



September 13, 2021

Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee

Next Generation Firefighters Hearing



Community College of Allegheny County | Community College of Beaver County | Bucks County Community College
Butler County Community College | Delaware County Community College | Erie County Community College of PA
HACC, Central Pennsylvania's Community College | Lehigh Carbon Community College | Luzerne County Community College
Montgomery County Community College | Northampton Community College | Pennsylvania Highlands Community College
Community College of Philadelphia | Reading Area Community College | Westmoreland County Community College



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The Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony to the Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee regarding the need to strengthen the Commonwealth's emergency services workforce and the critical role community colleges play in training for these life-saving careers and callings.

Community colleges, established under Article XIX-A of the Pennsylvania Public School Code, collectively serve more than a quarter of a million students annually and are the largest provider of public postsecondary education in the Commonwealth. For more than 50 years in a variety of educational settings and across various delivery systems, the colleges have demonstrated agility and flexibility in designing and offering academic and workforce programming to meet the needs of the students, employers, and communities.

Pennsylvania's community colleges are uniquely positioned and eager to work with policymakers to address the gaps in the Commonwealth's emergency services workforce, including upscaling existing and creating new training programs as need dictates and funding allows. Emergency services are essential to Pennsylvania and community colleges are committed to working with their educational partners and local, county, and state governments to ensure that the Commonwealth's communities have a well-prepared emergency services workforce.

Pennsylvania's community colleges have provided training for the Commonwealth's firefighters and emergency services personnel for decades, including programs for secondary school students in partnership with school districts and career and technical schools. These programs play an important role in developing a robust and highly qualified emergency services workforce for the Commonwealth.

However, community colleges can do – and have done – more. Prior to 2005, Pennsylvania's community colleges received funding that allowed them to offer a wider array of quality, affordable public safety training for emergency services. Under the previous training and funding model, thousands of individuals participated in credit and noncredit programming that qualified them to serve their communities in these essential careers and volunteer positions.

However, in 2005, funding changes significantly increased the cost of offering these programs, resulting in declining enrollments and some program closures. While some community colleges have been able to

continue offering firefighting and EMS training programs, they face significant challenges in doing so. For example, students must be trained on up-to-date equipment, a considerable and consistent expenditure for the colleges to undertake without support.

Undeterred, Pennsylvania's community colleges still provide firefighter and EMS training to tens of thousands and continue to explore innovative and research-based practices to increase the number of trained firefighters and emergency personnel across the Commonwealth.

However, career pathways are critical for ensuring a pipeline of prepared workers, something that Senate Bill 83 can begin to address. SB 83 would create and potentially fund three pilot programs across the Commonwealth to train secondary students as volunteer firefighters. Pennsylvania community colleges already engage in these types of training programs, which could be immediately expanded with the funding that SB 83 could provide.

As the General Assembly considers this issue of a decline in firefighters and EMS workers, the Commission recommends the following:

- Leveraging the experience and expertise of Pennsylvania's community colleges to achieve an efficient and cost-effective training solution that addresses the emergency services workforce shortage.
- Upscaling current, successful training models offered by community colleges to utilize across the Commonwealth.
- Offering financial resources for firefighter and EMS training, in addition to the existing operating and capital funding support provided to the colleges by the Commonwealth.

The attached testimony highlights firefighter and EMS training programs offered by Westmoreland County Community College, Butler County Community College, Community College of Allegheny County, Community College of Beaver County, Bucks County Community College and HACC, Central Pennsylvania's Community College. With flexible financial resources, community colleges have the ability to expand these programs to train a pipeline of well-prepared firefighters and EMS workers.

Thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony to the Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee regarding the need to strengthen the Commonwealth's emergency services workforce. With additional resources, community colleges are well positioned and eager to train future generations of Pennsylvania heroes.

Pennsylvania Community Colleges offering firefighter and EMS programming:

- Community College of Allegheny County*
- Community College of Beaver County*
- Bucks County Community College*
- Butler County Community College*
- Delaware County Community College
- HACC, Central Pennsylvania's Community College*
- Lehigh Carbon Community College
- Luzerne County Community College
- Westmoreland County Community College*

**College-specific testimony attached.*

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**Dr. Tuesday Stanley, President, Westmoreland County Community College and
Vice Chair, Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges**

Good morning Chairman Stefano, Chairwoman Muth and all the members of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee. My name is Tuesday Stanley, President of Westmoreland County Community College and Vice Chair of the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you how Westmoreland is working to ensure that our Public Safety Training Center (PSTC) continues to meet the needs of our communities in Southwestern Pennsylvania and beyond, in the area of Firefighter Training and Emergency Services.

Westmoreland County Community College serves Westmoreland, Indiana and Fayette counties and is located in the Southwestern region of the state. We have our main campus in Youngwood, Westmoreland County and we have seven centers with one located in Indiana County and one in Fayette County. In the town of Smithton, Westmoreland County, our Public Safety Training Center is home to a variety of credit and continuing education programs that include:

- Firefighting
- Rescue Training
- Emergency Medical Services
- Hazardous Materials Training
- Law Enforcement
- Police Academy
- Lethal Weapons Programs

The PSTC is a premiere source for keeping the region's first responders up-to-date with essential skills by providing realistic fire service, rescue, hazardous materials, emergency medical services and law enforcement training. The PSTC is situated on a 167-acre site that is isolated but very accessible by Interstate 70, the Pennsylvania Turnpike and airports. The facility features a two-story Class A burn building and six-story tower with an attached residential building that simulates industrial, commercial and residential structures. Also on site are an administration/classroom building, outdoor firing range, rope rescue and confined space rescue areas, structural collapse area, chlorine railcar, ponds and additional training props.

As the President of Westmoreland County Community College, I am here to speak on behalf of Westmoreland and the important role these training courses play in the development of the Commonwealth's emergency services workforce in our region. Our college and many other community colleges in Pennsylvania are uniquely positioned and have been for some time, to help with the state's decline in the firefighter and EMS workforce.

Since 2016, the PTSC at Westmoreland has continued to see growth in the demand for classes in the firefighting, medical, rescue and hazardous materials. From 2016 to 2021, we have seen our number of classes grow from 147 to 486. This past year, in an effort to increase access and provide needed resources, we offered classes in our New Kensington location in collaboration with the City of New Kensington's SWAT Training building. Additionally, as the need increases in the Murrysville area, we hope to further expand our services. As demand grows, we have ongoing discussions on how we can meet the needs of the communities.

Westmoreland County Community College recommends the General Assembly appropriate dedicated funding to community colleges to continue and expand firefighter and emergency services training opportunities in the Commonwealth. With additional funding, Westmoreland could:

- Increase recruitment and access to recruitment materials. As volunteer fire departments struggle to recruit and retain firefighters, Westmoreland, and our sister community colleges could assist fire departments with access to recruitment materials. Fire departments struggle to recruit and retain firefighters and community colleges could help in this area. This type of expansion in curriculum could have long term success for the Commonwealth. The decrease in turnover increases retention and cuts down on the costs required to recruit.
- Increase access and reduce barriers for volunteer fire departments through the expansion of online training for local fire and emergency services departments. As the state continues their efforts to expand high-speed internet access to all of the Commonwealth, online training along with a strong hands-on supplement, will allow more departments to access training thereby improving skills and decreasing turnover.
- Additional funding would be instrumental in recruiting K12 students who do not participate in career and technical education into serving their communities through their local volunteer fire department. Additional funding could aid in helping them secure approved instructors to train these students. Additionally, this funding will help develop programs that properly support fire officer training regardless of their educational pathway.

Again, I wish to thank the committee for their time today. It has been an honor to speak in front of you today in relation to helping grow the firefighter and emergency services workforce in the Commonwealth. In addition, I would like to express our support for the work by Chairman Stefano, Chairwoman Muth and all the members of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee. We will continue to work with our fellow community colleges on improvements and successful outcomes for all our students.

Thank you.

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**Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee
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Lisa M. Campbell, Dean of Workforce Development, Butler County Community College

Good morning Chairman Stefano and members of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee. My name is Lisa Campbell, and I proudly serve as the Dean for Workforce Development at Butler County Community College. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding our Firefighter training programs and Next Generation Firefighters.

Butler County Community College (BC3) serves approximately 20,000 credit and noncredit students from its main campus in Butler Township, five regional campus locations, distance education, and through our workforce development and lifelong learning divisions. Under the leadership of our President, Dr. Nicholas C. Neupauer, BC3 met the call to educate those in underserved areas throughout our region. BC3 has campus locations in Armstrong, Lawrence, Mercer, and Jefferson counties, along with an additional campus in Butler County located in Cranberry Township. The college provides additional educational and training programs throughout several counties in western Pennsylvania.

BC3 is proud to serve our military veterans in their pursuit of an education. The College was designated as a Military Friendly School in 2013 by Victory media and has earned this status each year since. The Veterans Office at BC3 serves as a liaison between enrolled veterans and dependents of veterans and the US Department of Veterans Affairs. More than 70 veterans of the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps and Navy were enrolled at BC3 in the spring 2021 semester. More than half were full-time students. The College also offers two emergency funds for our veterans, created by two American Legion posts in the Butler area intended to help BC3 student-veterans address unexpected expenses and continue their education.

BC3's Public Safety Training departments have an extended footprint for training in approximately 27 counties, which include Cameron, Clearfield, Clinton, Elk, and Jefferson. The College's Public Safety training departments provide fire/hazmat training programs and EMS training programs conducted on our main campus in Butler, through many partner locations, and at onsite facilities for personalized training needs.

Butler County Community College's EMS department is accredited by the PA Department of Health, Bureau of EMS. This department offers Emergency Medical Responder (EMR), Emergency Medical

Technician (EMT), Advanced Emergency Medical Technician (AEMT) programs and ACLS, ITLS, PALS, CPR, First Aid and Phlebotomy.

BC3's fire/hazmat training department provides training to municipal fire departments, both career and volunteer, to equip individuals to perform their job in a safe and efficient manner. The college is proud to conduct training at the campus's thirteen-acre Public Safety Training Facility (PSTF), offering state of the art training props and equipment to support first responder training. Our PSTF offers a burn building, fire training tower, 4-acre pond, three fire trucks, propane fire stations, a tanker truck and railroad car, and confined space training props which support fire training, industrial fire brigade and safety training, and confined space training programs. The fire/hazmat department of BC3 trains approximately 9,000 individuals and delivers 550 classes per year in this area.

The fire/hazmat department of the college offers over 100 State Fire Academy accredited courses, instructed by State accredited fire instructors, and provide personalized courses meeting specific needs of individual fire departments. BC3 is also a Pennsylvania State Fire Academy approved test site for Pro-Board-IFSAC (International Fire Service Accreditation Congress) certification for Firefighter I, Firefighter II, Hazmat Awareness, Hazmat Operations, Fire Service Instructor 1, Diver Operator Pumper, with a desire to add more in the future.

In addition to our classes and certification programs offered through the fire/hazmat training department, BC3 offers academic programs to support our first responders. The College has two workplace certificate programs in Emergency Services – Fire Service Option Certificate and Emergency Services – EMS Option Certificate. For those in EMS, the college offers an Associate in Applied Science degree in Emergency Services – EMS Option, preparing students for an entry-level position in the pre-hospital and clinical health care environments.

Butler County Community College's fire/hazmat training department has partnered with several regional fire associations. These include, Butler County Fire Chiefs Association, Warren County Fireman's Association, Tri-County Fire School, Crawford Venango Fire School Committee, Beaver County Firefighters Association, and Cranberry Township VFC PSTF.

The college is aware that recruitment and retention has been, and continues to be, an issue for all fire departments around the region. We support our area's fire departments by offering quality training programs and certifications as cost efficient and convenient as possible. We offer our Entry Level program in a modular format to allow individuals and departments to register for only the specific courses needed for training at that time. We offer training in various locations and times to support each unique fire department. The majority of our programs are delivered onsite at locations convenient to fire companies in their area. We have established several partnerships with regional fire associations, as mentioned, which also helps us to reduce the cost of training, and we began to address the shortage of firefighters years ago through a collaborative community approach.

In 2015, BC3 began to address the critical need for firefighters through an effort to help recruit and retain volunteer firefighters in Butler County. Collaboration between Butler County Commissioners,

Cranberry Township Community Chest (a non-profit to actively support community projects), and BC3 set a goal to raise \$500,000 to purchase training trailers for training and community education, and to establish funding for educational scholarships for firefighters. Because of a successful campaign, two training trailers were purchased and a scholarship fund was created through the BC3 Education Foundation. The scholarship fund was established for full or part-time students, who are an active or will be an active firefighter enrolled in any credit program, to apply for a \$500 scholarship per semester.

This successful campaign has expanded scholarship opportunities to allow for funding for non-credit training programs for Butler County First Responders. Training programs for county first responders include fire Entry-Level classes and certifications, along with CPR/First Aid, Emergency Medical Responder, and Emergency Medical Technician certifications.

Because of BC3's broad footprint of serving 27 counties for fire training, we realize barriers for recruitment vary throughout the area. Funding for training remains the largest challenge. With the decline of volunteer firefighters, each department is required to do more, sometimes cover more areas, with less manpower and less funding for adequate training and equipment. In some areas, more focus has been given to fund-raising. We feel funding for training is essential for our fire companies to ensure firefighters are equipped to do more.

BC3's fire/hazmat training department support on-line training programs. We recognize the State Fire Academy has moved some classes or portions of classes online to create a more convenient means of training, limiting travel to hands-on portions of training only. Going forward, we feel online classes should continue to grow and hybrid type training models be offered as State accredited courses. We do believe technology is extremely important to this move forward, ensuring broadband is accessible in the rural areas, and the proper equipment is provided to our fire companies and training providers for delivery.

We also recognize that there may be a gap between instructors who currently train in traditional classrooms or face-to-face environments and training using different online platforms and technology. We feel this could be a barrier to moving online and hybrid training opportunities forward, and encourage consideration given to training dollars appropriated for instructor training.

The college's fire/hazmat department works with the fire departments to train those youth interested in fire service. This year, BC3 has entered into a pilot program with Leechburg High School in Armstrong County to deliver the Entry Level program to interested students as an after-school club program. The classes will run once a week for two hours. This program is supported by Armstrong County Department of Public Safety who will be registering participants, if needed, under Leechburg Fire Department and will cover all expenses. Should this pilot program be successful, we believe we will have a model to use in other high school settings as well.

Butler County Community College recommends the General Assembly appropriate dedicated funding to community colleges to continue and expand fire fighter training opportunities in the Commonwealth. With additional funding, Butler County Community College could provide additional training to first

responders throughout our region without cost to individuals or fire companies, allowing fire companies to focus on necessary items such as new equipment and recruitment programs. We believe our outreach can continue to serve our region by increasing the skills necessary for first responders to be prepared to do their job safely.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Chairman Stefano and the rest of the committee members here today for providing me the opportunity to speak to you about Butler County Community College's Public Safety Training departments. It has been an honor. We look forward to our continued collaboration with our State and County officials, the State Fire Academy, and the other Community Colleges in the Commonwealth to remove barriers for our Public Safety professionals.

Thank you.



OUR GOAL IS YOUR SUCCESS.

Workforce Development

**COMMUNITY COLLEGE
OF ALLEGHENY COUNTY**
CCAC West Hills Center
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Oakdale, PA 15071
ccac.edu

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**Rick Hilinski, Assistant Director Public Safety Institute,
Community College of Allegheny County**

Good morning, Chairpersons Stefano and Muth, and members of the PA Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. As Southwestern Pennsylvania’s preeminent provider of career education and training—serving one out of every three adults in Allegheny County—the Community College of Allegheny County plays a vital role in training firefighters and other emergency services professionals. And with 92% percent of our graduates choosing to live and work in the region, a CCAC education remains a great investment for the residents of Pennsylvania.

My name is Rick Hilinski, and I am the assistant director for CCAC’s Public Safety Institute, which is a part of the college’s Workforce Development Division. I have been involved in emergency services since becoming a junior firefighter at 14 years of age, working on behalf of my neighborhood volunteer department and rising to my current rank of Fire Chief. I was employed by the City of Pittsburgh as a paramedic in the Rescue Division for 13 years before joining CCAC’s Public Safety Institute, where I’ve held my present position for the last 24 years. At one time, the institute was the largest provider of paramedics in the Commonwealth, graduating more than 150 paramedics per year.

This past fiscal year 2020–21, the institute ran 372 classes at 114 different locations and conducted in excess of 146,500 instructional contact hours for more than 6,000 students during the pandemic. We offer the 184-hour, entry-level fire training program and numerous other fire/rescue classes for individual fire departments as well as groups of firefighter candidates from the South Hills Council of Government (COG), CharWest COG, and the Washington County Firemans Association. We also cosponsor with the Allegheny County Fire Academy many of their programs. In addition, we offer onsite training and education to individual fire departments and EMS agencies predominately in Allegheny and Washington counties, as well as for some departments in Fayette and other counties.

CCAC also offers scholarships to residents of Allegheny County who are either current volunteers or who join a volunteer fire department in Allegheny County through the FireVEST scholarship program. This program, which is operated in partnership with the County Executive and the Allegheny County Fire Academy, provides scholarships to individuals so that they can earn their associate degree at CCAC in exchange for a five-year service commitment as a volunteer firefighter within Allegheny County. Since January 2009, more than 434 Allegheny County volunteer firefighters representing 151 out of 192 (79%) of Allegheny County volunteer fire departments have participated in this recruitment and retention program, whose purpose is to help keep Allegheny County’s volunteer fire companies staffed, well-trained and ready to respond.

We recommend that funding be allocated to community colleges on an annual basis so that CCAC and Pennsylvania’s other community colleges can provide training and education to volunteer and career agencies. Since the tuition we receive only covers a small portion of what it costs to run our programs, many individuals don’t appreciate the true cost of the training we provide. With annual funding, we can work with our training partners and formulate a yearly plan and budget to satisfy their annual training requirements. Yearly funding will also enable departments to use funds earmarked for training, rather than those from fundraising, in order to ensure firefighters have access to the latest and most effective firefighting technologies and safety protocols to protect the communities they serve.



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Workforce Development

**COMMUNITY COLLEGE
OF ALLEGHENY COUNTY**
CCAC West Hills Center
1000 McKee Road
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ccac.edu

Many might wonder, if training is so critical to fire departments, why don't they absorb these costs? The truth of the matter is that there is already a heavy cost paid by these departments. We press for professional credentials, but we don't provide funding for departments or individuals to obtain the required training, nor do we cover the cost of the certification exams. We ask our volunteer firefighters to fundraise for their equipment, utilities and other bills, in between responding to calls and conducting weekly in-house training, so should we not provide them with the funding to be able to adequately train their departments and protect the public's safety? And while grant funds can help, the need far exceeds the amount of money that is available.

For these reasons, CCAC recommends the General Assembly appropriate dedicated funding to community colleges to continue and expand firefighter training opportunities in the Commonwealth. With additional funding, CCAC could offer training programs to accommodate fire departments that are currently unable to meet the class size minimum. Departments could also train on more advanced equipment. In addition, for minimal cost, we could once again offer a training weekend where local, state and national instructors are brought in to provide experienced firefighters from across the state with additional hands-on training and instruction. Programs of this caliber are currently charging \$300 a day per member, which is well outside the financial capabilities of most volunteer departments.

Thank you, Chairpersons Stefano, Muth, and members of the PA Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee for your support of emergency services and community colleges across the state. I appreciate the opportunity to appear here today, and I look forward to working with you to keep our communities safe. I will now answer any questions you may have.



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Written Testimony

Dr. Roger W. Davis

President, Community College of Beaver County

Community College of Beaver County (CCBC) serves a population of 162,623 people and a community that includes 50 fire departments and stations. Clearly, the next generation of firefighters resides here and with funding restored, the College can provide the training they need.

With the elimination of FTE based funding for Pennsylvania's community colleges in 2005, the funds available for firefighting training became greatly limited. As a result, in 2013, CCBC began requiring fire departments to cover the cost of training, leading to a significant decline in enrollment.

Currently, all of Beaver County's fire departments travel out of county for classes while CCBC continues to provide EMT and First Responder training for Beaver County's firefighters.

We can do so much more.

That is why CCBC recommends the General Assembly appropriate dedicated funding to community colleges to continue and expand firefighter training opportunities in the Commonwealth. With additional funding, CCBC could provide financial assistance to local fire departments not able to cover the cost of training their crews, implement and provide online training solution, develop basic and higher education training partnerships across the Commonwealth, and more effectively utilize technology.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our testimony, and we are ready and willing to work together.



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**Matthew Hatrak, MBA, Executive Director Public Safety Training and Certification
Bucks County Community College**

Thank you Chairpersons Stefano and Muth and members of the PA Senate Veterans Affairs Emergency Preparedness Committee for this opportunity to provide testimony on next generation firefighting in Pennsylvania. Bucks County Community College provides emergency services training and national certification within the 67 counties of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. We have been providing emergency service members the opportunity to receive a quality education in the fields of public safety operation and management, public safety professional certification, emergency management and industrial safety for 26 years. During the past fiscal year we sponsored over 2,546 courses processing approximately 22,065 registrations. We currently also provide 62 professional certification disciplines.

Over the past year we have seen an increase in student participation due to online availability of programs. During the calendar year of 2020, 2,000 emergency responders were able to not only get necessary training but also earn national certifications. During this time we saw approximately a 50% increase in student enrollments due to the online availability. These programs allow for that additional tool that can be used to better prepare our emergency responders into the future.

Bucks County Community College feels that the following are benefits to continuing to provide online programs.

Currently in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania training is provided to emergency responders often in a traditional classroom setting. In the traditional delivery system a member would need to attend the training sessions in order to gain the knowledge and skill sets of the subject matter. This requires the members of the departments to be away from their families, work and other obligations, not everyone is able to take this time. In order to assist with scheduling considerations we can look at delivering these sessions in an online educational platform.

Some of the benefits of offering these programs in these modalities include the following:

- Flexibility
 - Less likely to have classes cancelled due to weather, pandemics, emergencies
 - Delivered in multiple timeframes
- Accessibility
 - Allowed students to use a variety of technology to attend programs
- Networking

- Multiple Departments
- Student to Student
- Agency to Agency
- Specific and directed instructor and student interaction
- Materials can be updated and more current and students can access them easier
- Student cost savings
 - No need to travel to locations for programs

When looking at the benefits of these programs we can use this as a tool for recruitment and retention of members. If members have the ability to meet their training needs at their convenience as opposed to a strict schedule and time restraints they might be more willing to participate.

With new training programs being developed it presents another challenge to responders and training agencies in the form of funding.

In the past, public safety courses offered at community colleges were funded on a reimbursement basis per FTE. However, this per FTE reimbursement structure was eliminated via Act 46 of 2005 and the colleges currently receive no dedicated funding to support the important work they do in this area.

Under the previous funding mechanism, the colleges received 100% for lecture hours and 50% for lab hours. While this funding was appreciated, it nevertheless failed to recognize that in public safety courses, lab sessions require more instructor supervision, thus more instructors, because of the nature of the training and the associated risks and exposures. Many public safety courses have a standard instructor-to-student ratio to support a safe training environment. The previous formula failed to compensate the colleges appropriately for these costs. Bucks County Community College encourages policymakers to provide dedicated funding, in addition to existing community college operating and capital funding, to ensure the college can continue to offer these important training opportunities.

Thank you Chairpersons Stefano and Muth and members of the PA Senate Veterans Affairs Emergency Preparedness Committee for your consideration of these comments. Bucks County Community College encourages policymakers to leverage the expertise of Bucks and the Pennsylvania's other community colleges, in funding new and innovative approaches to emergency responders training.



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John J. "Ski" Sygielski, MBA, Ed.D., President and CEO
HACC, Central Pennsylvania's Community College

[HACC, Central Pennsylvania's Community College](#), Pennsylvania's first and largest community college, offers an average of 10 complete Pennsylvania State Fire Academy-sponsored entry-level [programs](#) annually across Central Pennsylvania. On average, these programs graduate 200 new fire service students each year, ready to begin serving their local communities. These programs include guided pathways to prepare students to complete national certifications in Firefighter I and II, Hazardous Materials Awareness and Hazardous Materials Operations that can lead to additional training opportunities. Junior firefighters meet the age requirements to complete several of these entry-level courses and are eligible to complete additional courses in other related topics before the age of 18. Completion of these entry-level courses along with national certifications provide the opportunity for articulation to college credits in higher education programs.

HACC is currently offering fire training courses in person, remotely, blended and fully online. Additionally, some of these courses are offered online, as self-paced offerings. The College currently has the technology and internal resources to continue to evolve and expand these programs to meet the growing needs of the 21st century fire service and fire service students.

Successful Partnerships

HACC has partnered with several regional high schools to integrate fire training and emergency medical service (EMS) courses within their school year, programs targeted at recruiting students to the fire service. In some high schools, public safety clubs are planned to further engage students to consider volunteer opportunities and careers in emergency services. These clubs offer students the opportunity to participate in components of emergency services with hands-on experiences, field trips and the ability to network with current career professionals.

HACC continues to partner with local fire companies to offer several regional training conferences and seminars aimed at retention of firefighters by providing them additional learning experiences to enhance their skills and knowledge.

Recruitment Challenges

A recruitment challenge of new firefighting students includes limitations on the types and amount of skills that junior firefighters can complete because of their age. We must find innovative ways to keep junior firefighters actively engaged while completing all of their required training.

The recruitment and training of new firefighters must be a joint effort between the training providers and the sponsoring fire companies to be successful. In some cases, individuals may wish to pursue becoming a firefighter in a municipality where no volunteer fire company exists. We must have the ability to provide these individuals the appropriate sponsorship, mentoring and needed personal protective equipment (PPE) to complete their firefighting training. A new model should be explored in which the training agency provides PPE to students while in training and assists with placement into a fire company after course completion. Funding would be required to provide the needed PPE. Sponsorships, scholarships or partnerships with corporate agencies could help support this initiative.

Staffing of experienced educators for fire service programs, especially weekday offerings, is another challenge. Often part-time or adjunct staff are assigned to fill teaching assignments and scheduling can be labor intensive. Funding to secure more full-time educators to focus on the delivery of fire training programs for recruitment and retention would greatly enhance the ability for educational agencies to expand offerings to a wider audience.

Thank you for this opportunity to share HACC's testimony with the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee.