



# PENNSYLVANIA COMMISSION FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

800 North Third Street, Suite 405 • Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17102  
phone (717) 232-7584 • fax (717) 233-4723 • [www.pacommunitycolleges.org](http://www.pacommunitycolleges.org)

## STATEMENT OF THE PENNSYLVANIA COMMISSION FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

### HIGHER EDUCATION AFFORDABILITY ISSUES HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

OCTOBER 10, 2007  
HARRISBURG, PA

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Good afternoon members of the House Education Committee. On behalf of the 14 community colleges, we regret that we are not able to be with you to present our remarks in person. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to present comments in writing and for your focus on the critical issue of higher education affordability. We hope that this will be a continuing dialogue and that our community college Presidents will be able to join you in this discussion at a future hearing.

Pennsylvania's future competitiveness requires increasing the numbers of students who enter and complete postsecondary education. The number of unskilled jobs has declined steadily over the past several decades and this trend will continue. With this changing workforce, there is a greater need than ever for skilled workers – whether certifications, associate, baccalaureate, or advanced degrees. Areas of particular need are in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (or STEM as often referred to) related fields. Indeed, the 12 fastest growing occupations are technology based or tied to the health-care industry.

cruel choice between staying in a minimum wage job to pay bills rather than entering college and reducing their earning capacity in the short term.

Now to the specific legislation before the Committee today... Pennsylvania's community college leaders applaud Representative Stairs and Representative Payton for their legislation – House Bill 108 and House Bill 1722 respectively - to recognize and reward academic achievement through financial support to attend college. This is a major policy issue whose time has come and one that the Presidents of our 14 community colleges place as a PRIORITY within a new agenda for higher education in the Commonwealth.

Many other states around the country have begun such programs in one form or another. States have viewed it as a means to grant better access to higher education for their high school graduates as well as an incentive to retain students in their states. These types of merit based awards – particularly when widely publicized – encourage students to focus on academic preparation and equalizes, albeit to a point, degree attainment.

We believe it was the intent of both sponsors Representatives Stairs and Payton to include community colleges within the eligible institutions under the definitions of the legislation but that is not clear. The community colleges would respectfully request clarifying amendments to do so and to further allow a student to begin at a community college and be eligible to continue to have access to the scholarships upon transfer to another Pennsylvania four-year institution eligible under either piece of legislation.

Pennsylvania's community colleges offer honors programs and have chapters of Phi Theta Kappa – the national honor society for two-year colleges. Graduates of our community colleges have moved on to become lawyers, doctors, educators, engineers, and business leaders in their communities. They live and work in our communities and make ongoing contributions to the economic vitality of the Commonwealth.