

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

Wednesday, January 25, 2012

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Good afternoon, Chairman Pavlov and Committee Members. Thank you for this opportunity to appear before your distinguished Committee to address a matter of critical importance. But before I begin, and as a point of personal privilege, I want to express greetings to our own Detroit Senator Coleman Young II. And I wish to thank each of you, Senators, for your leadership and dedicated service to the people of the Great Lakes State of Michigan.

Even though I became a Michigan resident just eight months ago, in June, I have relatives who have lived in the State since 1944. They moved to Detroit as youth with their parents from my native city of New Orleans; and today, they and the majority of their sons' and daughters' children still live here in this great State. So I am very much at home. Even more, as I worked very closely in my career with many colleagues who were educated at and taught at Michigan colleges and universities, this State has always been recognized for its outstanding pluralistic higher education system, with different types of institutions that have unique missions focused on serving the people of Michigan. However, that strength and focus of Michigan's higher education system would be jeopardized by House Bill No. 4496.

It is a genuine privilege for me to serve as President of University of Detroit Mercy, Michigan's largest and most comprehensive Catholic University. Our long history goes back to 1877 when the University of Detroit was founded by the Society of Jesus (Jesuits); and in 1990, University of Detroit and Mercy College of Detroit (founded in 1941 by the Religious Sisters of Mercy) consolidated to form University of Detroit Mercy. Both institutions had offered outstanding nursing programs, which became one of the strongest niche programs of the consolidated University of Detroit Mercy. A UDM education seeks to integrate the intellectual, spiritual, ethical and social development of our students. Because of our urban-focused mission, UDM is critical to the vitality and future of the City of Detroit and the entire State. This year UDM is educating approximately 5,400 students in more than 100 undergraduate, graduate and professional programs, including law, dentistry and architecture. Eighty-five percent of our students are Michigan

residents, and more than 90% of our undergraduates receive some form of financial aid. We are also proud to be a Charter Member of the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Michigan, a vital organization that AICUM President Blews has led since 1985.

Representing University of Detroit Mercy and my other Michigan independent college and university presidential colleagues, I am here to express our opposition to House Bill No. 4496, which would grant unprecedented and inappropriate baccalaureate degree-granting authority to community colleges in five academic disciplines, especially nursing. More specifically in regard to nursing, endorsement of House Bill 4496 would be ill-advised public policy because it would undermine and unnecessarily duplicate existing baccalaureate nursing programs such as ours. Moreover, it would diminish the quality of baccalaureate nursing education in the state of Michigan and dramatically increase the cost of postsecondary education to the State and its taxpayers.

University of Detroit Mercy's McAuley School of Nursing produces excellent nurses, broadly educated in the sciences and liberal arts so that they will be critical thinkers in healthcare and outstanding practitioners who have been educated to solve society's evolving health care needs. Our signature program in nursing is the undergraduate Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree. This year we have 981 students enrolled in that program. Our program is nationally accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education. National accreditation, and not merely regional accreditation to which community colleges aspire, is absolutely essential to maintaining a quality baccalaureate nursing program; and it is required for baccalaureate graduates to be able to pursue graduate degrees. In addition to our McNichols campus in Detroit, UDM also partners with Aquinas College and Saint Mary's Health Center to offer the BSN in Grand Rapids.

On average, we produce a total of more than 330 baccalaureate nursing degrees and more than 50 graduate nursing degrees each year.

Also important for your consideration and review today, University of Detroit Mercy, like many four-year nursing programs, also offers a flexible and efficient RN-to-BSN completion program for students with nursing associate degrees, which enables them to achieve a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree in a timely manner. And like many other universities around the State, we offer community college students a seamless track to the BSN through the University

Center at Macomb Community College, which underscores the point that Dr. Blews has already made.

Quality Bachelor of Science in Nursing programs are very expensive to establish and costly to sustain because of the need for qualified faculty members, low student-to-faculty ratios, expensive laboratories, and extensive clinical experiences. University of Detroit Mercy has invested a great deal of money in the creation and enhancement of its BSN program over the years, and it will continue to commit the necessary resources to maintain its level of excellence.

As further rationale for why H.B. 4496 would not be good public policy and should not be approved by this Committee or the Legislature, I would like to cite three additional compelling reasons.

First, this legislation would undermine four-year higher education institutions and diminish the quality and credibility of baccalaureate degrees. It would not be a positive precedent. Based on what I have read, baccalaureate nursing degree programs of community colleges would not be nationally, professionally accredited, thereby producing a lesser quality degree whose recipients would discover they cannot pursue graduate degrees in nursing. I want to emphasize here that I have great respect for the role of community colleges and UDM has numerous cooperative relationships with more than a dozen Michigan community colleges. And for that reason, I believe that community colleges' existing roles should be maintained and focused on associate degrees, lower division quality education, and vocational job/training. Those areas of study are and have been the clear mission for which community colleges were constitutionally, statutorily, and educationally-designed. Allowing community colleges to begin to offer baccalaureate degrees would not only be inconsistent with their missions but also adversely increase the cost of postsecondary education to taxpayers.

Second, this legislation would exacerbate the already acute shortage of qualified nursing faculty that possess the required graduate-level degrees necessary to teach in baccalaureate-level BSN nursing programs. From my last 15 years of senior level administrative experience in higher education, I can attest that the shortage of qualified baccalaureate nursing faculty is a major problem in nursing education. Thus, this legislation will compound an already acute shortage of nursing faculty among colleges and universities, and indirectly create costly duplication.

Third, House Bill No. 4496 will increase dramatically the cost of higher education to this State and its taxpayers through unnecessary duplication and by exacerbating the acute shortage of nursing faculty, as I have just described. This has been noted in editorials and articles in numerous papers, including The Detroit Free Press, Lansing State Journal, and Grand Rapids Press. We urge you to review the Delta Cost Project ([www.deltacostproject.org](http://www.deltacostproject.org)), which indicates the astonishing higher cost per degree that would be required to provide baccalaureate degrees through community colleges. Even more, H.B. No. 4496 would effectively start the process of creating 28 new four-year public universities at enormous cost to the State's taxpayers.

The President of Madonna University, Sr. Rose Marie Kujawa, asked that I share the following example to illustrate her concerns with this legislation. Madonna University has a highly-respected BSN program in Livonia, in which they have heavily invested through the years. House Bill No. 4496 would create a duplicate BSN program right down the road from them at Schoolcraft Community College at the expense of the taxpayers. In this period of limited financial resources, the Legislature and Leaders of our State are rightfully seeking to eliminate, avoid and discourage unnecessary and costly duplication. This legislation would be in opposition to that principle and duplicate programs that already exist, which would be adversely received by taxpayers who would be expected to pay these additional costs.

Senators, on behalf of my independent private college and university presidential colleagues, I respectfully urge you not to adopt or approve H.B. No. 4496. Thank you for allowing me this privilege to speak to you at this hearing.