

**Assembly Standing Committee on
Higher Education
Public Hearing**

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Testimony of

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**March 20, 2009
New York, NY**

Good morning, Chairwoman Glick and committee members. I very much appreciate your time and commitment to hearing our views regarding how our 36 community colleges play a significant role as centers for educational opportunity and economic development for the State of New York.

I am Drew Matonak, President of Hudson Valley Community College in Troy, New York. The second-largest higher education institution and the largest undergraduate institution in the Capital Region, Hudson Valley offers more than 70 degree and certificate programs through four schools: Business; Engineering & Industrial Technologies; Health Sciences; and Liberal Arts and Sciences.

As Dr. Golladay indicated, demand is surging at community colleges. Students are choosing Hudson Valley in record numbers. We expect this to continue as more people turn to community colleges. So how can we do it? How can we continue to serve more students with less money? And, more importantly, how can we maintain the quality of our academic programs under our current circumstances?

In this state, there is a community college within driving distance of every citizen. Our geographic distribution, coupled with our low cost and community-focused programs, make community colleges the best economic and workforce development tool New York State has.

Just like all of our community colleges, Hudson Valley's work reaches across all socio-economic levels. We are known for providing dynamic, student-centered, comprehensive, and accessible educational opportunities. We have a reputation for seamless transferability to four-year institutions, and local employers recruit and hire Hudson Valley students, because they know that they are well-qualified workers and from the local area. The same is true for all of the community colleges that you represent.

Your community colleges are not only centers of educational opportunity, but they are drivers of our economy as well. I know that I'm preaching to the choir, because you are the leaders who truly understand the economic and workforce powerhouse of your community college.

We recognize the enormous problems confronting the State of New York due to the current global financial crisis, and we are prepared to do our part to reverse this economic downturn. With continued funding, your community colleges will play a pivotal role in the recovery of the New York state economy.

During economic downturns, community colleges are a critical gateway to higher education and retraining for thousands of New Yorkers. This is a time when we should be investing in these institutions that have such a tremendous impact upon the state economy. As you know, the Executive budget proposes cutting base state aid by 10% to the community college system.

This would have a detrimental impact on the ability of all community colleges to serve their students and communities both now and in the future. Access and affordability is our primary mission. Access to higher education will be impaired without your help. Perhaps most disturbing to me is the growing possibility that our students will bear the brunt of our economic woes. As you may recall, base state aid for the 2008-09 academic year was not increased from the prior year. That is why I respectfully request that base aid remain at the current level for all community colleges.

Community colleges are an integral part of the communities in which they reside. Community colleges have responded to the needs of businesses and individual employees in all sorts of ways. Whether it is needs assessment, specific training, or business incubator programs, the State's community colleges are finding innovative, locally-based ways to deal with workforce development.

Where there are trained workers, businesses will go. And where community colleges provide proactive education and training, economies flourish. We are the pipeline for providing the skilled workforce needed in all of our communities.

For example, at Hudson Valley two new programs were established over the past year: the Overhead Line Worker certificate, established in conjunction with National Grid, and the Photovoltaic Installation certificate, created in partnership with the New York State Energy and Research Development Authority. Both of these one-year programs grew out of a need to create timely, intensive training to fill a growing workforce demand.

And not only are community colleges supplying a trained workforce, they have a significant economic impact on their communities. Hudson Valley is a good example of the widespread economic impact of our community colleges. In the Capital Region, Hudson Valley Community College enrolls nearly 13,000 students. Over 80 percent of our 63,000 graduates remain in the Capital Region upon graduation and reside, raise their families, become community leaders, and pay taxes in our local community. At the end of the day, Hudson Valley has almost a billion dollar annual economic impact on the Capital Region. I know that Sean's and Mamie's community colleges have the same economic impact on their local communities. Just imagine. What is the collective economic impact of all of our community colleges on New York State?

Businesses around the country know that community colleges adapt dynamically to changing trends in business needs. It is expected by the communities we serve that Hudson Valley will be there for them – they count on us to change and evolve as their needs change and evolve. All of our community colleges need your continued support to be responsive to these critical needs.

Together, we need to ensure that New York's 36 community colleges are positioned to meet the future needs of your constituents and address the demands of New York State employers. With your help, we are committed to enhancing our community colleges as a significant economic engine for our local communities and the state of New York.

Thank you very much for your attention and for all that you do for the citizens of this great state.