

**Testimony of Dr. Edward Bonahue, President**  
**Suffolk County Community College**  
**to the Senate Standing Committee on Higher Education**  
**New York State Senator Toby Ann Stavisky, Chair**  
**October 27, 2021**

Madame Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity – my first time testifying as President of Suffolk County Community College. I appreciate the ability to represent my peers in the SUNY community college system.

You have asked for comment on how we can best maintain quality, equity and affordability as we move past the 18-month mark of this pandemic. Before I deliver my remarks, I wish to state, up front, that the actions implemented both at Suffolk and throughout the SUNY system since March of 2020 enabled our students and our institution to persevere through an extraordinary time of uncertainty and heightened anxiety. I remain grateful for the many contributions made by our employees and colleagues that enabled us all to transition through this period, and I want to acknowledge the many challenges that our students endured. (PAUSE)

This work and our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic is thanks in no small part to the support that last year's state budget provided, as well as all that our congressional delegation delivered for public higher education in the stimulus plans.

Each semester, Suffolk County Community College—the largest community college in the SUNY system—serves more than 20,000 for-credit and non-credit students by providing an affordable and accessible option for their higher education and workforce training needs. Over 65% of the jobs in our nation's knowledge-based economy require at least some postsecondary instruction, and so economic development agencies across the region – including the Long Island Regional Economic Development Council, the Long Island Association, and many others – look to Suffolk as a partner for attracting, retaining, and growing innovative industries that require a qualified workforce. We take our responsibility for developing that workforce very seriously.

Everyone at Suffolk is hard at work designing a learning-based culture that meets students where they are (not where we wish they were) and eliminates barriers and disparities in student access and achievement. It is clear that talent and ambition, the desire to excel, and energy and entrepreneurial spirit come in all colors, genders, shapes and sizes, and these qualities are evenly distributed among all parts of our community and, indeed, in equal parts all over the world. What has not been equally distributed is opportunity, and Suffolk will always stand in that gap as a bridge for any student seeking knowledge.

Our passion, and really the passion of all SUNY's community colleges, is to create pathways and systems that facilitate open access to educational and workforce opportunity, and student progression toward completion.

Today, Long Island is changing in the same ways that America is changing. A few weeks ago, the results of the 2020 census revealed that Suffolk County's population increased by 2%, with minority residents increasing from 28% to almost 37% of the county's population. For students from areas of Long Island that have not always been served well by public education, for students who are underrepresented in higher education, and for new Americans just arrived in this state and this country, a community college education is a beacon of opportunity and the very best place to start.

Unfortunately, as you know community colleges nationwide are seeing enrollment declines due to certain demographic changes and to an unsettled and uncertain economy. Students who register are enrolling on a part-time basis at a greater rate. In response, our college is working to diversify our funding base, establish innovative corporate partnerships, cut costs, and enhance our use of technology. These actions are more important than ever as we work to support teaching and learning in a post-pandemic environment, especially for high-demand, but high-cost programs such as healthcare and technology.

Thanks to the efforts of the Governor and State Legislature, New York continues to show a strong commitment to public higher education. Coupled with the funding received through the federal stimulus plans, the dire outlook for our colleges for the prior and current fiscal year was erased, but we all know the federal funds are only a temporary fix. Having the privilege to speak before you today, I ask your consideration of the following measures:

- You have secured a 98% floor in the current budget which has been enormously helpful..
- You took the bold step in the current budget to increase the maximum TAP grant last year, which will provide our campuses much-needed financial resources. We have joined with our colleagues in advocating the federal government to double the Pell grant, and while we do not yet know what will happen with Pell,
- Finally, I would like to call the Committee's attention to an issue that I know is a priority for Governor Hochul, and that is the need for increased funding for campus-based childcare centers for community college students. With the regional average annual cost of private childcare exceeding \$17,000 in Suffolk County, there is a critical need for affordable, quality childcare to address this significant barrier to student enrollment, retention, and graduation.

I thank you for your service and your commitment to public higher education, and I would be happy to take any questions.