeing 110,000 passionate Penn Staters at a Whiteout game or over 40,000 students and student organizations celebrating the gift of hope at THON. While these events show the Penn State community at its largest, it's indicative of a community of passion and pride that surrounds every Penn State campus across Pennsylvania. I was lucky to have my first experience with Penn State as a prospective student on THON weekend, and at that moment, I fell in love with the community that Penn State offered.

Penn State is an R1 research institution, having some of the largest amount of research activity nationally. Across countless industries, student and faculty research has revolutionized fields of study such as agriculture, science, engineering, psychology, political science, and so many more disciplines.

For example, researchers in the College of Earth and Mineral Sciences have created LionGlass, a type of glass that is significantly stronger, while using a fraction of the carbon footprint to produce. This discovery is one of countless innovations that Penn State students have been responsible for since the University's founding.

Penn State researchers and graduates are recipients of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the National Medal of Science, the Nobel Prize, and countless other incredible accolades that this University is so proud of. In any industry, the Penn State impact runs deep and moves mountains, and within the Commonwealth, this impact is seen as well through economic impact and our land grant mission.

While I still have three semesters left here at Penn State, thankfully, I take comfort in knowing that Penn State will prepare not only myself but all of my classmates for life after graduation. Through research, countless opportunities, the strongest alumni network in the world, and a community that makes anyone who enters campus feel at home, Penn State will continue to be a powerful institution that prepares young people for a future of excellence, augmented by support from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

When I first arrived at Penn State in August of 2022, I never could have imagined that I would be given the opportunity to speak in this setting, or that I would be able to serve the university and its students in this capacity. Penn State has changed who I am, and for the rest of my life, I will be a proud advocate and ambassador of this institution, hoping to uphold its high standards in everything that I do.

Every student at Penn State has their own unique Penn State story, and funding from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania not only allows more students to experience Penn State, but puts them in a stronger position to succeed. Whether it goes to the lowering of in-state tuition, Invent Penn State, Penn State Health, or agricultural research, this state funding is essential to the success of Penn State and its students. An increase in these areas through Performance-Based Funding would make Penn State a stronger university, with a stronger student body, and a stronger research enterprise.

Thank you