



**Testimony of
Dr. William T. Brown, CEO, Gateway Community College
to the Committee on Appropriations,
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
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To the Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Chair, and to the Honorable Tom Cole, Ranking Member, and to all the members serving on this subcommittee of the House Committee on Appropriations, I thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

Who We Are and Who We Serve

I am Dr. William T. Brown, and it is my privilege to serve as the Chief Executive Officer for Gateway Community College, a comprehensive, public, open access, associate-degree granting institution located in the heart of downtown New Haven, with additional space in North Haven, Connecticut. Our mission, which reflects that of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities, is one of teaching and service to our students and communities, and of providing broad and equitable access to higher education, and opportunities for career and personal development.

Gateway is the largest community college in Connecticut, and primarily serves the New Haven metropolitan area. The college is home to over 90 associate degree and certificate credit programs—as well as dozens more non-credit workforce and continuing education programs—that play critical roles in the health and economic vitality of our region. Several of our programs are innovative in their design, unique in their scope and powerful in their impact:

- Our Automotive Technologies program—one of only two in the state—trains technicians to service and repair automobiles across a variety of vehicle platforms and helps to supply a workforce that is projected to experience numerous retirements in the coming years.

- The college's Railroad Technologies program, the only one of its kind in the state and the only one in the country that features specific options for rail signaling and communications, provides a critical pipeline of trained and experienced talent for the major rail transportation providers of the northeast corridor, including Amtrak and Metro-North.
- Gateway's Public Utilities program, developed in partnership with Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU), serves to provide the next generation of workers that will install, repair, upgrade and manage critical infrastructure for the region, and provides a seamless path to the baccalaureate degree at SCSU.
- Gateway Community College has a full complement of clinical programs, including Nursing, Nutrition & Dietetics, Nuclear Medicine Technology, Radiography, Diagnostic Medical Sonography, and Surgical Technology. To date, GCC has one of only two designated evening nursing programs in the state, and the only one at a public institution, which affords students the opportunity to remain employed either part-time or full-time during the day while they strive to become Registered Nurses.

This academic year, 8,644 students from more than 100 of Connecticut's towns and cities enrolled in credit courses at Gateway (6,003 in Fall 2020 and 5,326 in Spring 2021), and 627 students enrolled in our non-credit workforce programs. Gateway's student body is diverse racially and ethnically, and reflects the city, towns and communities we serve. The majority of our students are African-American and Hispanic/Latinx (52% total), and Gateway has been designated as a Hispanic-Serving Institution since 2018.

Most of our students are challenged economically: 45% are eligible for Pell grants to fund their education, and almost 6 in 10 students (57.6%) receive some form of financial aid.

Approximately 41% of our students are non-traditional aged (25 years of age or older) adults. Almost 7 in 10 (68%) of our students attend the college part-time.

Taken together, our students face many life challenges that too often get in the way of them attending college and completing their academic and workforce programs. Some of the most pervasive, and often interrelated, challenges they experience include financial instability, unemployment or underemployment, food insecurity, lack of reliable transportation, inadequate access to computing technology and Internet access (i.e., the “Digital Divide”), unmet needs for mental health services, and unavailable/inadequate childcare. They are attending school—full-time when they can, part-time when they have to—while going to extraordinary lengths to make ends meet and while also taking care of children or older relatives. We have observed that we tend to lose many of our students not because of poor academic performance, but because “life gets in the way.”

What we have learned over the past year is that the COVID pandemic has aggravated every single one of our students’ challenges and laid bare all of their vulnerabilities. Our local United Way data on food insecurity shows that 50% of people receiving food from food pantries are doing so for the first time. Students who were already working hard to balance school, work and family often held jobs—in retail, food service, healthcare, or manufacturing—that required them to continue working throughout the pandemic, potentially putting themselves in danger. Most did not have the option of telecommuting or working remotely. Additionally, many of our students lost their jobs or suffered reduced income from reduced hours. Students who relied on the college’s computer labs for access to technology found themselves without the resources they needed to fully engage their coursework or access college services when we shifted to fully remote operations in March 2020. Imagine trying to complete a class assignment or term paper

on a cell phone screen. These non-academic barriers—from childcare and education, to healthcare for themselves and relatives—were only exacerbated to sometimes unimaginable levels for many of our students.

Even with all the challenges they already faced on a daily basis prior to the pandemic, our students and the Gateway college community have responded with generosity and courage to the needs of our communities. Numerous Gateway students are on the “front lines” of fighting the pandemic as Certified Nurse Assistants (CNAs), Patient Care Technicians (PCTs), and Emergency Response Technicians (EMTs) in addition to attending school. Gateway allied health and nursing students continued to serve in their clinical placements, and many of our nursing program students are actively caring for COVID patients at local clinical affiliate sites. Some students have helped to staff vaccine clinics and vaccine testing sites. Others helped to distribute care packages to homeless individuals, donated food to food banks, and made care packages for families who were quarantined.

Our Work is Beyond the Classroom

Gateway Community College, like all community colleges across the nation, has looked beyond our historical—and still deeply relevant—mission of higher education access: we also support students’ success at the college by addressing many of the life challenges they face. Over the course of the last several years, Gateway has extended its supports for students by directly providing wraparound services and partnering with agencies in our community to provide critical services for our students. One shining example is the college’s Family and Economic Security Program (FESP), which offers wraparound services to support students through certificate and/or degree completion by providing one-on-one coaching, early course registration, scholarships, professional development workshops, networking skills, on-campus

family events, cultural enrichment activities and other needed wraparound services. FESP at Gateway currently serves 159 students (average age is 31, 77% identify as female, and 75% are Hispanic/Latinx or African American), and the rates of retention (64%) and graduation (14%) for program participants are significantly higher than the college's overall rates of retention and graduation.

Brilliance & Resilience

Despite the challenges they face, our students have powerful stories of resilience and dedication. Their stories and achievements are a testament to what can be accomplished when ambition, hard work and unrelenting perseverance meet with a challenging educational environment and a supportive community:

The first student whose story I would like to share is of an African-American single father who shares custody of his son, and worked for electrical contractors doing installation and repairs. Between assignments, he collected unemployment, which required seeking employment or job training. This student is known to say, “*You have to be on the pier when your ship comes in*” and therefore believed he could better maintain and repair the machinery he encountered if he knew how to operate those machines. At Workforce Alliance, the regional workforce investment board, he learned about Skill Up for Manufacturing, a five-week program that prepares workers for manufacturing jobs. He joined Skill Up while taking academic classes at Gateway and quickly landed a full-time position with a well-known national maintenance and engineering company.

The second student whose journey I would share with you is of an African-American student in Gateway's nursing program, who ultimately wants to enter the field in order to reach her goals to serve our community. She is a single mother and excels academically, all while

balancing full-time work and her family, and she has shown time and time again that she will work as hard as she needs to and make whatever sacrifices are necessary to graduate, pass the certifying exam and become an RN. This student is supported by Gateway's FESP, and she is projected to successfully complete her program this academic year.

The third student I will introduce to you is full-time male student majoring in Business Management, who started in our English as a Second Language (ESL) program. He is also the primary caretaker of his wife and three children, while also running a small business. He is also one of our FESP students, and he has been a recipient of financial emergency assistance through the college's Foundation. Despite the financial obstacles, he continues to persevere in order to make a better life for him and his family.

The final story I will share is of one of our students majoring in Engineering Science. This young woman left her home state to live with a relative and escape some difficult family circumstances. Despite a personal history that included periods of homelessness and substance abuse, she has achieved remarkable success at Gateway, carrying a GPA just shy of 3.5, serving in our Student Government Association, working in our wellness center, and aspiring to a career in developing space technologies. Of her college experience, she has said, "I have drive and ambition, but this Gateway 'village' is fashioning me into the woman I want to become."

These are powerful stories of determination, dedication and success, and serve as powerful illustrations that if we invest in our students, they can overcome powerful obstacles and thrive in the classroom and beyond.

The College and Community Rise to Meet the Challenge

It is not possible for me to fully express my admiration for our students and my pride in the ways that the Gateway community has responded to their needs, particularly in the face of

this pandemic. I am also especially gratified with how business and industry and our partners in the community have rallied around the college to support our students:

- Yale University continues to be committed to funding the New Haven Promise scholarship, which pays the tuition of graduates of New Haven high schools at a Connecticut public college or university. Gateway Community College is pleased to be one of the partners in this program.
- Yale-New Haven Health, one of the largest employers in New Haven and in the state, has been rock-solid in their support and direct investment in the college's clinical programs.
- Workforce Alliance, our regional workforce investment board, the (private) Deluca Foundation, and the State of Connecticut (CT Statewide Healthcare Industry Pathways [CT SHIP] grant) have provided the necessary support for our Skill Up program so that 46 CNA and 30 manufacturing students could complete their programs since the pandemic erupted, with an additional 50 CNA students and 52 manufacturing students projected to enroll next academic year.
- The Storehouse Project, based in Milford, CT, comes to the college on a monthly basis to distribute food to our students who are experiencing hunger.
- The Gateway Community College Foundation provided more than 160 emergency assistance grants—helping students who experienced severe or unexpected circumstances—to stay enrolled in their courses and finish the semester. The GCC Foundation also raised funds from the private sector and distributed more than 650 laptop computers to students, so that they would be able to fully engage with their courses after we had to shift 90% of our course offerings to online, remote and virtual formats.

Also, Honorable Representatives, we appreciate of your support to Gateway Community College. The Pell grants our students receive make it possible for thousands of them to attend GCC—to the degree that they receive grants beyond tuition and fees, their financial aid helps them to pay their rents, feed their families, and secure their transportation between home, work and school. The three rounds of HEERF funding have enabled us to keep our campus safe, to preserve continuity of courses and services, to ensure that our faculty and staff have the technology, equipment and training they need to teach and provide services remotely and/or virtually, and, most importantly, have provided a great deal of financial assistance and peace of mind through direct payments to our students.

The college is the recipient of a Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) grant, and we have used this funding to expand the childcare available through our laboratory school into the evening. Gateway Community College, along with four other colleges in Connecticut, is receiving funding through the Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grant. These funds will enable us to develop and expand critical programs in healthcare and thus provide both greater employment opportunities for participants as well as a trained workforce to assist with our region's recovery from the pandemic. Over the last several years, Gateway has used its funding from Perkins IV and V to support students in several career and technical programs, including Automotive Technologies, Culinary Arts, Nursing and our other clinical programs, Engineering Technologies, and Early Childhood Education. Our Perkins grant has enabled us to equip several laboratories and classrooms, provide professional development opportunities for both faculty and students, and deepen our partnerships with both our local K-12 schools systems and business and industry.

We request and encourage you to continue to make the investments necessary to support our students, increase our ability to effectively educate and train them for their futures, and prevent further disruption to our country's workforce. In particular, we urge you to continue and expand your support for established programs like Pell, GEAR UP, TRIO and Perkins and to seize the promise of newer programs like the Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grant. Beyond support for community colleges and higher education, we also encourage you to enact policies and provide additional resources that will support families in feeding, caring for and educating themselves, meeting childcare, healthcare and transportation needs, and hastening our communities' recovery from the pandemic. As I have shared, family, employment, community and education are all especially connected for our students, and wraparound services and other supports are critical for ensuring that they have the opportunity to realize their full potential. Given the range of the challenges that our students face already, all made worse by the pandemic, any and all funding, policies and regulations that support students and their families will have a tremendous impact on their prospects for a brighter future.

Representative DeLauro has, of course, been a longtime champion for Gateway, and she and her fellow members of the Connecticut delegation regularly visit our beautiful campus. Gateway is always happy to host any member of this committee, and we invite you to come and see firsthand the work we do and to see how your investments have impacted our amazing students.

On behalf of Gateway Community College, the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities, and community colleges across the nation, thank you again for this opportunity to address you.