



**Remarks on Behalf of the MA Community Colleges Council of Presidents
to the MA Board of Higher Education
Delivered by President Jim Mabry, Middlesex Community College**

Framingham State University
January 22, 2019

Chair Gabrieli, Secretary Peyser, Commissioner Santiago and members of the Board of Higher Education, on behalf of the 15 Community Colleges, I thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on the Community College Council of Presidents. Chair Valerie Roberson is unable to attend today, as she has a critical meeting with faculty and staff on her campus. I also would like to acknowledge my colleagues here from the community colleges and the state universities, as well as Rear Admiral Fran McDonald sitting alongside of me representing the State Universities Council of Presidents.

Over the next two days, most of our institutions are welcoming back returning students for another semester. Personally, I love the first days of the semester because of the energy, excitement, and air of optimism that comes from our students and our faculty and staff who work so hard to help our students succeed.

Our students are of all different ages and backgrounds, but all share the goal of transforming their lives through education. As they turn to their academic studies, internships, and co-curricular activities, it is important to remember that new research confirms what we have long suspected, that many community colleges students will be attending classes without having a solid meal for the day, and some without having a secure place spend the night. In fact, a report released this January by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports that nationally, more than 30 percent of college students are food insecure. The report was sponsored by Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren and Senator Ed Markey, and at the urging and request of my colleagues Presidents Pam Eddinger/Bunker Hill, Ellen Kennedy/Berkshire and Pat Gentile/North Shore.

The GAO study reinforces work done, under the leadership of Commissioner Santiago. In 2017 the Wisconsin Hope Lab survey of food and housing insecurity was released in MA. The report, titled Basic Needs Insecurity in Massachusetts Public Universities and Colleges, noted that:

- Forty-four percent of community college students and 33% of 4-year college students reported low or very low food security during the previous 30 days prior to the study.
and

- Forty-nine percent of community college students reported housing insecurity in the past year and 38% in the past month prior to the study. For 4-year college students, these statistics were 32% and 20%, respectively.

The findings of the GAO Report and the prior Hope Lab Study led several community college presidents into recent talks with members of our Congressional Delegation about this crisis (and yes, it is a crisis!), and to explore potential solutions to reduce hunger and food insecurity amongst our community college students. Possibilities include better connection to the Federal programs like SNAP—Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. We will be working with our delegation to follow up on these recommendations.

I bring this up to you today because as much as this is a federal issue, it is also a state policy issue that needs to be addressed.

- We have students on all our community colleges across the Commonwealth who we expect to persist and complete their degrees and training programs without having the fuel to get through a class because they are hungry.
- We have students in early college programs on our campus and in dual enrollment programs who are eligible for free or reduced lunch in their K-12 schools, who then come to us and no longer get this kind of assistance.
- As much as this is a moral and human issue, it is a college completion issue, and we ask the Board of Higher Education to help us advocate for further funding solutions here in Massachusetts.

All our campuses have multiple programs and individual efforts to help students dealing with food insecurities including on-campus food pantries. But as my colleague President Eddinger says “the need is so great that we can’t food-pantry our way out of it”.

At Middlesex, we have an emergency food fund, and have partnered with local food banks to establish food pantries with multiple pick up locations on both campuses. This spring, we are piloting a food voucher program in the spring. But I do not see the colleges as having the funding to deal with this on our own.

I wanted to share with you that my colleagues and I have worked with Senator Lovely and Representative Meschino to file a bill for this legislative session that would create a new trust fund to scale programs aimed at reducing food insecurities for our community college students. As the bill works through the legislative cycle, we will be asking for your advocacy too, so that together we can help our most vulnerable students persist and succeed. They demonstrate every day that they want to be core members of our workforce and we should do all we can to prepare them for the critical high demand jobs that are vital to our robust economy in Massachusetts.

The community colleges are also working together, along with our state university colleagues on two critical issues that impact all of our campuses. Through our PACE partnership and under the direction of President Christina Royal, the 24 campuses are exploring best practices to protect against cyber-attacks, and other cyber security challenges. Although our work is in the beginning stages, there is tremendous urgency to our work, and we welcome all partners to the table to ensure that our campuses are protected to the highest degree possible. It is already evident that protecting our campuses against cyber-attacks is a complex endeavor that will take a large and sustained effort. We hope that you will advocate with us for much needed funding to assist campuses in this critical area.

The second large-scale PACE partnership is a joint effort with the DHE to improve our use of data to improve student outcomes. The 24 campuses are embarking on a project that incorporates the system-wide use of Tableau platform for system level reporting and data analytics. At MCC we are using a Federal Title III grant to build an integrated data warehouse that will utilize the Tableau reporting platform to assist us with data analytics and predictive analytics. I believe, this is a key endeavor that will provide critical tools and insights that will greatly assist our efforts to keep students on the path to success.

We are grateful to the staff at the department for their efforts with both projects and look forward to continuing the collaborative work within our segment, the department, and with our state university partners.

Thank you for your time this morning.¹

¹ This document may not represent the full extent of the comments made at the meeting