



Testimony before the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

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Miller Senate Office Building, Annapolis

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Good afternoon. Thank you Madam Chair, our own Senator Montgomery, and all the committee members for this opportunity to testify in support of SB 167.

Nearly 70 years ago, local lawmakers and educators in Montgomery County realized that the men and women in this state needed a new higher education option. They believed that a college education should not be reserved only for the wealthy. To them, our state and its future generations would succeed only when young people and returning veterans had the opportunity to learn a career, train for a trade, and contribute to the growing economy.

Fast forward to 2011. Montgomery College, like the other 15 community colleges across the state, still holds true to its mission—everyone deserves a college education.

How do we do it? Maryland's community colleges are the most affordable higher education option in the state. Community colleges are about half the price of a four-year public university in Maryland... that is, for those students who receive the lowest tuition price.

There are different tuition rates even within a community college. At Montgomery College, there is a tremendous difference between our lowest rates for which certain in-county residents are eligible and our higher rates, which include those who come to us from out-of-state. For example, a student taking 12 credits pays \$1,284 in tuition at our lowest rates; a student classified as out-of-state pays \$3,588 in tuition for the same number of credits.

We believe in access; in encouraging every student who attends Montgomery County Public Schools to graduate and aspire to college. That is why all recent graduates of MCPS receive our lowest rates, regardless of their current place of residency. We believe in leveraging the state and county's investment in K through 12 education by providing an opportunity to attend an affordable, quality college.

Why? A high school diploma is not enough in today's innovation economy. This great state of Maryland needs all the college-educated workers it can get. Maryland faces the same challenges as the rest of the country: there are too many job openings that don't have enough qualified



candidates. Many are the kinds of middle-skill jobs that require a community college education, from jobs that require technology training to lab bench skills to health care staff.

Your community colleges are here to provide the skills training. We're here to provide the two-year degree. And we're here to provide a high quality, lower cost entry point to the four-year degree.

We are already doing good work. In the last fiscal year, 63 percent of Maryland's new, licensed nurses came from community colleges. That's right; two-thirds of our state's new nurses are products of community colleges. As for transfer programs, Montgomery College's engineering program enrolled over 1,100 students last year – many of whom go on to transfer to 4-year programs at institutions like the University of Maryland. Overall, we enroll nearly 60,000 credit and noncredit students every year.

Montgomery College's policy is to offer its lowest tuition rate to all recent Montgomery County Public School graduates. Students who have not graduated from a MCPS high school within the last three years must provide proof of residency to receive the lowest rate, unless otherwise permitted or required by law.

The provisions laid out in SB 167 will help those students who wish to transfer from our community college and would face prohibitive tuition costs if they are required to pay out of state tuition at a MD four-year university. The annual tuition and fees for an in-state student at the University of Maryland College Park are \$8,416; for a student classified as out of state, those tuition and fees jump to \$24,831. Which rate a student pays can be the difference between going to college and not going at all.

We need to ensure that all Marylanders who dream of a better life achieve that dream; our state depends on it. We cannot afford to put college financially out of reach for our high school graduates.

Education can change people's lives. And it not only betters the individual – enhancing her earning power; or work opportunities – education can also lift up a community. Because if we can fill those jobs that require skilled workers, college-educated workers – then we see foreclosure rates come down, increased home ownership, community involvement, and more tax revenue and services for our state and local governments.

But to me, this issue goes well beyond the economy. For me, it's personal. I have a 4-year-old son. Like many 4-year olds, he is very concerned with what's right and wrong.

How would I explain to him that he may very well grow up in a community where our leaders have chosen not to provide educational access to everyone? I reject the notion that this is my Maryland. History has shown us what happens when we fail to provide equal education opportunities to all.



Instead, I choose to raise my son in a community where all have the opportunity to go to college without fear, because I know the power of higher education. I know what it has done for me and our family, and I know what it will do for him.

I want him to grow up in a state where every child who is here can have the dream that the realities of their parents' lives do not have to define their future. Finally, I want my son to live in a state where we remember that we are here because of immigrants... those who formed our nation as a safe haven for all immigrants who believe in the American Dream.

To deny some of our community's young people this opportunity—a piece of the American Dream—is beyond disheartening. It is, from a young child's perspective, wrong.

So for the many young children coming up through our schools, children much like my Myles, expecting and dreaming of a better life, of college... let's not let them down. On behalf of Maryland's community colleges, which remain committed to our core mission of access to higher education for all, please support SB 167.

Thank you.