

Board of Governors names Aaron A. Walton president of Cheyney University

Action assures stable leadership as institution seeks continued accreditation

Harrisburg – The Board of Governors of Pennsylvania’s State System of Higher Education today named Aaron A. Walton president of Cheyney University of Pennsylvania for a term beginning immediately through June 30, 2021, to ensure stable leadership while the university implements a multi-year financial plan.

Mr. Walton has served as the university’s interim president since May, shortly after the Middle States Commission on Higher Education ordered Cheyney to “show cause” as to why its accreditation should not be withdrawn. Since then, the university has made significant strides, including submitting a detailed operating plan to Middle States that explains, among other things, how it will balance its budget in the future while meeting the educational needs of students.

The university’s Council of Trustees last week voted to ask the Board of Governors for limited dispensation from its policy on presidential selection in order to expedite the process and recommended Mr. Walton be named the university’s next president. In accordance with state law, the Council conferred with students, faculty and alumni prior to voting on the recommendation.

“When we considered who would be best to ensure the university’s future, it was clear that Aaron Walton is that person,” said Robert W. Bogle, chair of Cheyney University’s Council of Trustees. “I applaud what he has accomplished in just six months, and I can only imagine what he will do with more time.”

The Board agreed to the Council’s request for limited dispensation from some of the search requirements and to its recommendation that Mr. Walton be named president in order to help address Middle States’ concerns and to help support the university’s efforts to secure its continuing accreditation.

“Since the day he arrived on campus, Aaron has demonstrated his commitment to securing Cheyney’s continuing accreditation and—just as important—to ensuring the university’s long-term future so it can continue to serve students,” said Board of Governors Chairwoman Cynthia D. Shapira. “There is no stronger advocate for Cheyney University, and no one better able to lead the effort to shape the future of this historic institution and ensure it is on the road to success.”

“We are confident that the strides the university already has taken under President Walton’s leadership will demonstrate to Middle States that Cheyney has a bright future,” said State System Interim Chancellor Karen M. Whitney. “He crafted an exceptional multi-year recovery plan that was submitted to Middle States. There is no better person to ensure the university’s success.”

Among the issues cited by Middle States in its “show cause” order was the importance of leadership. Mr. Walton is scheduled to appear before the

commission Thursday, after which a decision regarding the university's accreditation will be made.

"While I came here to help transform Cheyney University, I can tell you that Cheyney University has changed my life. It beats in my heart. It courses through my veins," Mr. Walton said. "The students on this campus will forever be part of my family. These remarkable young people deserve every opportunity to receive a high-quality education here and to earn a degree that will help ensure their successful future, and I will do everything within my power to make that happen.

"I welcome the opportunity that has been given to me today, and commit my all toward working together with the Board, the Trustees, and the students, faculty, staff and alumni to ensure there is a Cheyney today, and a Cheyney forever."

Mr. Walton previously was employed by Highmark Inc., where he was one of nine principle officers responsible for providing overall management and direction of all of the organization's corporate activities. During his 40-year tenure with Highmark, he held progressively higher key management roles in both corporate and subsidiary operations. Additionally, he had oversight of the company's community involvement, foundation and strategic health initiatives and its joint venture affiliate activities, including Gateway Health Plan.

He has served on more than 35 community boards, including the August Wilson Center, The Pittsburgh Foundation and United Way of Allegheny County.

Mr. Walton holds a bachelor's degree in speech pathology and audiology from California University of Pennsylvania and a master's degree in public policy and management from Carnegie Mellon University.

Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education is the largest provider of higher education in the Commonwealth, enrolling more than 100,000 degree-seeking students and thousands more in certificate and other career-development programs. Collectively, the 14 universities that comprise the State System offer more than 2,300 degree and certificate programs in more than 530 academic areas. Nearly 520,000 State System university alumni live in Pennsylvania.

The State System universities are Bloomsburg, California, Cheyney, Clarion, East Stroudsburg, Edinboro, Indiana, Kutztown, Lock Haven, Mansfield, Millersville, Shippensburg, Slippery Rock and West Chester Universities of Pennsylvania. The universities also operate branch campuses in Oil City (Clarion), Freeport and Punxsutawney (IUP), and Clearfield (Lock Haven), and offer classes and programs at several regional centers, including the Dixon University Center in Harrisburg and in Center City in Philadelphia.