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## Remarks at the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Education (2012)

Glenn DuBois  
*Virginia Community College System*

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## Remarks at the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Education (2012)

*This speech was delivered in the General Assembly Building on January 24, 2012.*

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**M**r. Chairman; members of the committee; ladies and gentlemen: good afternoon. I frequently remind people that our community colleges have had no better partner in its 46-year history than the General Assembly.

We are grateful for that as well as today's opportunity to discuss how we can leverage that partnership and the introduced budget to meet a goal that we all share: helping more Virginians earn a college credential.

You know, when Governor McDonnell signed the TJ21 bill into law last year, he said it was creating 6,000 new slots for Virginia college students. And he said 4,000 of those were at Virginia's Community Colleges.

While that is a small anecdote, it is a telling one – emblematic of the role our community colleges must play if Virginia is to succeed.

You can also see that what our community colleges accomplish:

- In the four years leading up to last May, your community colleges were responsible for nearly one out of every three college degrees awarded by a Virginia public institution;
- Last year, Virginia's Community College graduates accounted more than one-third of all the science, technology, engineering and mathematics degrees earned at Virginia's public higher ed institutions; and
- Your community colleges leveraged the \$3 million investment you made last year in Workforce Development instruction into job training for 75,000 Virginians and service for 8,000 Virginia employers.

We maintain a public pledge to keep our tuition and fees at less than half of the same charges at Virginia's public universities. We're currently just over one-third. Given that, and the results I just mentioned, it's easy to see how we are helping a lot of people get ahead while saving them – and taxpayers – a lot of money along the way.

Similarly, Senator Hanger has introduced legislation that would make it easier for middle-income families to benefit from the state's Two-Year College Transfer Grant program. We support that legislation and believe it could help hundreds of families every year.

### **Introduced budget**

In general, we are supportive of the introduced budget and grateful for the priority it places on higher education in general and community colleges in particular.

To date, the introduced budget has earned formal resolutions of support from the State Board for Community Colleges as well as the Virginia Foundation for Community College Education – two esteemed panels that include some of Virginia's most respected community-focused business and industry leaders.

The introduced budget continues moving our partnership in the right direction following some dire years of public funding. In the four-year period that began in 2008, Virginia's Community Colleges lost \$95 million dollars in General Fund support. At the same time, we enrolled 50,000 additional students.

To offer a broader perspective, Mr. Chairman, since the fall of 2007, Virginia's Community Colleges have accounted for 69% of the undergraduate enrollment growth at Virginia's public colleges and universities. We are proud of that record.

Our colleges were created in a spirit of innovation to address Virginia's unmet higher educational and workforce needs. When the chips are down, families use our community colleges as their personal economic recovery plan. Even in the most challenging times, we are there for them.

Virginia's Community Colleges are in the second year of an innovative reengineering initiative that is exploring everything we do and asking how can we do it better? That honest, open process is earning attention across the Commonwealth and across the country. And it is one more reminder of that innovative spirit that gave rise to our colleges.

### **Moving Forward**

In that spirit, Mr. Chairman, I would like to offer just a few thoughts about priorities that support the goal of an additional 100,000 college graduates but are not in the introduced budget: Capital Outlay remains a challenge for our institutions and the four-year universities, especially as they ramp-up our offerings in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and healthcare.

Across Virginia, we are serving students at our community colleges in buildings that are 40 to 45 years old but were built with a life expectancy of only 25 to 30 years. Nor were those campuses built with 21<sup>st</sup> century community college students in mind.

Increasingly, our student enrollments are younger and much more likely to attend full-time – remaining on campus from eight or nine in the morning until five in the evening. They are expecting things we just can't offer right now, like someplace to study between classes other than the inside of their car.

Virginia's Community College struggle with finding the right balance of full-time and part-time faculty members. Over the past decade or so, while balancing funding challenges with the need to remain affordable, we have backed-into a place where the majority of our instructors are part-time



employees. I don't question the quality of instruction those people bring to the table. We need more full-time faculty members, however. Our work to improve student retention and student success depends on people who spend their entire day on-campus. We cannot count on that from our adjunct instructors who owe most of their time and attention to their other, primary job.

I must also mention our faculty and staff salaries, which, as you know, have remained stagnant for more than four years now. As I previously mentioned, we have added more than 50,000 students over the last four years while losing \$95 million in General Fund support. The resources simply have not existed to ramp-up our faculty and staff in the same dramatic fashion that our enrollment has.

Forgive the cliché, but in very tangible ways, our people have been doing a lot more with less. I would hope that the time is drawing near that we can honor that work with even just a modest cost of living salary adjustment.

And finally, Mr. Chairman, I believe a state investment in the VCCS Career Coach program would payoff in our shared pursuit of more college graduates. Career Coaches are community college employees, who work in high schools with students, helping them carve out customized career and college plans – a task that even guidance counselors will tell you that they lack the time to do. With your help, we could continue expanding this proven and effective strategy to every high school, influencing more and more young people whose vocabulary doesn't even include the word, "College."

### **Closing**

You know, the first year we opened for business, we served 7,500 students at two colleges. This year, when you add together our academic and workforce development efforts, we will be serving more than 400,000 Virginians. We could not have that kind of impact on Virginia without the partnership that we share with you. Thank you. We are grateful for that.