

HB 4496 (Walsh) – A Testimony in Favor of Community College Baccalaureate

Presented to the House Committee on Education – June 8, 2011

By Dr. Daniel J. Phelan, President of Jackson Community College, Jackson, Michigan

Good morning, Chairman Scott and members of the Committee, my name is Dan Phelan and I serve as President of Jackson Community College, an institution that serves over 11,000 credit students annually in the tri-county area of south central Michigan. Jackson Community College is a quality and continuous improvement-based, data-informed organization that is regionally accredited by the Higher Learning Commission. We are a \$50M enterprise, comprised of over 684 full- and part-time employees who are committed to the success of our students. In terms of econometric impact, an independent study revealed that JCC accounts for nearly \$200 million of all earnings in the south central Michigan economy; roughly 5,500 jobs. We also know that for every \$1 of revenue at the College, we generate another \$8.48 in local area income.

As you may know, community colleges are the first point of entry for so many people in our State. Whether it's the individual who lost their job and needs to be re-trained; the 18-year old student who always planned on going to the university, but due to family income problems, they are now looking to the community college; or the 40-year old who is not only unemployed, but lacks the basic work skills to secure a job, or the 18 year old who chooses the community college because of our high quality programs and wants to graduate without all the debt, Michigan, now more than ever, needs its community colleges.

To assist with keeping our people resources in the State, community colleges must be fiscally and strategically supported so as to assist with meeting State needs including the re-training of displaced workers; providing college degrees in such areas as nursing, allied health, entrepreneurship, alternative energy, sustainability, and advanced manufacturing; providing company capacity-building; as well as provide for pre-baccalaureate education. Ultimately, community colleges can, and do, play a major role in the revitalization of the State's economy.

Indeed, Michigan's community colleges are often the source of innovation, flexibility, responsiveness, and creativity in meeting state and community needs. Permit me to offer a few of specific examples, at Jackson Community College, that typify some of the unique ways that Michigan's community colleges are addressing today's challenges.

At JCC, we have over 1,100 students in the nursing pipeline; meaning that they have enrolled with the intention of completing the general education and related courses necessary to earn a practical nursing (PN) certificate or an associates in applied nursing (ADN) degree and sit for the National Council (NCLEX) examination. History demonstrates that our students have an exceedingly high level of success passing the boards as evidenced by our 2010 PN pass rate of 100% compared to the state PN average of 94%, and national average of 87%. Similarly, JCC enjoys an RN pass rate of 96%, while the State 2010 average was 88% and the national average was 87%.

Increasingly, I've been approached by students, hospitals and health care providers alike expressing concern about the changing nature of the industry, such that the entry level requirement to serve in the health care industry is moving away from the ADN to the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN). This is especially true of hospitals pursuing "Magnet" status. States like Iowa and Washington already require 100% of their nurses to be BSN credentialed. Many of our students have expressed a strong desire for Jackson Community College to be able to offer baccalaureate degrees in applied areas such as nursing. I tell them, however, that this requires an act of the legislature to change the Community College Act.

At JCC, our students currently pay 61% of the full-burden cost of running Jackson Community College. These students, as "majority shareholders of the college" have expressed a need for local education leading to a BSN degree. A recent campus survey noted that 93% of our nursing students seek at BSN; 83% specifically prefer to obtain their BSN at JCC. These individuals are challenged with childcare limitations, financial limitations, scheduling, and the nature of clinical and didactic requirements while balancing family, school and work schedules. Though they have a desire to pursue the baccalaureate degree, it simply is not available to many of them in a time, place, and manner that meets their needs. They have asked me pointedly; please bring baccalaureate nursing to Jackson. As an organization committed to providing for its local community and its students, we try our best to meet their needs.

With me today is Ms. Nia Byerly, a recent JCC Nursing Graduate who can share with you her personal accounting of this issue and the impact of the community college on her life, as well as what a BSN available through JCC would have meant to her...

[Comments from Ms. Nia Byerly]

Thank you, Nia. Members of the Committee...Community colleges are ready, willing, and able to provide a much-needed baccalaureate of science in nursing degree on our campuses. Georgia Fojtasek, the CEO of Allegiance Health Hospital in Jackson, who is the principal recipient of our graduates, has plainly expressed the strong desire for BSN students from JCC. Indeed, she has indicated her hospital intends to achieve "Magnet Status" which will require 75% of their nursing staff to be BSN credentialed within a few short years.

Permit me the introduction of Jackie Liebowitz, the Vice President of Patient Care at Allegiance Health, a health care organization serving over 17,000 patients annually. Jackie is here to provide a hospital perspective on student quality, BSN demand, and their desire for community colleges to deliver the BSN to augment the university programs...

[Comments from Ms. Jackie Liebowitz]

Thank you, Jackie. Authorizing community colleges to provide baccalaureate education meets the needs of our students and of our employers for whom we exist to serve. We are fully accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, which is the only required regional accrediting body that covers Michigan and 19 other states in the Midwest. This is the only required accreditation for our College and for our nursing programs, including the BSN if we were permitted to offer it. It is the same required accreditation for the universities – nothing more...nothing less.

I ask you to advance legislation to allow Michigan community colleges to join what 19 other states in this country have done in order to better serve its people. Allow Michigan community colleges to meet the needs of our students, employers and our community by permitting community colleges to expand upon that which they do so well...offer a quality education, hopefully now also at the BSN level. Advance the community college baccalaureate legislation knowing that we are fully accredited, are proven quality institutions of higher education whose only mission is teaching and student success, free from distractions of research and publishing. Advance this opportunity fully knowing that you are helping to meet the burgeoning need for nurses at the ADN and BSN levels in the State, particularly at a time when retiring baby boomers will need the services the most. Thank you for your consideration.

