

Testimony before the Education, Health,
and Environmental Affairs Committee

By Dr. DeRionne Pollard, President, Montgomery College

Miller Senate Office Building, Annapolis

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Thank you Madam Chair, our own Senator Montgomery, and all the committee members for giving me this opportunity to testify in support of SB 167.

I want to speak for a moment about how community colleges came into being. They were created because enlightened people realized that higher education should not be reserved for a few. That giving more young people - and our returning veterans - the opportunity to earn a degree was a win for all. Because both the individual and the community benefit when good jobs are filled by an educated workforce.

Fast forward to 2011. Montgomery College and our fellow colleges still hold true to a central mission—everyone deserves a college education.

How do we do it? Maryland's community colleges are the most affordable higher education option in the state. Community colleges are about half the price of a four-year public university in Maryland... that is, for those students who receive the lowest tuition rates.

There are different tuition rates even within a community college. At Montgomery College, our highest rate is close to three times that of our lowest rate.

That is why all recent graduates of Montgomery County Public Schools receive our lowest tuition rates, regardless of their place of residency. We believe in leveraging the state and county's investment in K to 12 education by providing an opportunity to attend an affordable, quality college.

Why? A high school diploma is not enough in today's innovation economy. This great state of Maryland needs all the college-educated workers it can get. Much of the job growth can be found in middle-skill jobs. There are jobs that require technology training, or lab bench skills, or health care credentials – exactly what a student can get at his community college.

The provisions laid out in SB 167 will help those students who wish to transfer and would face prohibitive costs if required to pay out-of-state tuition at a Maryland four-year university. We don't want price to mean the difference between going to college and not going at all.

We need to ensure that all Marylanders who dream of a better life achieve that dream; our state depends on it.

For me, this issue is also personal. I have a four year-old. Like many 4-year olds, my son is very concerned with what's right and wrong.

How would I explain to him that he could very well grow up in a community that does not provide educational access to everyone --- perhaps even to someone he will sit next to for the next 12 years of his compulsory education? I reject the notion that this is my Maryland. History has shown us time and time again what happens when we fail to provide equal education opportunities to all.

Instead, I choose to raise my son in a community where all have the opportunity to go to college without fear, because I know the power of higher education. I know what it has done for me and our family, and I know what it will do for him.

I want him to grow up in a state where every child who is here can have the dream that the realities of their parents' lives do not have to define their future. Finally, I want my son to live in a state where we remember that we are here because of immigrants... those who formed our nation --- a more perfect union --- as a safe haven for all immigrants who believe in the American Dream.

To deny some of our young people this opportunity—a piece of the American Dream—is beyond disheartening. It is, from a child's perspective, wrong.

So for the many children coming up through our schools, children like my Myles, expecting and dreaming of a better life, of college... let's not let them down. And on behalf of Maryland's community colleges, which remain committed to our core mission of access... please support SB 167.