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Testimony by Philip Mahler, President, Massachusetts Community College Council, to the House Ways & Means Subcommittee on Education, Bridgewater State College, February 28, 2002.

Good morning Chairman Flynn and members of the Committee. Thank you for your time and your interest.

I am Philip Mahler and I represent the union of 7,000 faculty, librarians, counselors and other professionals in our 15 Commonwealth Community Colleges.

The Governor's House I budget is a disaster for the Commonwealth's system of public higher education. In tough times the Commonwealth is relying on its community colleges more than ever. Enrollments are increasing while state support is decreasing.

The role of community colleges in workforce training, lifelong learning, MCAS "cleanup", and remediation, is widely acknowledged at all levels of government. It is widely acknowledged that some college is necessary for a good job today, and it is the expectation of our Commonwealth's citizens that public higher education be there for them. Industry demands an educated workforce. Our public schools need trained teachers. In the end, a long term strong state economy relies on a quality system of public education, not just up to the 12th grade, but through the 16th grade. A consultant recently reported to the Board of Higher Education that higher education is the single best thing a state can do to raise the quality of life of its citizens, and this means quality jobs and a strong economy.

We fully understand that the legislature has hard decisions to make in these times of economic stress, and indeed we have silently accepted cuts because of this recognition. The cuts this year have already hurt. The pain includes the dismissal of 28 faculty, librarians and counselors, as well as the more than 100 who are anticipated to leave due to early retirement incentives and not be replaced. Spread over our 15 community colleges, this can only be categorized as the decimation of our ability to educate our neediest students.

Class sizes are going up dangerously. West Point Military Academy prides itself on having class sizes of 12 to 18. We already accept double that, and make do. To go farther is to ask too much.

Advising opportunities will go down as there are fewer full time faculty and counselors. This is one of the biggest areas of need for our students in the quagmire of career and higher education choices today.

At least three programs have already been cut and more are anticipated, and will from now on be unavailable to our students as career choices. Our colleges will be unable to meet the challenges of workforce training for emerging careers and the high technology opportunities in communications and biotechnology, for example, as the economy picks up again.

Of necessity fees will have to be raised even if the cuts in our support are mitigated through your efforts.

Thus, our students face larger classes, fewer program and career choices, less advising and guidance and less access to higher education. This is not the promise of the ed reform to which this Commonwealth and this legislature committed itself almost a decade ago.

Deep cuts and attacks on the integrity of those who serve the Commonwealth ruled the day in the early 90s. The damage was real, it was deep, and it was long lasting. The Board of Higher Education, our College

Presidents, their staffs and my colleagues have worked hard over the last five years to heal the damage and the wounds, and to provide high quality higher education to our K-12 graduates.

After freezing the salaries of our higher ed professionals through most of the 90s, just in the last few years some of these cuts were restored. In so doing the legislature and the Governor made a commitment to our professionals to provide some kind of dignity in the workplace. Right now the Governor's budget breaks that promise - we ask you to keep yours.

The Board of Higher Education, the Community Colleges, and my member faculty and education professionals want to - and do - deliver quality higher education opportunities to our students. These are the kids this Commonwealth has spent billions and billions of dollars on to improve their primary and secondary education - to not spend an additional 1% of just one of those billions on this higher ed budget is just not fair or farsighted.

Much of the current crisis is due to the excessive tax rollbacks, and tax waivers given to companies to retain jobs - or to try to retain jobs. In fact the best way to retain jobs is to provide stable support for public higher education.

While understandable, the policy of tax cuts has not provided the stability we need in the times we need it most. It is a failed policy. The legislature has had the privilege of rolling back taxes since the mid-90s. Now it has the duty to stand up and be counted as being for good government for our Commonwealth.

We implore the legislature to take the steps necessary to restore some stability to state services, and especially our public colleges.

- It is time to freeze the reduction in the state income tax rate. Those who have jobs today need to support all of their fellow citizens. Had this and other taxes not been rolled back, our stability fund would be much stronger today and every citizen of this Commonwealth would benefit. Today all we can do is try to stop the bleeding.
- It is time to repeal the recently passed charitable deduction tax cut, and to revisit some of the hundreds of millions in tax cuts enacted in the last decade.

The legislature has shown tremendous fiscal restraint over the last decade, and will continue to do so. But now it must show it understands that good government includes raising taxes as well as raising tolls and fees. Parenthetically, if we all paid fair taxes we wouldn't have to stick it to commuters that happen to live in one unlucky area.

The reduced FY 02 budget was terrible for us. It has already caused severe pain and done damage. Now the proposed House 1 budget has us cutting deep into muscle and bone - it is eating our seed corn - it is mortgaging our future.

In light of the deep cuts already made this year, rough estimates are that the legislature need to restore 8% to our state and community college budgets to just keep us at a maintenance level. Last year you cut us by 2% and increased support for the cities and towns 7%. We ask for what is fair, and what is good for our Commonwealth.

My organization wants to thank Chairperson David Flynn for his unflagging support of higher education over the years. We believe it is the job of this subcommittee to deliver for our students and teachers, and we believe that's what the Committee will do. We thank you for your time, and your anticipated strong and courageous support. My members are behind you all the way.

- Keep quality in our public colleges for our students.
- Keep the promise for dignity in the workplace to our faculty and other education professionals.
- Support restoring stable tax support for the Commonwealth and its citizens.
- Stand up and be counted - it is time.