

Massachusetts Community Colleges, Council of Presidents
Chair: Dr. James Mabry, President, Middlesex Community College

Massachusetts Board of Higher Education

Tuesday, June 23, 2020

Good morning Chair Gabrieli, board members, Commissioner Santiago and all of the DHE staff along with participating colleagues. For those I haven't met before, my name is Jim Mabry. I am in my sixth year serving as the President of Middlesex Community College and have now stepped into the role as the Chair of the Massachusetts Community College Council of Presidents. I am pleased to be with you this morning, and to begin my term at a moment when the role of higher education and the impact we have on our students, our communities, and the Commonwealth's economy, has *never* been more important.

My colleagues at the community colleges have spent nearly every day of the last few months responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, giving everything to meeting the needs of our students and the needs of our college communities. As we remain in the throes of this global pandemic, with public health and economic impacts still unfolding, I simply cannot overstate the value of our community college system in Massachusetts.

As students and families face difficult financial decisions this fall, Massachusetts Community Colleges will continue offering the most *affordable* pathway to an associate degree or transfer to a 4-year school, with many of us offering a combination of high quality online and hybrid classes while providing limited on-campus instruction for the programs that require it. In addition, our colleges will keep filling the role as the largest workforce trainer in the state and leading the charge on workforce development. The Community Colleges are uniquely positioned to be a primary catalyst for the Commonwealth's economic recovery *throughout* and *following* the COVID-19 pandemic. We have a record of rebuilding local economies, providing a pipeline of workers to high-demand industries, and serving as economic engines for *all* regions of the Commonwealth. As we begin to imagine life in Massachusetts as the

pandemic subsidies, we must recognize the unique ability of community colleges to re-skill and educate the core of the workforce.

On this topic, the Presidents and the Massachusetts Association of Community Colleges have developed a new virtual conversation series: “On the Road with the Community Colleges: Driving the Economic Recovery.” This series is initially focusing on our partnerships with workforce and business leaders, and how our programs serve critical industries in Massachusetts. In the first two sessions, we have had incredibly valuable discussions with Presidents Valerie Roberson of Roxbury Community College and Ellen Kennedy of Berkshire Community College; along with Jim Brett of the New England Council; Prabal Chakrabarti of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston; Steve Walsh of the MA Hospital Association; and Michael Curry of the Mass League of Community Health Centers.

We are going to submit some important comments from those dialogues, but I want to read one for you right now.

Michael Curry, the Deputy CEO and General Counsel for the Mass League of Community Health Centers, **said something during our last community college conversation that I want to share with you.** Michael currently serves on the boards of the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, the Massachusetts Nonprofit Network, and formerly Roxbury Community College. Michael is also the past president of the Boston Branch of the NAACP, and was elected to the National NAACP Board of Directors in 2014 and serves as Chair of the National Board’s Advocacy & Policy Committee and Vice-Chair of the Political Action and Legislation Committee:

- **READ:** “I think it’s interesting where we are that if we understand that we do need to see greater investments in community colleges...that’s the gateway to greater opportunity. So, if you really want to deal with equity, how do you invest in people? How do you invest in the institutions that are on the front lines with communities of color, on the frontlines with immigrant communities, that can be that first opportunity for that

homeless person? All these underserved populations will come to community colleges to get that opportunity.” - *Michael Curry, Deputy CEO and General Counsel for the Mass League of Community Health Centers*

- **SUBMIT with written remarks:** “...There was an early COVID case that took an entire shift out of the hospital. Over a hundred employees had to be quarantined. When that happens you face some significant workforce challenges, and the pipeline already was something that was in jeopardy prior to COVID, and this has really pointed out our needs in strengthening our relationships, and I think primarily...with community colleges. Because you’re doing different types of remote learning, commuter learning, things that we would be able to continue even in a resurgence of COVID down the road. We’re going to have 15,000 RN’s that are needed by the end of [2024], we’re going to have 10,000 jobs in behavior health that are needed by the end of [2024]. Those are primary areas where we should, could, and will be partnering with you and your teams to find out how to get talented students from our communities into our community hospitals, academic medical centers, and community health centers to take care of patients, because that is what this is really all about.” – *Steve Walsh, President & CEO of the Massachusetts Health & Hospital Association*
- **SUBMIT with written remarks:** “The community colleges are the great equalizer in the country when it comes to providing education and opportunity and changing lives. They are also the least resourced aspect of higher education, which is a really frightening thing. And maybe with all the attention we’re paying right now to what is happening across the country, there will be greater recognition of what needs to be invested in community colleges to ensure that every person who enters its doors has equal opportunity to achieve an education and change the lives of multiple generations of their families.” - *Dr. Ellen Kennedy, President of Berkshire Community College*

I know you have heard my fellow community college presidents and I make several of these points before, but I think we are in a critical moment where we are facing two powerfully dangerous pandemics: the COVID-19 virus, and systemic racism in our nation. It is up to us to come together and work to find solutions that help **ALL** students in public higher education reach their full potential. Right now, we are falling tragically short.

These last weeks and months have been eye-opening for many; we are reckoning with the reality that, at an alarming rate, people of color in America are not provided the same opportunities to match the outcomes of their white peers, whether those are health outcomes, education outcomes, professional and career outcomes, and so on. This structural racism has kept generations of families from achieving their dreams, the dreams that we in public higher education are supposed to help people fulfill.

We know that the community colleges - who provide the most affordable higher education in the state, who educate more than 50% of the students in Massachusetts public higher ed, who offer regional accessibility with our 15 colleges, and, ultimately, who serve the largest share of students of color - are deeply and inequitably underfunded. Of state funding allocated for public higher education, our 15 colleges receive just 25%.

If the funding to community colleges is cut further, it will quickly hamper our ability to gear up training and programs need to rebuild our economy and put people back to work. Our budgets are primarily made up of dedicated faculty and staff and stripping us of our human resources would hinder our ability to meet our mission. It should be noted that 85% of first responders in Massachusetts attended a community college and we know that more CNAs, Nurses, Medical Assistants, Respiratory Therapists, and EMTs are critically needed. We are the first choice and starting point for so many of these students.

This moment – in response to the pandemic and in response to long-standing institutionalized racism – is calling on us to do better for our students. We have all seen the data, we know the

outcomes for our students of color, and we know that we are not doing enough to support them. And the reality is that the community colleges serve more low-income students and students of color than the other two public higher education segments combined.

So, I am here to advocate for a renewed partnership between us – one that is bold and proactive. We must take the goals of the equity agenda, take the aspirations of a post-COVID economy, and enable the community colleges to do the work that they are best known for: being regional economic engines and serving our Commonwealth's most vulnerable students and communities. Let us put ideas into action and be partners in this fight for educational justice for all.

Thank you for allowing me the time, and I look forward to working with all of you.