

## Testimony before the Senate and House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committees

March 9, 2016

Good afternoon, and thank you Chairman Vulakovich, Chairman Costa, Chairman Barrar, Chairman Sainato, and the members of the Senate and House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee for the opportunity to speak before the committee today. My name is Robert Grunmeier, and I am the Executive Director of the Department of Contracted Public Safety Training and Education at Bucks County Community College.

Many community colleges throughout the Commonwealth have long enjoyed the relationship with Pennsylvania's emergency services providers. Community colleges believe this partnership works because of the high level of competency and commitment of all stakeholders that support the mission of these response organizations. This educational partnership is a marriage of theory and practice. We recognize the need for emergency response organizations and our community colleges to bring their respective expertise together to produce well-trained emergency services providers. In many cases across the Commonwealth, community colleges award college level credits for fire, rescue, hazmat, emergency management, and emergency medical courses. This existing strategy can help to support an initiative to bring these processes to the attention of as many high schools students as possible.

For over a decade, Bucks County Community College has supported this concept through career and technical schools, the Commonwealth's Local Level Fire Training System, and our Summer Basic Fire Academy Program. Our primary outcome for these programs is to provide basic education courses to support the needs of the Commonwealth's emergency response effort.

Bucks County Community College delivers approximately 3,200 courses to an estimated 30,000 responders annually. These courses include fire, rescue, hazmat, EMS, and emergency management disciplines. From a return on investment viewpoint, we support this in-school Firefighter 101 initiative. Bolstering Pennsylvania's volunteer and career emergency services system is a critical element for affordable essential life-saving services.

We are not alone in providing training to emergency service providers. For example, the Luzerne County Community College EMS Program currently trains EMT and Paramedic Candidates in both advanced and basic life support. The EMS Program has been offering EMS Training since 1985. Although the Luzerne program does not specifically teach firefighter courses, they do provide the EMS Component to current and future firefighters. The Luzerne County Community College EMS Program will provide certification opportunities to approximately 30 paramedics and 50 Emergency Medical Technicians this calendar year. The college spans a wide demographic in Luzerne County offering school districts in Crestwood, Wilkes-Barre Area, Hanover, Nanticoke as well as sites in Columbia and Northumberland Counties. The main campus facility is located in Nanticoke at the Health Science Center with off-site campuses in Northumberland, and Columbia Counties.

Partnerships between school districts and community colleges for this Firefighter 101 initiative are critical to expanding access to training across the state. These include fire, rescue, EMS response organizations, community service groups providing public safety education, and an expanding public safety and homeland security job market. Planning will be the key element for initiating a best practice start-up strategy.

Another important element is to integrate existing high school academics into the public safety content. For example, delivering a fire safety program requires the same knowledge and skill sets as are required for public speaking courses. Another example would include applying calculation and problem solving skills learned from basic algebra courses to ladder placement and reach (using the Pythagorean Theorem), as well as, calculating fire flows or friction loss values through hoses and appliances. Applicable connections through both disciplines are already evident and could reinforce learning outcomes as a student progresses through their training. Making these connections would provide an applied science focus for participating students that could carry through to post-secondary education opportunities, leading to career opportunities.

Finding existing and available credentialed multi-disciplined teachers may prove to be a challenge for expanding programs like ours. At Bucks County Community College, our experience has been that available and credentialed teachers or instructors have applicable experience in one or two emergency response disciplines. Credentialing instructional teams is a key factor to short-term and long-term success. The majority of the existing instructors for fire, rescue, hazmat, EMS, and emergency management are part-time contracted employees of the community colleges and Educational Training Agencies(ETAs).

Resources are essential for meeting, assessing, and testing (evaluating) the student's progress. Currently, evaluation strategies include prescriptive, formative, and summative assessment tools developed through text-based evidence or text-dependent analysis. Partnerships with community colleges, ETAs, response organizations, or county and state departments that have the facilities and equipment to support this initiative are paramount. These resource needs can be costly and in some areas scarce; however, these resources are essential for bringing the intensity value to this initiative.

Bucks County Community College, as well as other Pennsylvania community colleges, is addressing convenient delivery strategies to support the declining number of volunteers. These include summer programs to avoid conflict with traditional academic schedules, hybrid delivery initiatives to support personal and professional obligations, and in-school (career and technical centers) delivery support for homeland security, law enforcement, firefighting, and other related protective service areas.

We look forward to working with our educational colleagues, local, county, and state governments, and the core agencies that provide these essential services to our communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to convey our interest.

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