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**Preparing for the Future: America's
Community Colleges**

Before the House Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education

March 4, 2026

Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the important topic of *Preparing for the Future: America's Community Colleges*. It is an honor to represent the Alabama Community College System and, specifically, Bevill State Community College, which serves students and communities across Northwest Alabama.

The Alabama Community College System (ACCS) is comprised of 24 community and technical colleges serving more than 160,000 individuals annually. Our mission is both educational and economic. We exist to ensure that every Alabamian—regardless of background or geography—has access to high-quality education and workforce training aligned with the needs of industry. Recent economic impact studies show that ACCS institutions contribute over \$8 billion annually to Alabama's economy and return measurable public value for every dollar invested. We are not simply institutions of higher learning; we are engines of workforce development and economic mobility.

At Bevill State Community College, that mission is personal. We serve some of the most rural counties in Alabama—across campuses in Jasper, Sumiton, Fayette, Hamilton, and an instructional site in Carrollton. Nearly half of the population in our service region lives in rural communities. For many of our students, we are not just the most affordable option—we are the only accessible option.

And we are delivering results. Our total credit hour production has increased 24% from the 2020-2021 academic year to the 2024-2025 academic year.

Just one of our highlights, our nursing programs consistently demonstrate excellence, with NCLEX pass rates ranging from 95 to 97 percent in recent years. Over the past three academic years alone, Bevill State has graduated more than 1,000 nurses across our ADN/RN and LPN programs—strengthening healthcare systems throughout rural Alabama at a time when staffing shortages threaten hospital viability.

These outcomes are not accidental. They reflect a model built on industry alignment, local partnerships, and agility.

Proven Models: Industry-Driven, Flexible Pathways

Bevill State operates on a simple principle: workforce programs must be employer-informed and student-centered.

We maintain active advisory committees across healthcare, manufacturing, construction, and transportation. These partnerships allow us to rapidly adjust curriculum, equipment, and delivery models to meet real-time labor market demand.

In our region, manufacturing and skilled trades remain foundational to economic stability. Nationally, over one million trade jobs remain unfilled, including 500,000 in manufacturing

alone . That shortage is felt acutely in rural communities like ours, where retirements outpace replacements and generational knowledge is at risk of being lost.

To address this, Beville State delivers:

- Short-term, industry-recognized credentials in welding (including SMAW, GMAW, and FCAW processes), industrial maintenance, and construction trades
- Commercial Driver’s License (CDL) training to support logistics and supply chain needs
- HVAC Fast Track programs that move students from enrollment to employment in a matter of weeks
- Stackable credentials in healthcare that allow entry-level employment with clear pathways toward advanced licensure

Our approach reduces time-to-competency while preserving academic rigor. Students can enter quickly, earn, and return to continue building credentials over time.

Expanding Opportunities

Dual Enrollment and Early Exposure

The ACCS takes a forward-thinking approach by exposing students to industry-driven college level material at an early age. In the 2024-2025 Academic Year, the system served over 40,000 dual enrollment students who were able to simultaneously attend high school and college-level classes. This number represents an even bigger picture with a **230% increase** in enrollment since 2015. At Beville State, our dual enrollment students have increased over **130%** since the 2020-2021 academic year. While dual enrollment itself is not unique to the ACCS, what makes our programs unique is that we provide low tuition year-round, accessible instructors and resources, lower GPA requirements, and high-quality education opportunities that offer full transferability and academic rigor across all 67 counties in the state of Alabama. Additionally, many of our dual enrollment instructors are local high school teachers credentialed by community colleges, a model that supports K-12 teacher retention and expands instructional capacity statewide. Through dual enrollment, we are providing opportunities to reach those who may not initially see themselves as college-bound, widening the state’s talent pipeline and preparing students for in-demand careers.

In rural counties where economic opportunity may appear limited, dual enrollment changes life trajectories.

Workforce Pell Grant – A Transformational Opportunity

The forthcoming Workforce Pell Grant represents one of the most significant federal policy shifts in workforce education in decades. By allowing Pell Grant eligibility for high-quality, short-term programs between 150 and 600 clock hours aligned to high-demand occupations, Congress has the opportunity to remove a major barrier to entry for working adults.

At Beville State, Workforce Pell would immediately expand access to programs such as CDL, HVAC Fast Track, welding, lineworker training, and healthcare technical certificates. Many of these programs are 8 to 15 weeks in duration—ideal for dislocated workers, underemployed adults, and individuals needing rapid reentry into the workforce.

For rural communities, this is not simply about tuition assistance. It is about economic survival. Workforce Pell can help stabilize hospitals, support energy infrastructure expansion, and fill critical trade shortages—all while providing liveable, family-sustaining wages.

Alabama Energy Infrastructure Training Center & Network (AEITCN)

In response to growing regional demand for skilled energy and infrastructure workers, Beville State is leading the development of the Alabama Energy Infrastructure Training Center & Network (AEITCN).

This initiative will include expanded training capacity for:

- Lineworker programs supported by a dedicated pole yard
- Fiber connectivity and broadband infrastructure
- Solar / Microgrid installation and maintenance
- Electric vehicle and battery troubleshooting and maintenance
- HVAC and Weatherization training

The AEITCN will leverage existing campus facilities alongside approximately 50,000 square feet of new training space to create a scalable regional workforce hub. The goal is not merely program expansion—it is the creation of a coordinated, multi-campus network capable of responding quickly to industry growth in utilities, energy production, advanced manufacturing, and infrastructure modernization.

Energy security and workforce development are directly linked. By training local residents for high-skill, high-wage infrastructure careers, we strengthen both regional economies and national resilience.

Skills for Success Program: Our **ACCS Innovation Center** developed the "Skills for Success" program, which offers customized, rapid-delivery, non-credit, industry-recognized training in high-demand fields like commercial truck driving (CDL), welding, construction, and healthcare. This program is often offered at **no cost** to the participant, swiftly moving individuals from unemployment or underemployment into family-sustaining careers.

By reducing the time-to-competency, we accelerate the state's ability to attract new industry jobs. What distinguishes this program is its industry-driven design. Businesses identify their specific workforce needs, and we convene a task force of leaders from across that sector to develop the curriculum. Their combined expertise ensures that our training is precisely aligned with current hiring demands and upskilling priorities.

Supporting Rural Communities and Special Populations

Rural access remains central to our mission. Healthcare shortages threaten the viability of small hospitals across our region. Manufacturing employers struggle to replace retiring skilled technicians. Broadband expansion requires trained fiber technicians. The modernization of energy infrastructure requires certified lineworkers.

Our response is community-specific solutions.

We work directly with hospitals, manufacturers, utilities, and economic development authorities to design targeted pipelines. We provide flexible scheduling, hybrid instruction, and supportive services to adult learners who strive to balance work and family responsibilities.

We also recognize that many untapped workers face barriers—whether financial, academic, or proximity. Community colleges are uniquely positioned to meet individuals where they are in life and help them reach new heights.

Agility as Workforce Strategy

The defining strength of community colleges is agility. When employers ask, “Can you provide the talent?” we must be able to answer “Yes”—not in years, but in months.

At Bevill State, agility means:

- Rapid curriculum development
- Employer-informed equipment investments
- Stackable credential design (short-term, long-term or eventual Associates Degree)
- Flexible delivery models
- Partnerships across K-12, industry, and economic development

Community colleges are the “conduit” between federal investment and local workforce impact. We translate policy into practical outcomes—jobs filled, wages increased, industries stabilized, and communities strengthened.

America’s community colleges are not simply preparing students for the future—we are preparing the future workforce itself.

On behalf of Bevill State Community College and the Alabama Community College System, I thank you for your continued support and for recognizing the essential role community colleges play in America’s economic competitiveness.

We stand ready to partner with Congress to ensure that federal workforce investments—including Workforce Pell—are implemented in ways that maximize opportunity, strengthen rural America, and secure our nation’s talent pipeline for generations to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.

