

**TESTIMONY OF STEVEN M. ROSE, Ed.D. PRESIDENT OF PASSAIC COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE TO  
THE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT**

June 29, 2021

I am Steven Rose President of Passaic County Community College. The main campus in Paterson, NJ which is the third largest city in New Jersey. I have been President since 1996 and have been at the College since 1987. When I arrived, we served approximately 2000 students per year and currently we serve over 11,000. This growth is fairly typical for community colleges during this time span. Eighty percent of our students are minority with many having English as their second language. While many enroll to seek an associate's degree for either transfer to a baccalaureate institution or direct entry into a career such as registered nurse, others come seeking our Workforce Development Programs leading to industry recognized credentials in health care and technology fields. The topic of this hearing is "Expanding Access to Higher Education and the Promise it Holds." Community colleges were created for this purpose.

PCCC, like most community colleges, is an open admission institution serving students with varied educational backgrounds. While some enroll fully ready for the rigors of college-level work others are ill prepared. Some students enter ready to enroll in advanced calculus while others need basic arithmetic. Some enter with well developed writing skills while others struggle with literacy. Community college students are often the first generation in their family to attend college. At PCCC many students are the first in their family to graduate from high school. We welcome all of these students. We believe regardless of age, that every student should not be limited in life by a lack of education. It is never too late. A college degree or credential is still the easiest path to the middle class and our programs are designed to help students reach those goals. However, these students face significant challenges. Many

work full-time while attending school. The type of jobs they work in often have unpredictable schedules and mandatory overtime. Approximately 20 percent of our students are single parents. The pandemic has only enhanced these challenges.

During the past year students faced unprecedented challenges. Many struggled adapting to remote classes and lacked the technology they needed. Many lost their jobs and were directly impacted by Covid. The financial support our college and students received from the federal government was necessary and impactful. We were able to provide laptops for all students who needed them and provide financial help when needed. I am not exaggerating when I report that the aid for students was, in many cases, life sustaining and changing.

Enrollments at community colleges have historically been counter cyclical with the economy. During economic recessions our enrollments tend to grow and decline when the economy is thriving. When individuals have strong employment options, they tend to put off enrolling in college. At PCCC our enrollment hit an all-time high in the early 2010's and has been declining since 2012. In 2017 we saw a large decline in enrollment when DACA and other undocumented students no longer felt comfortable attending college due to the national debate on immigration. For the most part, these students have yet to return. This impacted both new students and students who were currently enrolled.

The pandemic has brought challenges that we anticipate will last for many years. Enrollment at PCCC dropped approximately 17 percent this year. Most of the decline came from newly enrolled students rather than continuing students. Enrollment patterns from local high schools tend to follow fairly predictable patterns. For the fall 2020 semester we experienced a relatively minor decrease in new student enrollment from more affluent school districts. The loss of student enrollment from urban

districts was dramatically worse. Enrollment from several high schools was down over 50 percent. In our discussions with these districts, it is clear that these students did not choose to go elsewhere. They just did not go to college.

The outlook for Fall 2021 continues to be grim. Many urban schools report that many students stopped attending remote classes at some point during the year and many will not be graduating. In some cases, the school districts report that they have totally lost touch with these students. Most significantly, it appears that students who do plan to attend this fall are coming with greater academic deficiencies. From a preliminary analysis of placement test scores, these students will need more remedial courses than is typical. Since research has consistently shown that students who enter below college level graduate in greatly reduced numbers, it would appear that college graduation rates could be hurt for years to come.

I believe I can speak for all community colleges when I say that we will continue to do whatever is necessary to ensure the success of our students. While the challenges are daunting, the cost of failing is too great.

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