

## **Testimony of Walter G. Bumphus, Ph. D.**

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### **House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education, and Related Agencies**

Good Morning Chairwoman DeLauro, Ranking Member Cole, and members of the Subcommittee. I am Walter G. Bumphus, President and CEO of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), which represents the nation's 1,044 community colleges. I am pleased and honored to be with you this morning to discuss community colleges and the essential role that the federal government plays in supporting them and their students.

Community colleges are extremely diverse, but they share some basic principles. The most fundamental is to serve all those who aspire to postsecondary education and to ensure that they succeed in their academic and career goals. The colleges also serve as engines of productivity and growth to meet the current and projected needs of their local, regional, and state economies. Another major dimension of their mission is to reflect the broader needs and priorities of their communities and to bring them together, a particularly important role at this moment.

#### **Community College Basics**

Key facts about community colleges include:

- Community colleges enrolled 6.8 million credit students in Fall 2019, and another five million non-credit students. Credit students comprise 41% of all U.S. undergraduates.
- In the fall of 2020, the average tuition and fees for a full-year, full-time community college student was \$3,770.
- 58% of community college students are female; 13% Black, 27% Latino, and 6% Asian/Pacific Islander.
- The average student age is 28 (median age 24); 29% are first-generation college students.
- 54% of total institutional revenues come from state and local sources (37% state; 17% local). Tuition comprises another 27% of revenues.

### **COVID-19 and Community Colleges**

Along with the rest of America, community colleges were dramatically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. After the national emergency was declared, colleges pivoted almost immediately to offering nearly all their instruction virtually, with some exceptions for technical programs. That situation has changed somewhat, but community colleges are still offering an overwhelming majority of courses online. They have also restructured programs and student support activities.

The pandemic has hit community college enrollment hard. Enrollment declined by 10.1% in the fall of 2020 compared to the year before; early estimates for the 2021 spring term show a 9.5% drop. These declines have been concentrated among first-time students, particularly Black and Latino males. Community college enrollments declined much more sharply than those of other sectors of higher education. While this dynamic was not originally anticipated it perhaps should have been, given that community colleges serve higher percentages of low-income and adult students. These students are more likely to have been negatively impacted by the pandemic vis-

à-vis college enrollment than traditional-aged, dependent students. Dual enrollment students comprise roughly one-seventh of all community college students, and the pandemic has created unique challenges for those students as well.

### **The Value of the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF)**

Fortunately, the HEERF funds have provided a lifeline that is allowing students and colleges to weather the pandemic, and in many respects emerge stronger. Our students and leaders cannot sufficiently thank Congress for this support. We particularly thank the House Appropriations Committee for reflecting AACC's position that, in the distribution of HEERF formula grants, a headcount rather than full-time equivalent (FTE) formula be employed, which better reflects our student population.

The Department of Education also deserves kudos for responding to AACC's urging that HEERF guidelines provide colleges maximum flexibility. Colleges are busily developing and implementing plans to maximize the impact of the HEERF funds. The top priority is addressing the pandemic's massive financial and academic impact on students. Colleges are also developing strategies to enroll the pandemic's "lost students," i.e., those who might have matriculated absent the pandemic. HEERF funds will also be used to support students excluded from Title IV of the HEA, especially those in short-term, non-credit, and dual enrollment programs. This will also provide important lessons about the impact of assisting these students. Many colleges are using substantial portions of their institutional funds to augment the student allocation.

Institutional HEERF funds will be used to recoup lost revenues, particularly those caused by enrollment declines; make campuses safe; and address needed technological upgrades the

pandemic has laid bare. More permanent changes will be facilitated by HEERF, particularly in terms of instructional modalities, but also in a variety of student-focused activities.

### **Federal Role in Supporting Community Colleges and Their Students**

Community colleges are creatures of state and local government, but they partner tightly with the federal government and depend on its support. The federal role has evolved, reflecting changing priorities as well as institutional developments, but its guiding principle is consistent – an overriding emphasis on equity, in ensuring that all members of our society have an equal shot at the American Dream by earning a family-sustaining wage. By prioritizing students with the greatest need, especially in the student aid programs, but in other areas as well (e.g., TRIO and GEAR UP), the federal government helps community colleges address societal inequities while fostering economic growth.

### **Student Financial Assistance**

The most important federal engagement with community colleges is through the HEA's student financial assistance programs. Community colleges would look dramatically different, and many would not exist, without Title IV. Coupled with low community college tuition, federal student aid allows most students to finance education without borrowing; only 15% of community college students take out loans. Federal Work-Study and the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG) programs are also key student financing vehicles. We look forward to an HEA reauthorization that can update the student aid programs to reflect the dynamic nature of community college offerings.

- **Pell Grants**

AACC continues its support for sustained increases to the maximum Pell Grant. Roughly one-third of community college students, now more than 2 million, receive a Pell Grant each year. Given low community college tuitions, hikes to the maximum grant generally cover students' non-tuition expenses, enabling them to work less, borrow less, and focus more intensively on their studies. Enhanced Pell Grant funding would help address the well-documented food and housing insecurity, child-care costs, and technology needs facing community college students.

The Biden Administration's proposed \$400 increase in the FY 2022 maximum grant is welcome, especially as it is coupled with a proposal to extend Pell eligibility to undocumented students, as in pending DREAM Act legislation.

AACC commends and offers its gratitude to Congress for its landmark achievement in authorizing Second Chance Pell in CRRSAA. Community colleges eagerly await implementation of this new eligibility in July 2023, so that they can dramatically expand their programs' benefits to incarcerated individuals.

### **Workforce Policy**

The federal government provides necessary support in helping community colleges deliver high quality, market-oriented programs. Regrettably, the cost of these programs results in tens of thousands of skilled positions going unfilled — a situation that preceded and continues through the pandemic. As the pandemic wanes, community colleges will look to provide training in advancing fields: logistics, green energy, cyber security, transportation, robotics, and AI. These will complement more traditional programs in areas such as nursing, teacher preparation, and computer science.

Study after study shows that investment in community colleges has a positive return for individual students and the communities in which they live. A 2018 study by Stephanie Cellini and Nicholas Turner, for instance, found that earning a CTE certificate at a public institution (primarily community colleges) increased earnings by more than 30% and employment rates by more than 4%, on average. The economic returns that community college students derive from their educations substantially benefit their local economies. A 2015 study by the Brookings Institution found that the average associate degree earner contributed \$81,000 more to their local economy than a high school graduate over their lifetime. The positive returns to investments in community college programs are reinforced by numerous state-level economic impact studies. Federal programs that leverage community colleges to boost local economies and provide greater economic mobility include:

- **Strengthening Community College Training Grants (SCCTG)**

The Strengthening Community College Training Grant Program (SCCTG) was created in FY 2020 appropriations legislation and is a model for effective federal support of community college job training. The program requires close collaboration with business but allows grantees to determine highest priority regional needs. SCCTG's implementation mirrors the successful TAACCCT program. The SCCTG program's first round of grants showed its potential reach, given adequate funding. The DOL received approximately 150 applications and was only able to fund 11 of them. While AACC is thankful for the current \$45 million appropriation, we strongly urge the subcommittee to bring the SCCTG program to scale as major domestic investments are hopefully made in FY 2022. The program can both revitalize the economy in the short-term and help provide longer-term training capacity.

AACC thanks Chair DeLauro and the Subcommittee for their support of this program.

- **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)**

Community colleges overall are deeply engaged in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) system, though involvement varies locally. Subcommittee members are aware that WIOA's potential impact has been inhibited by deeply inadequate funding. AACC continues to urge Congress to significantly increase WIOA funding – the Administration's FY 2022 “skinny” budget proposal is a positive first step – and anticipates its upcoming reauthorization to facilitate deeper community college participation, hopefully with a stronger emphasis on training.

- **Apprenticeship**

Community colleges are deeply involved in the nation's apprenticeship system. Traditionally, their primary role is providing related technical instruction for apprenticeships. More recently, community colleges have been actively working to expand apprenticeship to new occupations and extend opportunities to populations underrepresented in apprenticeship programs.

Community colleges increasingly serve as apprenticeship program sponsors and intermediaries to help businesses start their own or connect with existing apprenticeship programs. This is especially vital to expanding apprenticeship to small and medium size businesses. Through a cooperative agreement with DOL, AACC administers the Expanding Community College Apprenticeship initiative, which will create more than 16,000 new registered apprentices in numerous industries. Community colleges are also well represented in the DOL apprenticeship grant programs. We support increased investments in this important work.

- **Carl Perkins and Adult Education Acts**

The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act's Basic State Grants program is the largest single source of ongoing direct federal support for community colleges. Community

colleges use Perkins funds for faculty professional development, academic support, and equipment acquisition. Under the latest Perkins reauthorization, states have developed new CTE plans that focus more than ever on identifying local needs. There is also a renewed emphasis on equity. In short, this is an exciting time for CTE, but we need increased federal investment to fully realize the promise of all this work.

### **Institutional Support**

As important as investments in student aid and workforce programs are to community colleges, federal support for their general needs is also essential as community colleges operate on far leaner resources than other types of institutions.

- **American Jobs Plan Community College Infrastructure Proposal**

Community colleges are enthusiastic, and thankful, for the inclusion in President Biden's American Jobs Plan of \$12 billion for community college infrastructure investment. The increasing sophistication of technical education, which has a growing virtual component, requires continuous, large-scale capital investments. However, academic facilities at community colleges need modernization, and state and local support falls far short of that need. This results in an increasing backlog of unaddressed infrastructure projects and a mounting number of deferred maintenance needs, with an inevitable impact on education quality.

In evaluating facilities needs across all community colleges, we estimate national total deferred maintenance, needed renovations and upgrades at \$60 billion. This does not include future new construction that colleges hope to undertake. Therefore, we ask that \$50 billion be provided for community college facilities in any recovery legislation. Projects funded through this proposal would include advanced manufacturing sites, libraries, nanotechnology laboratories, nursing



facilities, and smart classroom structures. Investment would not only improve instruction, but also directly boost local economic activity.

Any federal effort should ensure a broad diffusion of funds, both regionally and across institutions, including smaller colleges. Emphasis should be given to facilities projects with a strong local economic impact.

- **Strengthening Institutions Program (SIP), Title III-A of the Higher Education Act**

The Strengthening Institutions program helps improve low-resourced colleges that serve large percentages of needy students. This program combines local innovation and priority-setting with a fierce national competition. The projects that emerge have long-lasting positive impacts in areas such as student supports, data systems, and financial management. We appreciate the subcommittee's recent funding increases for Title III-A, whose uniqueness and impact often go unrecognized. AACC also continues to strongly support key Minority-Serving Institutional (MSI) programs, including Hispanic-Serving Institutions (41% of which are two-year public institutions), Predominantly Black Institutions, Asian and Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions, and others. The association also reiterates its longstanding support for Tribally-Controlled Colleges.

- **Child Care Access Means Parents in Schools (CCAMPIS)**

While there are hundreds of on-campus childcare centers in the United States, they meet only a small percentage of the demand. Lack of access to quality childcare is often cited as the reason why students with young children withdraw prior to completing a certificate or degree.

Expanding access to on-campus childcare helps to increase college access and retention for low-income students, especially single parents. The CCAMPIS program needs a Congressional

commitment to this key program to help institutions plan childcare centers and parent-support services.

- **Small/Rural Colleges**

Small, generally rural, community colleges are invaluable assets, providing services and often playing an irreplaceable convening role. They also have an essential role in catalyzing economic development, often against fierce headwinds because of a lack of a strong supporting infrastructure, broadly defined. More than two-fifths of all community colleges (41%) have enrollments of 3,500 students or less. Typically, these institutions have service delivery areas that stretch across multiple counties. These smaller colleges face unique resource challenges, in part because they lack the economies of scale that accrue to larger institutions. One challenge is successfully competing for federal grants, frequently because of a simple lack of personnel to develop strong applications. AACC will be asking Congress to develop policies to ensure that these institutions have access to funding.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to appear before you this morning and I look forward to responding to any questions that you may have.