

Testimony to the Pennsylvania State Appropriations and Education Committees

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Good morning and thank you for inviting me to speak on behalf of Community College of Beaver County (CCBC). My name is Katie Thomas, and I am the dean for the School of Professions and Transfer Studies. Before I was a community college dean, I was a community college student. I graduated high school and, like so many of our students, about 80% in fact, I simply didn't know what I wanted to do. So, I worked and I waited and started college a year later at my local community college. Six years later, with my master's degree, I landed my first full-time job—teaching English right here at Community College of Beaver County. Over the next 15 years, CCBC provided me with the opportunity to pursue my doctorate and advance in my career to my current position.

Mine is one story of the transformative power of community colleges. This morning, I am honored to share three more stories with you from distinct program pathways at CCBC: education, criminal justice, and STEM. Each story demonstrates the small but mighty strength of the college. At CCBC, we make our resources spread fast and far. Our size makes us nimble. Our employees' commitment to student success makes our work impactful.

I'll start with education. As we know, the need for qualified childcare providers is a significant state-wide priority as schools are facing massive teacher shortages. The National Education Association polled 3,000 of its members in January and nearly 55% indicated that they were more than likely to leave teaching or retire earlier than expected due to the pandemic and its aftermath.

In 2022, CCBC was awarded a grant from Pennsylvania's Professional Development Organization and the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) to provide Child Development Associate credentials free of charge for current childcare providers. Initially, our grant was funded to train 20 educators. However, through the work of the *single* faculty member leading the grant, an additional 60 spots were made available, tripling OCDEL's initial investment in our training. CCBC filled 50 of those spots and graduated a total of 67 newly credentialed CDA childcare workers in July.

One CCBC faculty member was able to address the need for qualified educators 67 times over in under a year. What this experience taught me was that college is ready, students are ready, but at times the funding is not. There are many barriers to completing a college education, but as our CDA experience demonstrates, if we pay for it, they will come. Moreover, such investments are not static. They have a ripple effect in the community. When we prepare qualified childcare

workers, we invest in our youngest citizens, ensuring that the first five years of their development sets the stage for an increasingly bright Pennsylvania future.

Let's turn to criminal justice. There is no lack of coverage on local and national law enforcement labor shortages. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics:

- There are 67,100 projected job openings for police and detectives, and
- Overall employment is expected to grow 7% between 2020 and 2030.

CCBC is bridging the gap between today's issues and the future workforce in the law enforcement industry by training qualified applicants through its Police Academy and Criminal Justice programming.

In 2021, CCBC was awarded a Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEERS) grant to create the county's first and only Center for Public Safety. Through GEERS funding, the generosity of our local district attorney's office, and, again, the leadership of just *one* CCBC faculty member, the college equipped its new Center for Public Safety with a state-of-the-art MILO firearms simulator and crime scene room. In its first year of operation, the Center has trained dozens of criminal justice and police academy students and provided hundreds of professional development opportunities to current law enforcement officers across our county, region, and state.

Like education, the need for qualified law enforcement professionals in Pennsylvania looms large. CCBC's Center for Public Safety is dedicated to preparing municipal police officers and other law enforcement professionals who are committed to the equitable administration of justice within our neighborhoods and communities. While generous capital investments have made our Center a reality, a state-wide framework to fund municipal police officer training programs will fill our Center and flood the career pipeline into local police departments, ensuring a safer PA.

Finally, let's talk about STEM. Last year CCBC received a \$1.7 million Build Back Better grant to re-envision the future of technology on our campus. A significant portion of that investment has funded the creation of a new cyber security program rooted in pen testing, a Department of Defense priority. While this story is still developing, the college's new cyber program will be co-taught by CCBC faculty and DoD professionals to appeal to and prepare leading edge practitioners for employment with the Department of Defense.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics points out that the nation can expect an 11% increase in STEM occupations over the next ten years, and in Pennsylvania, we know that new technology jobs are produced at a rate higher than new technology graduates. With just a two-year turnaround time, and micro credentials that can be completed in a matter of months, CCBC's new cyber programming has the potential to significantly impact PA's need for leading-edge technology experts. However, STEM programming requires continued investments to remain on the leading edge and create a more advanced Pennsylvania.

Across the board, CCBC is dedicated to producing professionals as quickly and effectively as possible to address workforce needs. The College's High School Academies provide opportunities for high school juniors and seniors to complete up to a year of their associate degree program before their high school graduation in fields like STEM, Criminal Justice, and Education, as well as Construction, Aviation, and Health

These are CCBC's stories – each one demonstrating how our community college took an investment, grew it, and used it to impact the community we serve.

I leave you with one last story. I am the child of a single mother who supported her family by working at a convenience store. I stand before you today as a doctor, a dean, a person with a voice at this table because of the transformational power of community colleges. My story is not unique. I see it repeated in so many of our students. Investing in Community College of Beaver County and all the Commonwealth's community colleges is not about sending a check or two, but rather endowing the future of Pennsylvania.

Thank you.