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Women's Legislative Briefing
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Opening/Welcome...

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore--
And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Good afternoon! First, I thank you, for your warm welcome to this wonderful county. I am glad to be joined today by so many wonderful women.

In the poem I just read, Langston Hughes paints a vivid picture of what happens when a dream is deferred... and so he inspires

my speech today: let us pledge, together, to say no to dreams deferred.

Let us pledge, instead, to help women – and men – across this county realize their dreams. And let's acknowledge that so many dreams begin with an education.

And that is why I'm excited for the opportunity to talk to you today about Montgomery College... *your* community college. A place where dreams are not deferred.

First though, let me thank the Commission for Women and its director, Judith Vaughan-Prather, for inviting me.... We are proud to call Judith an alumna. I imagine that some of you may also be part of our vast network of MC alumni.

How many of you have attended Montgomery College? Has someone in your family attended? Good.... I'd love to hear your experience. I hope that our college made a difference in your life, in the lives of your family members. I hoped it helped you realize a dream... or put you on the path to that realization.

We should make a difference. Because here is what I know about community colleges:

Community colleges have the power to change the trajectory of an individual; transform the quality of life for a family; and enhance the intellectual, economic, and cultural essence of a community.

For me, it is an exciting time to lead a community college. Community colleges are essential to a thriving economy. To our nation's future success. And closer to home, we are essential to our state and our local communities. To a student's potential to realize a dream of a better life.

Since my arrival at Montgomery College, I've shared the message that it's time to celebrate the transformative power of our community college.... to throw open our arms to ensure that every person receives a college education. Because at a community college, we serve both the "haves" and the "have-nots." We pride ourselves on being inclusive; on being there for every student who needs us.

As I said at my inauguration last fall, my vision is for Montgomery College to become the most relevant community college in the country, by meeting the needs of our students and our community. Our college should be as meaningful to the lives and goals of our students, employers, and community as we can possibly be.

And that is what I want to talk about today....the ways Montgomery College is already changing lives and impacting our community – including thousands of women - every year. I want to talk about the challenges we encounter in our quest to be even more relevant to each student and our community. And finally, I'd like to talk about the future, about the collective impact we can all have on this county, working together.

First: Educate Audience about Montgomery College
(background; areas of special interest to women)

First, let me share some background on Montgomery College with you.

We enroll over 60,000 students a year. Thousands of students enroll in our non-credit Workforce Training and Continuing Education unit. These are students who take everything from early childcare education courses to continuing education for realtors.

We're one of the largest providers of undergraduate education in the state: last fall there were over 26,000 students in credit programs at MC. And more than half of them were women.

Behind every enrollment figure lie countless individual student stories. I'd like to share two of those with you: the stories of Marcia Williams and Usa Bunnag.

First, Marcia:

Marcia Williams came to MC with two major challenges: she was visually impaired, and she never finished high school. Yet Marcia earned her GED last year through the College's Adult ESOL and Literacy-GED Program. She worked closely with her instructor to ensure her vision challenges did not slow her

progress. In fact, Marcia's ability to persevere and excel in the classroom won her a student award from a statewide association of adult educators.

Marcia moved successfully from Montgomery College to culinary school and then to an internship. Last spring Marcia opened her very own business, a small food shop serving federal workers in Rockville. And it is only the start... as Marcia says, "determination, hard work, and a goal are all you need!" We are very proud of Marcia's accomplishments.

Then, there's Usa Bunnag...

Usa Bunnag enrolled at MC as a young mother with a full-time job; like many students, she attended part-time for five years. Usa went on to earn a doctorate in dental surgery from Howard University. But she didn't stop there - a successful dentist, Usa went on to found Smiles on Wings - a nonprofit providing dental services and more to remote villages in her native Thailand. She was recognized with a national outstanding alumni award by the American Association of Community Colleges.

Two students with two very different stories. What they had in common was the fact that both of them met their goals and found success.

There are an incredible number of programs and efforts aimed at helping women shape their own success stories at Montgomery

College. I thought about how I might share some of those with you without simply reciting a laundry list of programs.

I thought we'd narrow the discussion to an important area of study: Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. Women and minorities are under-represented in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math – commonly known as STEM– and there are a number of efforts underway to expand STEM education and career opportunities for women.

Now, let's talk about some of those STEM programs using a hypothetical student, Marie. Let me share some background on Marie... while hypothetical, some of it may sound strikingly familiar to many young women you know. No one in Marie's family has attended college. Marie attends a Montgomery County middle school and is benefiting from challenging coursework – but what's next? What's a good way to get Marie interested in college? To spark her interest in an exciting field of study?

Hopefully, Marie connects with the Commission for Women, who are strong supporters of Montgomery College's GURL Power camp. With financial support from the Commission, Marie might attend our GURL Power camp one summer in middle school. Marie finds that she enjoys designing digital graphics and websites.

I hope we'd see Marie back at MC on Sonya Kovalevsky Day, an effort that brings promising 8th grade girls and their middle school teachers to the Rockville Campus. Students and teachers hear from successful women working in STEM fields and are treated to stimulating STEM workshops.

Marie realizes she enjoys math and science. She loads up on those classes at her public high school. She dreams of college, but since no one in her family has attended college, she's not exactly sure what's involved... Luckily, she does know about Montgomery College, based on her past experience and on recent meetings she has had with her counselor and an MC recruiter who visits her school regularly. Perhaps she takes a Montgomery College course offered at her high school, or comes to one of our campuses as an early placement student.

Here's the really exciting news! Marie becomes the first person in her family to enroll in college, choosing – you guessed it - Montgomery College. The odds were good she would choose us: Montgomery College is the most popular college choice among MCPS high school students who choose to stay in Maryland for college. In fact, MC enrolls the most number of graduates from every MCPS high school. Every one of them, from Whitman to Kennedy, from Gaithersburg to BCC.

Perhaps students come to us for the small class size and outstanding faculty. Perhaps cost is a major consideration. MC is nearly half the price of a public four-year, and substantially less than private colleges.

Now, let's get back to Marie. Once enrolled, she may also qualify for need-based financial aid.. or a scholarship funded by one of our incredibly supportive community groups or donors.

Next, Marie needs to decide on an area of study. Montgomery College offers a host of associate degree programs. Those include both career programs – like nursing - and transfer-oriented curricula like engineering, mathematics, computer science and the like. Marie is drawn to engineering—an excellent choice.

Marie may benefit from a program at MC funded by the National Science Foundation. The project promotes full-time enrollment, academic achievement, and successful transfer and completion of a bachelor's degree in engineering by providing scholarships. Marie could also boost her chances of success by participating in activities that were developed through a FIPSE grant, Project Portal to Success in Engineering, another project with the objective of increasing the number of women and minorities in engineering programs.

Hopefully Marie will have time for some student clubs, like the WEST club, which invites successful female scientists and engineers to encourage and mentor students. The club also organizes engineering workshops, seminars, and field trips.

Marie can also utilize tutoring services through the college's Math/Science Centers. To gain relevant job experience, she can seek an internship placement with a local engineering firm, like Bechtel.

Once she successfully completes her coursework at Montgomery College, what's next for Marie? There's a good chance she'll transfer.

Like Marie, many students enroll at Montgomery College with plans to transfer to a four-year college or university. In a recent year, over 4,000 students transferred to a 4-year institution. Montgomery College has numerous transfer articulation agreements, with the goal of ensuring our students transfer seamlessly from community college to a 4-year college or university. Like many of our engineering transfers, Marie may transfer to the engineering department at the University of Maryland College Park or one of the other highly regarded engineering schools that enjoy working with MC transfers, like Georgia Tech or even MIT.

Her friends may transfer to the nearby Universities at Shady Grove (USG), where the upper division coursework ranges from Business to Information Systems. Or, they may choose to go out of state, to a private college like Mount Holyoke.

After leaving MC, Marie is likely to go on to great things – the data shows that our students do as well as students who begin as freshmen in the School of Engineering at the University of Maryland. Our women graduates often choose to live and work in the area, some area employers include Bechtel, the FDA, and Goddard Space Center.

There is also the possibility that Marie will serve as a role model for others in her family and community.... folks for whom college was once a far-off dream, might realize how attainable and accessible it can be...

Marie, as I indicated, is a hypothetical student, created to showcase a variety of our programs. But I can assure you, there are many such students out there like Marie – students who may be the first in their family to attend college. Students whose lives will surely be bettered by attainment of a college degree or credential. Students like alumna Andrea White, who went on to become an executive vice president at Clark Construction, overseeing projects like FedEx Field and the Washington Convention Center.

But as much as those students need us, we need them too. Why? There is a national consensus that an educated workforce not only lifts people out of poverty; it is key to maintaining our standing in the world, the key to the very future of our country. For in just a decade, the U.S. has fallen from first place to twelfth place in the proportion of young people with a college degree. In short, we need more women like Andrea to study engineering, math and science....

Challenges (Access/Affordability, Budget, Completion)

I want to talk next about some of the challenges that lie ahead for us as a college, and as a community.

First, let's discuss access and college affordability. In a community as affluent as parts of Montgomery County are, it's easy to overlook the fact that many in our community face economic hardship. Let's talk about our county:

- It's a community where the next generation of college-goers has incredible racial, ethnic and income diversity;
- Where nearly 30 percent of public schoolchildren rely on Free and Reduced Meals at their schools each day;
- Where 13 percent of public school students are enrolled in English for Speakers of Other Languages, or ESOL, courses;
- And according to a recent analysis, it's a place where economic security comes with a high cost; a place where a family of four needs around \$100,000 to live comfortably without government assistance.¹
- Unfortunately, it's a place where a number of families don't reach that threshold.

That's the reality of Montgomery County today. That's challenge number one: to ensure all our community members have access to good-paying jobs that can keep them financially afloat.

¹ Wider Opportunities for Women report, 2010.

Now, here's some good news: unlike many parts of the country, we can expect real job growth over the next ten years.

Last month I had the opportunity to meet Stephen Fuller, an expert on employment trends in our area and the director of the Center for Regional Analysis at George Mason University.

Dr. Fuller predicts 759-thousand new jobs will be created in the next decade here in the Washington metro area. Again, that's 759-thousand brand-new jobs!

And what are the education levels needed for those jobs? More than half – 56% - require a post-secondary award, an associate's degree, or a bachelor's degree.... State data shows a similar need: Maryland needs workers for the knowledge based economy --- scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs -- as well as electricians, nurses, surgical techs, fire fighters and the like.

So our challenge – as both a college and a community – is to ensure that everyone in our community who can benefit from a college education has the opportunity to obtain one. Has the opportunity to seek out those good jobs.

And if we don't fulfill our mission and help prepare this skilled workforce? Well, job growth without skilled and qualified employees to fill those jobs means a stagnant economy at best.

And while this innovation economy certainly needs more STEM graduates, every employer will tell you they also need critical

thinkers, team players, and good communicators. They need the ongoing skills training that MC offers.

It's exciting that we are part of the solution, but we face challenges in trying to deliver the promise of a college education. First, there is the very serious issue of the budget.

Our elected officials have warned that everyone will feel the impact of declining revenues and ongoing budget shortfalls. Montgomery College already felt the impact of \$12 million in state and county budget cuts last year. Such cuts can have real repercussions for MC, impacting the number of students we can accommodate, the number of faculty we can hire, the technology resources we can provide.... As well as the scholarships and financial aid required by our neediest students. I would add that state proposals to shift the cost of retirement benefits to the counties not only impact the schools, it directly impacts the college's operating budget.

At the same time we face budget challenges, we have a major new initiative to implement. There is a national movement to improve college completion rates. As I noted earlier, the U.S. has fallen from first to 12th in its share of young adults (25-34) with post-secondary degrees.

In response, Maryland community colleges have signed the "Promise to Act," a pledge to increase the number of degrees awarded by nearly two-thirds by 2025.

At Montgomery College, we will need to improve our graduation rate substantially over the next 15 years to meet the state goal.

So both access AND success are of utmost importance. And let me add, the need to ensure access and success applies to *all* students. At Montgomery College, we believe that all recent graduates of Montgomery County Public Schools should have the same opportunity to attend college. That is why we offer all recent graduates of MCPS high schools the lowest tuition rate at Montgomery College... we know our institution changes the lives of our students, their families, and their communities.

For let's not forget our end goal: preparing all of our students for those new jobs of the future, which will contribute to the economic health of our region and stronger communities. For in order to meet the workforce needs of our county, more minorities and women must have access to those high demand STEM fields. We also need graduates across all disciplines with good communication and writing skills.

So yes, we have a full plate in front of us -- from completion goals and workforce preparation to budget challenges. As I've heard our governor say, we've got "a new normal" to contend with.

The way we choose to respond to this new normal is crucial to our success. We may not be able to control every challenge and pressure we face, but we can control whether we choose to take an active or a passive approach.

(Share story of how you grew to understand the difference)

Conclusion/Vision Going Forward

You might have guessed it – Montgomery College is going to be active.

Why? Because your community college has never been more important. With every degree, certificate, industry certification and new skill attained, our students can become more economically secure.

In fact, students who earn an associate's degree from Montgomery College, when compared to those workers with only their high school diplomas, earn 593-thousand-dollars more in salary over a lifetime. Think about it: an additional half-million-dollars, just for earning an associate's degree. With more economic security, there is greater civic participation and fewer societal costs. It's truly a win-win.

Now how do we get there?

We start at the beginning. Montgomery College is an open access college. We welcome everyone who could benefit from college, no matter a student's background, age, or skill set. No matter their country of origin.

How do we ensure that accessibility?

First, we ensure that we remain affordable – this is where public support of community colleges is so essential, as are the efforts of our foundation board to raise funds for scholarships. It’s essential that we advocate for the necessary resources for our students, because what we do here is too important not to.

It’s also important that the state and county continue to support important new science buildings on our campuses, including renovations of Science East at our Rockville Campus and a new Bioscience Building at Germantown. We saw what happened after we completed the new Health Sciences Center and Student Services Building at the Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus – you build it, and they will come. We thank our elected officials for making these important investments; for your vision and recognition that we are crucial to preparing our region’s future workforce, and for understanding that we need modern facilities to do so.

It is crucial too that we partner with you, our community, on outreach – on connecting every person who can benefit from a college education with Montgomery College. That we break down any barriers that might prevent a student from enrolling in the first place. That we oppose legislation that would seek to “otherize” members of our community.

Montgomery College’s first message must be clear: our doors are open and we welcome you. We value you.

But providing access is only the first step.

We will be fully relevant to even more students if we can help them see the value of attaining a degree or credential. Part of that means working with our community partners – employers and the four-year colleges in our region – to incentivize the associate’s degree. We need employers to seek out associate’s degree graduates, to give bonuses or additional benefits to employees who earn their associate’s degrees. And we need universities to give additional scholarships and greater support to the associate’s degree holder.

Meanwhile, the college is turning to its own experts – our faculty and staff – to develop new and innovative ways to improve student success by embracing research and development. With private dollars we’ve created an innovation fund, aimed at creating sustainable, systemic, intentional organizational improvements at Montgomery College. I’m excited to watch our faculty and staff move into action and shape what completion looks like at MC.

I am optimistic as we move forward; as Montgomery College takes an active approach. I have to be. Because there are serious repercussions if we don’t take action: rising poverty and a growing divide between the haves and have-nots. For while a high school diploma is an essential first step to a brighter future, it is simply not enough in today’s economy to earn a living wage.

But it doesn’t have to be that way. As I said earlier: community colleges are potentially the most transformative institutions in contemporary America. We can bridge the divide with post

secondary education --- a degree, a certificate, training, and an opportunity to transfer.

This is our moment to be fully relevant. To respond to the broad goals of the state and national completion agenda, while understanding that the greatest successes at Montgomery College are accomplished student by student. By agreeing that their dreams will be deferred.

At the end of the day, I hope that every student who attended MC says “I met my goals at Montgomery College - and I had a phenomenal experience.”

And that is as successful as we can possibly be.

Thank you.