

Testimony
Committee on Education and the Workforce Field Hearing
March 21, 2011, 9 a.m.
Wilkes University

Thomas P. Leary, President
Luzerne County Community College

- Community colleges are critical to the future of our state and, given the shifts in our economy, have a more significant impact every day.
- Community colleges have always played a key role in providing the workforce with the education and skills necessary to find sustainable employment in the business and industry that supports the economy, including high priority occupations which for Pennsylvania includes such programs as nursing, dental hygiene, surgical technology, Automotive Technology, and Computer Information Systems, Architectural Engineering, and Early Childhood Education.
- During the current economic climate, with record numbers finding themselves unemployed, the impact of community colleges has increased dramatically, as more and more individuals are looking to our institutions to train and, in many cases, retrain them so that they may gain a competitive edge in today's limited workforce market.
- While community colleges like Luzerne County Community College are supported by state and local funding, that funding, combined with student tuition and fees, is still not sufficient to allow for the needed flexibility in programming and maintenance of state-of-the-art equipment and facilities to ensure students are fully prepared for careers and continued education in their field, including and especially the high demand occupations. As a result, federal, state and private grants and donations have become a critical piece to the community college revenue puzzle.
- Unfortunately, at the same time that state and local funding has been decreasing over the past two years, LCCC and our sister community colleges across the nation have also experienced loss of some of these supplementary funding sources.

- For LCCC, this situation will likely worsen dramatically if the Governor's proposed budget which calls for \$1.2 million cut (most of which is the result of a loss of federal stimulus money) is approved, as many anticipate will happen.
- Like other community colleges, LCCC has been making adjustments along the way to address the continually decreasing cuts while ensuring that the quality of education and training provided is not impacted. Staff are doubling up on responsibilities, and growth and development activities are stunted as we must reallocate existing resources to day-to-day operational needs.
- However, the areas where we can make cuts and trim the budget are nearing depletion.
- Other ways these budget cuts impact economic development is in the loss of programs such as Pennsylvania's Dual Enrollment program, through which eligible high school students receive funding to attend college courses and gain a head start on their post-secondary education.
- As the budget situation continues to worsen, community colleges face no other alternative but to increase tuition and fees. Accessibility and affordability have been the mainstay of community colleges since their inception and are the reason that so many in our community are able to gain advanced training and education and contribute to the economic development of their regions.
- Increasing tuition and fees can mean the difference between going to college and not going to college for those who are just outside the range of financial aid availability. Many of those who do receive financial aid rely on that funding to cover not only their tuition but also their textbooks, which can at times cost as much as tuition. Also needed are the additional funds to cover transportation, supplies and other varied needs, such as child care.
- If the Pell cuts proposed in HR 1 are approved, many of these same students will not have adequate resources to attend college.

- Consider the fact that 68% of first time, full time students at LCCC receive some form of financial aid. Again, that financial aid covers not only tuition, but also the other expenses that are incurred by the student in order to attend college. Ladies and Gentlemen, we are talking here about, say, the single mother of a family of 4 earning \$25,000 a year. The fact that she can manage a full-time job and raise a family while studying and completing homework and attending classes is remarkable enough. How do we expect her to find available money in her budget to pay for her textbooks or cover the additional cost of gas to get to and from campus?
- The Federal Government must provide sufficient Pell Grant funding to ensure the maximum award is not reduced in the 2011-12 academic year.
- The current continuing resolution (P.L. 111-322) provides sufficient Pell Grant program funding to ensure a \$5,550 maximum grant level for the 2011-12 academic year. However, the House passed H.R. 1 last week, a continuing resolution that cuts the 2011-12 maximum Pell by \$845—reducing the maximum award from \$5,550 to \$4,705.
- Because this Pell Grant reduction will have a detrimental impact on low-income students, I urge you to oppose this provision in the continuing resolution.
- Any changes to Pell funding at this point could disrupt, delay, or halt low-income students and families' higher education aspirations. To prevent this, Congress must vote down any Continuing Resolution that reduces the maximum Pell Grant award.
- Our students at Luzerne County Community College rely on federal aid to attend our institution. The students affected by these cuts are the neediest individuals and are the ones counting on financial aid to fulfill their responsibilities to their families by finding sustainable employment, without which they must rely on government assistance or the support of families and friends to get by, none of which enhances self-esteem or self-reliance, which can have a detrimental long-term effect on their and their children's ability to contribute to their community in a meaningful way.

- We also count on the funding of the SEOG grants to our students. If they are cut as well, we would have many students unable to attend school because they could not afford books and necessary supplies.
- The Pell Grant program continues to be the cornerstone of the federal student aid programs and it provides students the opportunity to attend Luzerne County Community College each year. In the academic year 2009-10, we had 2836 students receive a Pell Grant during the year of which 1268 received the maximum Pell Grant of \$2675. These students will be relying on Congress to ensure their awards are not reduced.
- I assure you that the colleges are doing our part to support our students and support the economic development of our regions during these difficult times in any way possible.
- For example, the PA community colleges are working together to submit an application for a TAACCCT Grant. This U.S. Dept. of Labor grant is designed to increase institutional capacity and student success for TAA-eligible students and “TAA-like” students – meaning adult learners who may have lost a recent job or are in need of additional skills to upgrade employability or meet the changing demands of their workplace.
- Life-long learning is a primary strategy for meeting President Obama’s challenge that by 2020, America will have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world, and community colleges will produce an additional 5 million graduates.
- About 40 % of LCCC’s 7,000 students (2,800) are over the age of 25 and can potentially benefit from the goals of and objectives of this grant. If the grant is successfully funded, a number of student supports already available through the College will be optimized and customized for its adult student population
- With jobs requiring at least an associate degree projected to grow twice as fast as jobs requiring no college experience, the 14 CC’s in Pennsylvania are collaborating to submit a single grant application with a focus on student success and capacity-building to serve adults looking to re-train and upgrade their skills to compete in the 21st century workforce.

- The approach being taken is designed to transform, streamline, and accelerate the initial experiences of TAA and TAA-like students at a CC and to align educational programs with industry recognized credentials and industry needs in specific focus areas ultimately leading to job placement.
- The CC's plan to invest in the intake/assessment and collaborations with other human service and workforce development organizations, as well as employers in order to support student success and the attainment of an industry-recognized credential. The 14 CC's in Pennsylvania plan to redesign and accelerate basic skills development to help move students through the foundation skills and on to learning the specific workplace skills and competencies needed in today's economy.
- This is just one example of the many avenues community colleges seek to supplement funding resources.
- We are doing our part to support a workforce prepared with the skills needed by business and industry to address the current unemployment rates and help restore our country's financial stability.
- We urge you to do the same by fully funding Pell Grants at their current rate and overall eliminating any cuts to education funding on the national level.