



800 N. Third Street, Suite 405
Harrisburg, PA 17102
www.pacommunitycolleges.org

February 20, 2025

**Testimony
Presented to the House Appropriations Committee
FY 2025-26 Community Colleges Budget Request**

**Dr. Nicholas Neupauer
Vice President, Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges**

**Dr. Quintin Bullock
President, Community College of Allegheny County and
Chair, Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges**

**Dr. Donald Generals
President, Community College of Philadelphia and
Vice Chair, Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony to the House appropriations committee. We are advocating for the increased support and funding for the 15 community colleges across Pennsylvania, which play a pivotal role in shaping the future of our state's economy, workforce, and educational landscape.

Community colleges are an essential part of Pennsylvania's higher education system, providing accessible, affordable, and high-quality education to students from all walks of life. Our colleges offer programs that prepare individuals for a wide range of careers, including those in fields such as healthcare, information technology, manufacturing, and skilled trades—areas that are vital to our state's economy.

We, the Pennsylvania community college sector, are respectfully requesting the Committee consider increasing funding in the following key areas:

- 1. Operating Funds for Community Colleges**
- 2. Capital Funds for Campus Improvements**
- 3. Non-Credit Workforce Development Funding**
- 4. Funding for First Responder Training**

These increases are critical to ensuring our community colleges continue to meet the educational and workforce needs of our state, and to ensure Pennsylvania's economy remains competitive in the future.

1. Increase in Operating Funds for Community Colleges

Community colleges are the backbone of higher education for many Pennsylvanians. We offer affordable, accessible education to students from diverse backgrounds, equipping them with the skills necessary to succeed in the workforce. Last year, we collectively educated 245,000 students, many of whom are the first from their families to attend an institution of higher learning. However, funding for operating costs has not kept pace with inflation, recent increases in student enrollment, and the growing cost of maintaining high-quality programs.

As the demand for education and training continues to grow, it is essential our institutions receive a 6% increase in the operating funds for community colleges. A 6% increase in operating funds will allow institutions to continue offering high-quality programs such as registered nursing. Seventy-five percent of the Commonwealth's RNs are trained by one of our state's community colleges. Further funding will help us to retain qualified faculty and staff and ensure that students have access to the resources and services they need to succeed. Such an investment will continue to pay dividends for Pennsylvania. Our community colleges contribute \$13.6 billion annually to the state's economy.

2. Increase in Capital Funds for Campus Improvements

Many of Pennsylvania's community colleges are struggling to maintain a safe, accessible, and conducive physical environment for learning as well as keep up with the demand for a virtual, technologically advanced learning environment. A 6% increase in capital funding is needed to modernize classrooms, laboratories, and technology infrastructure to ensure that our students have the facilities they deserve to compete in today's rapidly changing job market.

Increased capital funds will help colleges address urgent needs such as energy-efficient building upgrades, technology infrastructure improvements, and the expansion of training spaces for high-demand fields like healthcare, manufacturing, and information technology. Investing in capital improvements ensures that community colleges remain a relevant and effective educational resource for future generations of Pennsylvanians.

3. Funding for Non-Credit Workforce Development Courses

The demand for skilled workers in Pennsylvania continues to outpace the supply, particularly in fields such as advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and information technology. Non-credit workforce development programs at community colleges are designed to rapidly respond to these needs, offering certifications, technical training, and specialized courses to help individuals gain the skills required by employers. Last year, we partnered with 2,100 employers statewide to align training programs with workforce development needs.

However, the funding for non-credit workforce development programs was discontinued over a decade ago and the colleges are financially unable to meet this growing demand. Re-establishing funding with an initial investment of \$5 million for these programs will allow colleges to expand their offerings, develop new training pathways, and collaborate with industry partners to create programs that directly address workforce shortages. This will not only

support Pennsylvania's economic growth but also ensure that our residents have the skills necessary to thrive in a competitive job market.

4. Funding for First Responder Training

First responders are the frontline heroes who keep our communities safe. Community colleges are integral to providing high-quality training to police officers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians (EMTs), and other first responders across the state. Last year, we educated 79,688 first responders. These programs are critical to ensuring that our first responders are prepared for the increasingly complex and dangerous situations they face.

Unfortunately, funding for first responder training was discontinued decades ago and ALL of the community colleges offering these training programs are doing so at a loss, essentially subsidizing the training so communities are kept safe. Re-establishing funding with an initial investment of \$5 million for first responder training will allow community colleges to enhance their training facilities, purchase state-of-the-art equipment, and offer specialized courses that reflect the latest developments in emergency response. It will ease the burden of subsidization so funds can be spent on students and training. Supporting these programs is an investment in the safety of our communities and the well-being of those who serve them.

Economic Impact and Workforce Development

Community colleges directly contribute to the growth and prosperity of our state. According to a recent study, our 15 community colleges generate over \$13.6 billion in economic impact each year. These institutions provide students with the skills needed to meet the demands of employers across Pennsylvania. They are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between the education system and the workforce, offering specialized, shorter-term training programs and credentials that lead to good-paying jobs, apprenticeships, and certifications that employers value.

Our state's manufacturing, healthcare, technology, and construction sectors rely heavily on the graduates of community colleges, many of whom go on to fill critical positions in these industries. The success of these graduates directly contributes to the expansion of Pennsylvania's labor force and strengthens our local communities.

Access and Affordability

One of the greatest strengths of Pennsylvania's community colleges is our commitment to providing affordable education to all residents, regardless of income. Tuition at our community colleges is significantly lower than at four-year institutions, making them an excellent choice for students seeking a quality education without incurring crushing debt. During the 2023-24 academic year, over 33,000 Pennsylvania community college students were awarded over \$130 million in Pell Grants – an average grant of \$3,795 per student – to help them cover the costs of tuition, course materials, transportation, and living expenses.

For many students, especially those from low-income or rural backgrounds, community colleges are the only feasible option for continuing their education. They offer not only a gateway to higher education but also the flexibility to attend classes while working, caring for family, or living in communities where a traditional university may not be accessible.

Moreover, our institutions provide a critical pathway for students to transition into four-year universities, either through articulation agreements or by completing two-year degrees that seamlessly transfer into bachelor's programs. This "two-plus-two" model has empowered countless Pennsylvanians to earn bachelor's degrees who might not have otherwise had the opportunity. While we have always collaborated with the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education at an institution-by-institution level, last year's legislation to guarantee seamless transfer benefits our students and the Commonwealth as a whole.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Pennsylvania's 15 community colleges are vital to our state's educational, economic, and public safety infrastructure. The increases we are requesting today—operating funds, capital funds, non-credit workforce development funds, and funding for first responder training—are critical investments in the future of our state. They will help ensure that our community colleges can continue to provide affordable, high-quality education and training that meets the needs of our workforce, enhances the safety of our communities, and strengthens the economic foundation of Pennsylvania.

I urge the Committee to consider these funding requests in the upcoming budget, as they represent a direct investment for the people of Pennsylvania. Thank you for your time, your commitment to education, and your consideration of these essential funding increases.