

STATEMENT OF SEAN A. FANELLI, PRESIDENT OF NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE, BEFORE THE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE OF THE NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY March 20, 2009

Assemblymember Glick and Members of the Higher Education Committee, I am Sean Fanelli, president of Nassau Community College. Thank you for providing me, on behalf of my fellow presidents of New York State's community colleges, this opportunity to share our views with you regarding the important role that community colleges can play in being part of the constructive solution to the problems facing students, families and the economy, generally. But before I go further, I must thank you for your support for our State's community colleges during the debate on the Governor's Deficit Reduction Plan.

As we all know, the debate on the Fiscal Year 2009-2010 budget is taking place in an environment of economic uncertainty that is uncomfortably close to what our nation last experienced eighty years ago. Family budgets are stressed as people lose their jobs. At the same time, governmental budgets are squeezed by declining revenues and by the obligation to take action to counteract the hardships caused by the recession on the lives of our residents and on the wellbeing of whole sectors of our economy. Therefore, I recognize that it is not possible to overstate the difficulty of the choices with which you are confronted.

But even amidst all of this uncertainty, what is absolutely clear is that our State's community colleges are sailing through turbulent waters, while they are also being clung to as a lifeboat by individuals who are relying on them as a source of hope and as an opportunity from which they can embark upon their futures anew. Policy analysts of all stripes recognize the role that community colleges can play in continuing to keep a high quality, higher education within the financial reach of low and middle income families. In addition, at a time when workers may need to upgrade their skills to pursue entirely different career paths, community colleges can offer them the flexibility and the opportunity to meet those needs in a manner consistent with their financial resources and their family obligations.

Just to highlight this point, I would ask permission to insert into the record an article that appeared in *Newsday* one week ago, entitled "New Life For Career." The article describes how Nassau Community College's Mortuary Science program has experienced a 20% increase in enrollment, made up of both recent high school graduates and "second careerists." In the words of one 37 year old student who had lost his job as a personal assistant, "Losing my job gave me the push. [Now] I am in a good position to go to school – and its' a good job."

It is within this economic context that the facts presented in the Governor's budget are indeed stark. For Fiscal Year 2009-2010, the Executive Budget proposes to cut community colleges by almost approximately \$46 million. In the case of Nassau Community College, this translates into a cut of approximately \$5 million, or \$270 per Full Time Equivalent students. To put this further into perspective, every dollar we lose in State aid per FTE puts almost an equal amount of pressure on tuition to make up the difference. But, of course, we know that we would risk jeopardizing our capacity to fulfill our goal of providing an affordable higher education if we were to pass on to the students, through a tuition increase, the entire impact of the loss of State aid. Moreover, the simple reality is that many, if not most, community colleges are in the same position as Nassau in that our county sponsors have, in the past, indicted a great reluctance to approve College budgets that contain within them assumptions that there will be a substantial tuition increase.

And, as I said earlier, the mission of a community college is not only to offer an affordable higher education, but also a *high quality*, higher education, as well. The spending cuts called for in the Executive Budget would severely undercut the capacity of community college to fulfill that mission. Measures that would need to be taken to compensate for cuts in State aid would include reducing course offerings and increasing class sizes. In addition, we would need to consider cutting back on high cost programs that are, nevertheless, extremely valuable to the community at large. We would also have to consider cutting back on hours that student support services are available, which would have a particularly adverse impact on those students who are struggling to juggle school with their family and employment obligations. Moreover, these cuts would come even though there is a growing need for those support services. For example, some of the students who are now enrolling at the College have been in the workforce for many years and accommodating their particular needs can be especially labor intensive. This is simply not the time to throw additional obstacles in the face of those who are just doing their best to put their careers back together.

However, I also wanted to take this opportunity to clarify a potential misconception that this increased enrollment in community colleges reduces the need for governmental assistance.

First, as I just indicated, the revenue gains from increased enrollment are partially offset by the costs associated with educating these new students.

On the one hand, to the extent that these students require greater remedial instruction, these costs are compounded.

And on the other hand, to the extent that some of these students are entering fields that are on the technological cutting edge, the educational costs are increased further due to the need to have up-to-date laboratories and even more intensive instruction. In order for workforce development programs to have a relatively speedy and pervasive impact in propelling economic growth, we need to make sure that our graduates are ready for a seamless entry into the economic engines of our communities, our State and our nation. Having the

capacity to prepare our students in that way and with that objective requires innovative approaches from college administrators and faculty. But having that capacity *also* requires the continued vibrant support from our partners in government.

For these reasons, substantial reductions in State aid can, thus, easily overwhelm the increase in revenues to the College resulting from higher enrollment.

Second, under the State funding mechanism, there is a lag of one year between any increase in enrollment and any increase in State aid that reflects that increase in enrollment.

We, of course, recognize that in this budgetary environment no entity can avoid being part of the sacrifices needed. However, I would urge that you recognize that because of the one year timing lag that is part of the State aid formula, community colleges are, *de facto*, *already* not receiving a full measure of State support commensurate our enrollment increases and the increased costs associated with them. Also our other expenses continue to rise this year, and the impact of these increased expenses has been compounded by the fact that in *last year's* State budget, community colleges did not receive any increase in the level of State aid. Therefore, I would urge you to reject the proposed cuts in the Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2009-2010 and to, instead, maintain the current level of State support for community colleges by fully funding State aid at the \$2,675 per Full Time Equivalent level.

In addition, I would urge that you reject the Governor's proposal to cut the Tuition Assistance Program, or TAP, by \$47 million. This proposal would require students to take a heavier course load in order to receive the full TAP benefit. This change would work particular hardships on the students who attend community colleges and who are, as I said, trying to balance their obligations to their teacher, their employer and their family.

Finally, I, of course, have just reviewed, from the *community colleges'* perspective, the budgetary situation that you face. Nevertheless, I believe that our *mutual* perspectives highlight the need to address the budgetary situation in a way that, instead of compounding the problem, offers a constructive solution to it. Again, Nassau Community College along with all of the community colleges of New York State stand ready to be part of THAT ***constructive solution***.