

TESTIMONY TO SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
IN OPPOSITION TO H.B. 4496 (COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
BACCALAUREATE DEGREE AUTHORITY)

Wednesday, January 25, 2012

By: Edward O. Blews, Jr.  
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and Universities of Michigan

Good Afternoon, Chairman Pavlov and Committee Senators. I'm Ed Blews and I'm honored and grateful to appear again before your Committee as the President of the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Michigan. You will recall that our Association represents 49 excellent and diverse Michigan independent, nonprofit (or private) colleges and universities with a composite student body of more than 122,000 students. Our independent colleges provide invaluable higher education service to the people of Michigan on campuses located all over the State. More than 90% of our students are Michigan residents. Quality baccalaureate education is our strength and focus. In fact, our independent colleges produce more than 25% of the baccalaureate degrees in this State.

Outstanding baccalaureate nursing programs, fully approved and recognized by the State Board of Nursing, are provided by: Andrews University, Calvin College, Davenport University, Finlandia University, Hope College, Madonna University, Rochester College, Siena Heights University, and the University of Detroit Mercy. I am proud to be joined by the President of the University of Detroit Mercy, Dr. Antoine Garibaldi, who will testify in a moment focusing on the nursing baccalaureate degree issue.

Speaking for Michigan's independent, nonprofit (or private) colleges and universities, we join the public universities in respectfully but strongly opposing House Bill 4496. We are convinced that authorizing community colleges to grant baccalaureate degrees would be very unwise public policy which would produce unnecessary duplication very costly to the taxpayers, undermine the value of and create confusion about baccalaureate degrees, and actually damage nursing education and aggravate the nursing problems in the State. Moreover, baccalaureate education opportunities are already widely available and accessible to citizens all over the State, including for students in community colleges at community college campuses. I will address this latter point while President Garibaldi will elaborate on the first three powerful points.

Let me begin by expressing our great respect for our State's fine community colleges in their current and proper missions. Our independent colleges have excellent cooperative relationships with community colleges in providing expanded higher educational opportunity to Michigan citizens, with each sector playing to its strengths. Community colleges perform a critical role in providing and producing lower division general education, associate degrees, community education, and vocational/job training, the missions for which they were designed and where their expertise lies. They should continue to focus on those strengths rather than to "mission-creep" into baccalaureate education for which they do not have the structure and expertise to produce baccalaureate degrees.

Michigan citizens already have extensive and excellent opportunities to pursue baccalaureate degrees, including in nursing, at public and private colleges and universities literally located all over our State.

And community colleges already have the widely-exercised option of offering students on their campuses and in their communities on-site access to baccalaureate degree programs, including nursing programs (with the baccalaureate level courses properly taught and offered by four-year colleges and their faculty) through university centers, 2 + 2 programs, and other partnership arrangements with baccalaureate institutions. Many of our independent colleges participate with and serve community college students in these baccalaureate degree programs offered on community college campuses. These are the proper and far more economical models that should be followed. Our independent colleges and universities stand ready and willing to expand these partnerships with community colleges wherever there is the need and demand for expanded baccalaureate education, as do the public universities also. The answer is to continue and expand those partnerships, not to create a whole new system of State baccalaureate institutions at great cost to the taxpayers.

Now it is my special privilege to briefly introduce the impressive President of the University of Detroit Mercy. Dr. Antoine Garibaldi came to the UDM Presidency last year after serving for a decade as the President of Gannon University in Pennsylvania. I have known him and of him for many years as one of those highly-respected national leaders in higher education. His remarkable resume features more than 35 years of expertise and scholarship in higher education. We are delighted that he has brought that quality of leadership to Michigan and the University of Detroit Mercy.