



800 North Third Street, Harrisburg, PA 17102  
Phone: (717) 232-7584 • Fax: (717) 233-4723 • [www.pacomunitycolleges.org](http://www.pacomunitycolleges.org)

Statement of Tom Leary  
President, Luzerne County Community College

Before the Joint Senate Education and  
Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committees

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Campus Safety

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Good morning Committee Chairs Baker, Folmer, Solobay, and Dinniman, members of the Senate Education Committee and the Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee. I am Tom Leary, President of Luzerne County Community College and joining me today is Bill Barrett, Director of Campus Safety and Security for the college. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this joint hearing of the committees to discuss issues of campus safety. The December events in Connecticut are still fresh in our minds and our hearts. These events have given us all pause to consider how to make our institutions safe and to re-examine our approaches to security and crisis communications protocols at our institutions.

After each of the all too frequent tragedies of recent years, I do what every college president does -- I met with key members of the college's senior leadership team to think and re-think about safety and security issues. We re-visit our campus emergency procedures and communications plans. We develop a list of short and longer term issues and action items intended to increase our college-wide level of preparedness to hopefully prevent and to handle emergency situations.

We may discuss our ability to lock down buildings and classrooms, our connections with local law enforcement agencies, our communications protocols, the training of our campus security personnel, the adequacy of campus security staffing, and the design of a protocol to ramp up security presence should a short-term threat require increased presence. We also discuss our protocols for fielding and following through on faculty and college student concerns about student behavior and demeanor.

Each national tragedy requires us all to think differently about an issue that we have always placed a high priority upon, campus security and emergency preparedness. Like the other 13 community colleges, we have emergency response and crisis communications plans in place. At Luzerne, our Emergency Response Plan is reviewed annually by our Workplace Safety Committee and is on file with the County Emergency Management Agency. The plan is totally comprehensive, addressing all types of possible emergencies including: Active shooters, bomb threats, fires, utility failures, chemical spills, psychological issues, criminal activity, etc. As we look at these plans with a more critical and informed eye, I speak before you today knowing that none of us can fully predict, prepare for or anticipate---with any degree of certainty and comprehensiveness---random acts of violence.

Our 14 community colleges have campuses that vary in size and location, some small, some large, some rural, some suburban, some urban. Most have complex physical plants with numerous buildings and open spaces that are teeming with students, faculty, staff, and community members most hours of most days. Thirteen of the 14 community colleges have no residence halls on campus, making the majority of our nearly 500,000 credit and non-credit students commuters to our campuses. This adds a different level of complexity to our campus safety and security as well as crisis communications efforts.

We have so many individuals who attend our institutions for one non-credit class or perhaps a professional development activity we host for a particular employer or for youth events we may support that at any given point throughout a normal day or

evening, the numbers of individuals on our campuses can multiply. With many entrances to our campuses, a variety of facilities, and classes nearly all day and evening, it is not possible to restrict access or easily lockdown facilities. This leaves our institutions vulnerable.

Another layer of complexity is wide-spread communication. We must be able to communicate quickly and effectively with students, faculty and staff and community members who may already be on our campuses, who might be en route or who are planning trips from homes, offices and other locations.

All of this leads each college to consider a number of important questions. How do we balance campus security while preserving an open and rich learning environment? How do we balance security with the rights of students to confidentiality? How do we balance security while preserving the essence of our community college mission which is to be open to our communities because, in many respects, we belong to our communities?

All of our colleges are sharing best practices and ideas for improving campus safety and also crisis communications. At an upcoming meeting of the PA Commission for Community Colleges, we will be devoting a session to this topic of campus safety and crisis preparedness.

At Luzerne County Community College and at many of the State's other community colleges, the following steps and strategies have been adopted and integrated into daily practice to confront and mitigate these security challenges. We have held in-service training sessions on active shooters situations, posted training videos on our intranet sites for staff and students, and strive to maintain open lines of communication for our students, staff and faculty. Campus Safety provides detailed information for all of our incoming students during orientation sessions.

A multi-layered approach is used to disseminate information as broadly and quickly as possible. The College uses text messaging personalized voice messaging, closed circuit televisions and broadcast messages to quickly and efficiently notify students and staff. We are currently exploring other strategies to enhance and improve our ability to communicate in an emergency situation.

Our College, much like others, has an extensive network of approximately 200 video surveillance cameras on our main campus and our dedicated sites. All video is digitally recorded and stored for a minimum of 30 days. In addition, we are now in the process of implementing armed campus security, which will provide an increased level of protection for our college community. The College also has direct radio communication with local emergency responders, providing a quicker and more direct response for any type of situation.

No one believes their college or campus will fall victim to an emergency or tragedy, but that is precisely why we must remain vigilant and continually monitor our response plans and search for new strategies and technologies to maintain our safe learning and working environments.

The security of our students, staff and campus visitors is a top priority for all fourteen of the State's community colleges. Our campuses are vast complex places that by design foster an open and accessible environment. Although this does promote and support a collaborative and diverse learning situation, it does indeed present certain security challenges.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. We would be pleased to address any questions the committees may have.