

On behalf of the Commission for Community Colleges and the Presidents and Trustees of the 14 community colleges I thank the committee and its leadership for this opportunity to be heard.

I am Jim Linksz, the interim Executive Director of the Commission.

My previous experiences involve serving as President of Bucks County Community College for more than 20 years, including five years as a former officer and President of the Commission. Related to the matter at hand, I also have 5 years' experience as founding Dean developing a rural community college serving 13 counties and thousands of square miles in Virginia, and a dozen years as Dean of a larger community college in Maryland that offered community college services to neighboring counties without a community college, and that subsequently developed and operated a contract based community college in a neighboring more rural county. Additionally I started my community college career in Pennsylvania in 1964 serving as an administrative intern at HACC with founding president Dr. Clyde Blocker, and then was a part of the Master Plan team that did the first real statewide community college study in 1965 under the guidance of Dr. Ralph Fields.

These experiences have helped me understand Pennsylvania; community colleges both here and in other states; rural community colleges and their unique needs; start-up and extension college operations; and master planning to serve under-served parts of states. Hopefully my remarks may be helpful.

Six quick points from the perspective of the Commission:

1. We unequivocally support opportunities for students to get educated and communities to get the benefits of a comprehensive community college;
2. We unequivocally support community college programming in underserved parts of the Commonwealth – a problem recognized since 1965;
3. We unequivocally support additional dollars for projects that provide community college services;
4. We unequivocally support using existing college platforms as the wisest and most cost-effective way to provide services in underserved areas;
5. We unequivocally support efforts by the legislature to review existing funding and sponsorship/governance mechanisms to promote a coordinated development strategy for the Commonwealth; and
6. We unequivocally support using the Commission for Community Colleges as the agent of the State to broker new college developments.

There are 14 Presidents in the Community Colleges here in Pennsylvania. These men and women represent collectively over a hundred years of experience in all kinds of community colleges and in different states. Beyond Pennsylvania, our experience pool includes rural, suburban and urban colleges

in Michigan, Illinois, Texas, Colorado, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, Maryland, Missouri, Washington, West Virginia and Ohio – just to name a few. Among the presidents are the former Chair of the Board of the American Association for Community Colleges, and another who is co-chair of the 21st Century Commission on Community Colleges, Chair of the Advisory Board of the Community College Research Center, and an Executive Committee member of the Middle States accrediting association. Others have served on the national Presidents' Academy Board.

The talent is here and second to none nationally.

And look at the colleges we do have in the context of what is proposed. HACC is a model of service to a multi-county constituency, with both school district and county based operations. Pennsylvania Highlands is also a regional college serving multiple counties and poised to take over Bedford and Somerset from a Maryland community college which has extended itself into Pennsylvania.

Northampton is providing excellent services to Monroe. Butler has established its Brockway center to serve four counties in the Upper Alleghenies and other neighbors as well. Beaver serves Washington; Westmoreland has centers in Greene, Indiana and Fayette in the southwest of the State; Lehigh-Carbon is serving other counties in the center north, including a special relationship with Schuylkill. And Luzerne is reaching out to eleven Northeastern counties. Others are doing projects if not full extension centers in neighboring counties. In sum, there is neither a shortage of readiness nor of experience in finding creative ways to serve parts of our state that do not have a sponsored community college.

In its existing form, SB 1000 raises some concerns for us.

1. First, the bill does not take full advantage of this wealth of community college expertise enumerated above. That is not optimal in a state so richly endowed with talented people and colleges committed to the mission.
2. Second, while we know the current funding model is broken, proposing yet another model creates confusion, unnecessary wrangling, and further splintering of efforts to improve funding for all.
3. Third, starting in 1965 there was recognition of the need to create a state-wide system for providing community college education. That plan has been thwarted by the creation of competing and expensive two-year Commonwealth Colleges by PSU, and expansion of PASSHE colleges into extension programming that mimics community college efforts. Adding private colleges to the mix of institutions offering pricy community college-like programs is not helpful in the long run. We already have a Maryland college in Pennsylvania because there is no effective master planning for the State as a whole. More one-of-a-kind solutions are not ideal.
4. Fourth, special solutions create consequential problems; solving one but creating others.
 - What should other rural Pennsylvanians pay when they attend a non-sponsored college elsewhere?
 - What should other rural Pennsylvanians expect from Pennsylvania's leaders about provision of educational services?
 - Where do capital funds come from for expanded efforts when there are so many projects already on a long list of needs at the current 14 community colleges?

- How can we begin to change an educational model that is competitive rather than collaborative?

Working together, we think we can address these concerns creatively and cost effectively.

The Commission and its member Presidents and Trustees stand ready to work with State legislative and administrative leadership, as well as committed local leaders, to address the real issues of providing better community college services to rural Pennsylvanians throughout the Commonwealth.

Accessibility and affordability are both vital. We support efforts to study the funding model (SB 360) and to assist in adopting cost effective solutions. We recognize and appreciate the legislative leadership efforts to move that forward and encourage a fast-track process. We also appreciate and support efforts to bring more resources to the funding pool for capital projects.

It cannot be said often enough that we also greatly appreciate that the sponsors of SB 1000 are among our best advocates, who recognize the ways in which community colleges provide the best educational value for the State's dollars whether in technical education and workforce development or in providing the typical first two years of college for HS graduates and adult learners.

We applaud your efforts and look forward to working with you to bring community college services to underserved parts of our Commonwealth. Thank You.