



Fulton-Montgomery
Community College

Senator Carl Kruger
Legislative Office Building
Room 913
Albany, NY 12247

February 5, 2010

Dear Senator Kruger:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding the services provided by the Bridge Program at Fulton Montgomery Community College. In this time of economic crisis I recognize legislators must be informed as to the value of various programs funded through the state budget process. I appreciate the opportunity to inform you and your colleagues of the services provided through NYS Bridge programs and the Bridge Program at FM in particular.

As you are aware, the SUNY Bridge Program has been administered by the University Center for Academic and Workforce Development (UCAWD) with oversight by the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA). Through this arrangement Federal TANF funds are appropriated during the state budget process and administered by OTDA; local programs contribute the required matching funds that enable the State to draw down these Federal TANF funds. This constitutes the perfect marriage of government and education to address unique needs of working poor families and those who must turn to public assistance.

Our Bridge Program at FM addresses the needs of both Fulton and Montgomery County Departments of Social Services. During 2008 Bridge provided 5070 hours of supervised work experience to TANF clients of both counties, in 2009 that figure rose to 5313 hours. These hours assist our counties in meeting their required rates of client participation in allowable work activities while simultaneously allowing individuals on public assistance the opportunity to gain valuable work habits and general skill training to obtain and retain employment. Without these work experience hours provided by Bridge, our counties participation rates would undoubtedly drop thereby stifling the flow of Federal TANF dollars.

The Bridge Program at FM also provides job skills training to improve a participant's employability ensuring clients on public assistance have the basic skills competencies to support job entry. Additionally, Spanish speaking clients primarily from Montgomery County participate in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes facilitated in part by Rosetta Stone language learning software. This ESL component breaks a significant barrier to employment, the inability to speak and understand English. Once language skills are acquired, these clients can then seek out viable employment opportunities and break their dependence upon county assistance dollars. Vocational training opportunities coordinated through FM's continuing education department provide public assistance and low income clients with training as Certified Nurse Assistances (C.N.A.) and Home Health Aides (HHA). These entry level

healthcare positions provide a living wage for our students and supply both counties with a skilled workforce to assist hospitals and nursing facilities with a burgeoning elderly population. Without this training option for low income residents of Fulton and Montgomery counties a greater number of elderly residents might face institutionalized care sooner with fewer trained individuals to care for them in the comfort of their own homes.

Coupled with all program offering through the Bridge Program at FM is intensive case management of students. This case management includes coordination of services to break down barriers to client employment. This coordination and the community partnerships which it fosters are critical as it avoids duplication of services and maximizes Federal, State and Local assistance dollars. There is no waste in the Bridge model of operation; students reap the benefits of a program focused on assisting them with preparing for and finding employment.

From September 2008 through August 2009 the Bridge program served 468 low income, low skilled students with 122 students placed in jobs and 64 students retaining those jobs for at least 90 days. Fulton and Montgomery counties average unemployment rates during that period was among the highest in the state. Unemployment in Fulton County during December of 2008 was 8.9% rising to 10.4 in December 2009; Montgomery County did not fare much better with 8.7% and 9.7% respectively. In light of those figures, the job placements and retentions of the most difficult to employ segment of county residents secured through the Bridge Program is even more significant.

As you can see, the Bridge program model and the Bridge Program at FM greatly impacts the State and Counties TANF eligible population with greater opportunity for job placement, retention and ultimately freedom from reliance on public assistance. This lifting of the burden on an overtaxed social welfare system during these difficult economic times is essential to the fiscal health and well-being of our local counties and New York State. Thank you for allowing me to share with you the services and resources provided by SUNY Bridge Programs and The Bridge Program at FM in particular. I trust that you and your colleagues in the NYS Assembly and Senate will see the value of these proven programs as you enter into discussions surrounding the 2011 NYS Budget.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,



Jean A. Karutis
Director, Trio/Bridge Programs