



10901 Little Patuxent Parkway
Columbia, MD 21044-3197
443-518-1820
Fax: 443-518-4964
www.howardcc.edu

**Education, Business, and Administration Subcommittee
of the
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
February 11, 2011
Testimony of Dr. Kathleen Hetherington, President, Howard Community College**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of Maryland's community colleges. We appreciate your past support and recognize that you are always working to assure that we are able to meet the needs of our students. The operating and capital funds that you have provided us over past years have enabled us to grow innovative programs and services for our communities. We have worked diligently to maximize the results made possible by this support, recognizing our role as effective stewards of these funds.

As you may know, cost is the greatest barrier hindering high school graduates from continuing their education. Despite the current economic challenges faced by our state and the strain this has placed on community colleges trying to meet increasing demands for our services, Maryland's community colleges have made it a priority to remain affordable and accessible so an increased number of Marylanders can secure postsecondary education and training.

Additionally, we are now embracing President Obama's and Governor O'Malley's focus on college completion. President Obama has set a goal that the nation's colleges and universities will graduate an additional 8.2 million students, with 5 million coming from community colleges, by 2020. Governor O'Malley has charged Maryland's higher education institutions with the goal of 55% of the state's adult population having a college degree (two-year or four-year) by 2025. That means 20,000 to 23,000 additional degrees.

Most recently, a variety of state and federal government officials and others have noted that the United States, now ranked 12th in the world in college attainment and falling, has been suffering low graduation rates for a generation or more.

On October 5th, Second Lady Jill Biden held the first ever White House Summit on Community Colleges. One of the primary discussions that took place at the summit was a paradigm shift from a focus on access to a focus on completion. On December 3rd, Maryland was the first state to hold a follow-up summit to discuss how the state's community colleges can support this goal.

At the summit, all 16 Maryland community college presidents endorsed "A Promise to Act", which commits us to increase the number of Marylanders with postsecondary credentials and

to pursue this goal in partnership with faculty, staff, business leaders, local and state government, and public education teachers and administrators.

Over a dozen representatives from Howard Community College attended this summit and several individuals from our Step Up coaching program also attended in order to share this best practice. HCC has always been concerned about completion. Our strategic plan has specific goals and metrics on retention and graduation. As a result, we already have several initiatives underway designed to focus on completion and retention rates.

Some of you may have seen the November 12, 2010 *Washington Post* article entitled, "Coaching Students to the FinishLine," which featured HCC's Step Up program as well as several other Maryland community colleges' initiatives. Step Up, which began in 2006 and has been nationally-recognized as a best practice, was the result of faculty and staff researching ways to increase student success, specifically student retention.

The team determined that there was a connection between lack of success and other factors, including: lack of motivation; working too many hours; family, life, and health problems; irregular attendance; and a lack of self-confidence. Faculty and staff considered what steps the college could take that would help alleviate these issues.

After extensive research of a number of models nationwide, the team landed on the life coaching model as the one that they felt best supported the needs of students. Coach support, encourage, guide students in making transitions, help connect students to resources, and provide seamless communication between constituencies at the college regarding the student's progress.

All coaches are volunteers and they come from all areas of the college, from members of our plant operations staff to members of our board of trustees.

Four-years of data show that this program has been successful, especially to developmental students who are not yet ready for college work. As the Post article reported, semester-to-semester retention has ranged between 86 and 96 percent for developmental students in the Step Up program as opposed to about 75 percent for those who were not coached. As one student said about her coach, "[She] helps me to fight when I just want to give up."

HCC is such a special place as are all Maryland's community colleges. They are special because of their focus on serving students and ensuring that they leave our institutions prepared to become engaged and productive members of the community. We ask for your support for both the proposed operating and capital budgets in order that we can continue fulfilling our mission and producing a globally competitive workforce.

Thank you.