SB 98 (Shirkey) – A Testimony in Favor of community college baccalaureate nursing degree
Senate Commerce Committee – June 17, 2015
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Good morning, Chairman Schmidt and members of the Committee. My name is David Mathews. Although my Ph.D. is in mathematics, since 1997 I have served in the administration of Southwestern Michigan College. The past fourteen years I have served as President of the college.

During my brief testimony this morning, I want to accomplish two things. First, I want to describe to you the critical importance of this legislation to our students and the rural community we serve. Second, I will respond to the six most common, false arguments against the community college BSN. In the interest of time, I will just hit the hi-lights in my spoken presentation, I have included far more details in the written testimony that I have provided this morning.

Throughout the entire history of Southwestern Michigan College, nursing has been one of the College's "flagship" programs. The Practical Nursing program at SMC began in 1966 with the opening of the College. The Registered Nurse (RN) program at SMC began in the Fall of 1969. This two-year Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) program was, and continues to this day to be, the program to prepare students for licensure as a Registered Nurse. SMC's first associate-degree registered nursing students graduated in 1971.

A logical question that might come to your mind is "If the associate degree nursing program preparing registered nurses has historically been so successful, why now, all of a sudden, do community colleges need to produce baccalaureate prepared nurses?"

First, this isn't all of a sudden. I have personally been working on the issue of the community college baccalaureate degree in nursing – or BSN- for more than a decade. The community college BSN is not just an idea whose time has come. It is an idea whose time came about ten years ago. We are late, and every year that we delay the statewide shortage of baccalaureate prepared nurses only worsens.

The reason that community colleges now need to train baccalaureate prepared nurses is because today's healthcare landscape is considerably different than it was in 1969. In response to the changes in healthcare, the Michigan legislature over the past few years has dealt with issues of scope of practice and licensing for nurse practitioners, nurse anesthetists, and physical therapists, just to name a few.

There are many factors contributing to the need for significantly more baccalaureate degreed registered nurses, but perhaps the single greatest reason has resulted from the competition in health care, whereas many hospitals today are seeking their own specialty accreditation, called MAGNET Status. Whether this MAGNET status

(awarded by the American Nurses' Credentialing Center) actually improves the strength and quality of nursing at a hospital or serves mainly as a competitive promotional tool is an ongoing debate within the nursing profession. Regardless, the upshot is that to be eligible for Magnet Status, hospitals are preferentially hiring bachelor's prepared rather than associate degree prepared registered nurses with a goal of 80% of their nurses being bachelor's prepared.

Now, as a bit of background, 40% of Registered Nurses in Michigan hold a bachelor's in nursing (according to a 2011 survey by the Michigan Center for Nursing). This illustrates two things:

1. How critically important community colleges have historically been in producing the state's current registered nursing workforce and,

2. How far from the 80% goal the state actually is.

Today, doors are closing to registered nurses who hold only associate degrees, as hospitals are struggling to find more baccalaureate prepared RN's. The shortage of baccalaureate prepared nurses is REAL, and it is worsening each day by the retirement of nurses and the aging population which is needing even greater nursing care.

SB 98 will remedy this growing shortage by providing legal authorization for community colleges to offer their Registered Nurses a baccalaureate degree rather than just an associate's degree.

Let me now address the six most common arguments that I have heard against this idea: Mission, Clinical Space limitations, Accreditation, Quality, University Capacity, and Cost.

1. **MISSION** It has been incorrectly stated that community colleges' mission is awarding two year degrees, and for a community college to do anything else is "mission drift." To illustrate how a change in programs can actually be growth rather than drift, I will describe the evolution of the closest university to SMC --Western Michigan University.

WMU was founded in 1903 as Western State Normal School. Its original mission was to provide a two-year training program for teachers

In 1927 the institution was renamed Western State Teachers College

In 1941 the institution became Michigan College of Education

In 1955 it became Western Michigan College

Then, in 1957, Western Michigan University became the state of Michigan's fourth public university.

Today, after four name and mission changes, WMU has 140 undergraduate programs, 67 master's degree programs, 29 doctoral programs and a medical school. I am sure that students graduating from each of these programs today don't care that historically their university didn't provide their program. What matters to them is that they can get the training they need now for jobs now, and into the future.

Looking across the nation, when Michigan granted community colleges the authority to confer baccalaureate degrees several years ago, it became the 21st state to do so. Florida has included the BSN among the list of baccalaureate degrees offered by community colleges in their state, and according to a report by the Initiative on the Future of Nursing, at least three other states are considering doing so. The world has changed. Hospital's needs have changed. In order to meet these changing needs, our educational offerings need to change.

The true mission of a community college is to meet the education needs of its community, PERIOD. SMC's locally elected Board of Trustees have heard from our community that there is a critical need for baccalaureate degree nurses, and that that need is not being met elsewhere. SMC is willing, and able, to meet this need. SB 98 will provide the legal authority for us to meet this need.

2. **CLINICAL SPACE.** Those of you who have followed the challenges of nursing education know that there is a shortage of clinical nursing sites and an overall lack of clinical training capacity. It has been wrongly asserted that authorizing the community colleges to award BSN degrees will either make this problem worse, or at a minimum prevent the community colleges from being successful.

The truth of the matter is that there are ZERO additional clinical hours in a BSN completion program for Associate Degree prepared Registered Nurses. Yes, clinical shortages are real. And like every other institution we are working through this limitation using a combination of strategies – including computer controlled mannequins. But the clinical training of RN's is already accomplished in the Associate Degree program that

community colleges offer. Anyone who argues that clinical limitations would prevent community colleges from running baccalaureate degree completion programs for ADNs is either simply wrong, or intentionally trying to mislead.

3. **ACCREDITATION.** It has been wrongly asserted that community colleges could not overcome the accreditation hurdles necessary to successfully offer baccalaureate degree programs in general, and the BSN in particular.

The truth of the matter is that Southwestern Michigan College is fully accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, which is the regional accrediting body that covers Michigan and 19 other states in the Midwest. The HLC not only accredits each of Michigan's community colleges, but each of its fifteen public universities as well. I personally serve as a consultant-evaluator for the HLC, visiting other institutions of higher education and examining them as they pursue re-accreditation. I assure you that the HLC criteria for institutional accreditation are clear, and have evolved over the past decade to provide the capacity to properly evaluate and accredit community colleges that also offer baccalaureate degrees.

In addition to overall institutional accreditation, two national organizations accredit nursing education programs:

- The Accreditation Commission For Education in Nursing (ACEN) accredits all types of nursing education programs including master's, baccalaureate, associate's and diploma
- The Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) accredits programs that offer only master's and baccalaureate level nursing degrees

Both the ACEN and CCNE have set procedures that institutions with regional accreditation who wish to begin BSN programs can follow to become accredited. Simply put, Michigan community colleges can and will follow these procedures just as those community colleges in Florida have done to meet their bachelor's degree program accreditation requirements.

4. **QUALITY** Without fail, each time the possibility of Michigan's community colleges awarding baccalaureate degrees for its registered nurses is discussed, someone asserts that community college quality couldn't possibly be adequate to accomplish this. I would be offended each time I hear the

argument that community colleges cannot produce adequate quality if it were not so laughably ridiculous.

High quality has always been a hallmark of the SMC nursing programs. As you may know, all RN program graduates must pass the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-RN) exam in order to be licensed to practice as a Registered Nurse. It is very important to note that whether students graduate from an Associate Degree Program or a Bachelor's Degree program, they take the SAME Registered Nurse Licensure Examination.

The table below shows the percentage of SMC graduates who passed this examination on their first attempt in the last 10 years. It also shows the percentage of graduates of Michigan's BSN programs who passed the exam on their first attempt. **As you can see, for eight of the past ten years, SMC ADN graduates have a higher first-time pass-rate on the Registered Nurse licensure examination than graduates of the State's four-year nursing programs.**

Year	State BSN Yearly Avg	SMC ADN Yearly Average
2014*	84.93%	93.33%
2013	86.80%	77.42%
2012	92.37%	95.35%
2011	91.29%	94.44%
2010	89.42%	81.03%
2009	88.52%	89.74%
2008	88.67%	91.49%
2007	87.73%	93.62%
2006	87.18%	93.02%
2005	85.49%	90.91%

*2014 detailed data not yet available state-by-state. 84.93 is the national average BSN pass rate. Let me say this again, **for eight of the past ten years, SMC ADN graduates have a higher first-time pass-rate on the Registered Nurse licensure examination than graduates of the State's four-year nursing programs.**

5. **UNIVERSITY CAPACITY.** It has been falsely argued that because each of Michigan's university-based RN to BSN completion programs are under-enrolled, that this means there is no need for more BSN granting institutions in the state.

In reality, the fact that university-run RN to BSN programs are all under-enrolled is strong evidence that these programs' structure, location, and costs are not meeting the needs of Michigan's nursing workforce.

The current situation whereby only universities can provide baccalaureate degrees to their registered nurses simply will not produce the supply of baccalaureate prepared nurses that Michigan needs. Every day, Michigan imports more than 1,000 Canadian nurses to fill Michigan jobs. University-based nursing programs don't have the capacity to meet this shortage. The Michigan Health & Hospital Association – which supports community colleges awarding bachelor's degrees in nursing – reports that about 4,000 QUALIFIED students are turned away from university based BSN programs in Michigan each year.

6. **COST.** It has been wrongly asserted that allowing community colleges to offer the limited number of baccalaureate degrees specified in SB98 will cost taxpayers more.

There is ZERO evidence to support the unfounded claim that limited baccalaureate degree granting authority by community colleges in Michigan will result in greater taxpayer costs, and there is ALSO ZERO evidence of taxpayers in the 21 states that already have awarded limited baccalaureate degree granting authority to their community colleges paying more.

Even if maintaining the status quo was so important that the State wanted to find the MOST expensive solution to this problem and increase the size of university nursing programs, it would not solve the geographical and financial access problems for our state's residents. Community Colleges are well known for our ability to provide educational access to students close to home, at a price they can afford. Large numbers of community college students are unable to travel and/or relocate to university locations. Moreover, large numbers of financially needy students attend community colleges because our tuition is less than half that of state universities.

At SMC, our cost structure makes affordable tuition possible because our faculty are paid to teach, PERIOD. They do not have reduced teaching loads to do research. They do not have reduced teaching loads to publish. They have a passion for teaching. And as the nursing licensure pass rates show, they produce great educational outcomes.

Passing SB 98 will address the statewide shortage of baccalaureate prepared nurses, and will do so in a way that all of our state's residents and regions can benefit. For all of these reasons, Senate Bill 98 is the single most important piece of legislation for the students and community served by Southwestern Michigan College.

On behalf of the College and the seven elected members of the Board of Trustees (including one physician) I thank you in advance for your support, and welcome the opportunity to answer any questions you might have.