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Remarks for the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Education (2017)

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Remarks for the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Education (2017)

These remarks were delivered at the General Assembly Building in Richmond, VA on January 24, 2017.

Mr. Chairman; members of the committee; good afternoon. I want to begin my remarks with a thank you. I don't know how often in this business we get to say that we changed the world, but when it comes to Virginia's New Economy Workforce Industry Credential Grants program, we are.

None of that, of course, would be possible without your leadership and support. Thanks to you, Virginia began a unique workforce training initiative predicated on businesses deciding what skills



are in high demand; reliant on community colleges meeting those needs; and certain that taxpayer dollars are spent only on results.

We have been at this only six months now. Already, we see ambitious students pursuing the credentials they previously couldn't afford; colleges offering high demand training programs they previously couldn't fill; and businesses hiring the credentialed, skilled talent they previously couldn't find. While we are not the first state to fund this type of workforce training, our approach

is new. Leaders in other states are calling to ask what exactly is going on here, and how can they do it there.

Virginia's grant program makes us a leader in workforce training.

Virginians are responding

Members of the committee, our early success is a powerful reminder of just how hungry our fellow Virginians are for an affordable, accessible opportunity to bolster their American Dream. The credentials at the heart of this program are postsecondary, industry-recognized certifications and licensures. People achieve them through short-term community college training programs in fields ranging from healthcare and information technology to manufacturing, skilled trades and logistics. The grants program is focused on specific skills that Virginia businesses say are in high demand and can lead to good jobs in growing career fields.

In just our first six months:

- Nearly 2,900 Virginians have enrolled in these programs;

- More than half of them, nearly 1,500 individuals, have completed their training; and
- So far, more than 640 have obtained their high demand credential.

You can see more detail on the one-page sheet we've shared with the committee. Last year, Virginia's Community Colleges experienced an historic year in terms of the number of people who graduated from our traditional academic degree programs. I can tell you however, without question, that our short-term training programs are our fastest-growing.

And, of course, our college presidents and workforce leaders are prioritizing that that meet what business and industry leaders say are the highest demand.

The benefits of this grants program are truly statewide. The law you passed was clear: these grants should be offered on a first-come, first-serve basis and that no single region should dominate the program.

On the back of the one-page sheet we shared with you, you can see a map that breaks-out our grant program enrollment numbers by community college service region. Northern Virginia is leading the way, following closely by Blue Ridge Community College in the Shenandoah Valley; the Richmond region with the Community College Workforce Alliance, a partnership between John Tyler and Reynolds community colleges; and Southside Virginia is off to an impressive start.

While there is strong regional diversity in who is using the grants, there is also diversity in what high demand career fields those students pursue.

- Nearly a third of the students to enroll in the program (28%) are pursuing credentials in the healthcare field;
- A similar percentage (30%) are working toward logistics-related credentials;
- A quarter are enrolled in manufacturing and welding (15%) and other skilled trades (9%);
- Information technology credentials, including cybersecurity, attracted 11% of grant students;
- And the remaining 8% are pursuing credentials in business and education.

Employment and wage data

While we are celebrating this early success, we never lose sight of the fact that these numbers are a means, not an end. The program's success will be judged ultimately in the jobs obtained and wages earned by those who enroll and complete these community college training programs.

This information, as you probably know, is gathered and collected only after the fact. We're only half-a-year in. More time is needed for this information to take shape. No one is more eager to see that data, and learn from it, than we are. The anecdotes that we hear are encouraging.

- A single mom in Roanoke lost her fulltime job eight years ago. Since then, she's been trying to raise her now 9-year-old daughter on a combination of part-time gigs. During an eventful week in December, she obtained her Certified Medical Administrative Assistant training, passed her exam and was hired to a fulltime job with benefits.

- A stay-at-home mom in Northern Virginia, who said she had, quote, “No money to spend,” end quote, was inspired to pursue a Certified Billing and Coding course. Since completing it, she was hired fulltime as an Insurance Verification Analyst at INOVA Health Systems, where she is enjoying the highest salary that she has ever earned.
- A man in Fredericksburg, who was frustrated at never being able to land a fulltime job, completed his truck driver training program in November, earned his CDL in December and is now working fulltime for American Trucking, earning close to \$20 an hour.

If I may, I would like to share one last anecdote from Southside Virginia Community College. Before last year, any Virginian who wanted to become a power line worker had to leave the state to get the training. Most went as far away as Georgia. Some were able to go to a program in North Carolina. Those students would pay an estimated \$14,000 just for the program alone. Last year, Southside Virginia Community College began a power line worker training program. In less than one year, it went from being a good idea to being a reality.

Two things really made that possible: One, Virginia’s electric cooperatives donated equipment and resources that allowed us to create the program. And two, the workforce credential grants made that program affordable for students. In its first year, 30 students enrolled in the program. After 12 weeks of training, 30 students completed the program. Of those 30 students, 29 now have full-time jobs in the industry – an industry with a statewide average salary between \$60,000 and \$70,000.

For what it’s worth, we called down to inquire about that 30th student. His instructor tells us that he’s holding out for an offer from Dominion. He’s had other job offers, mind you. But his heart is set on working for Dominion.

The governor’s \$1 million proposal

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, I would like to bring my prepared remarks to a close by asking you to support the additional \$1 million the budget introduced last month proposes to place in this year’s grants fund.

The response we are getting from Virginians, to date, is quickly overwhelming the original allocation for the first-year of this pay-for-performance program. And no one has asked us to stop. Not the businesses, who tell us that they are pleased to see training programs responding to their priorities. Not the colleges, who tell us they are thrilled to have the necessary resources to respond to those needs. Not the chambers of commerce or economic developers, who are excited to brag about the workforce those programs will create. And not the individuals, who are grateful for an affordable chance to earn a good-paying job in a high-demand field.

With that, I will introduce Dr. Craig Herndon, our Vice Chancellor for Workforce Development. He’s been our quarterback when it comes to effort and, together, we would be delighted to answer any questions you may have.