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TO: All Media Outlets

FROM: Susquehanna Valley Community Education Project

SUBJECT: Highlights from the 2022 Community College Summit

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Sr. Mary Persico, President of Marywood University,
speaks to participants at the 2022 Community College Summit.

The 5th annual Community College Summit was held on October 7 at Susquehanna University, Degenstein Center, Apple Meeting Rooms and hosted by the Susquehanna Valley Community Education Project, the organization that is facilitating the establishment of a 16th community college that would serve the middle counties of Pennsylvania. Guest presenters spoke to topics relevant to creating a new community college in the Commonwealth.

Sr. Mary Persico inspired the attendees to maintain their vision of the Central Susquehanna Valley with a dedicated, vibrant, and responsive community college that improves the lives of individuals, businesses, and the region through economic development. She described this work as “Changing the Face of the Mountain”.

Elizabeth Bolden, the President, and CEO of the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges, spoke to the need for greater investment in the community college sector within the Pennsylvania budget as appropriations have flat lined and that Pennsylvania is 47th in higher education appropriation. She noted that of the 110 public and 90 private colleges and universities, the 15 community colleges enroll 250,000 students, nearly half of the undergraduates in the state. She showed that 4,000 are veterans, 70% of students attend part time, 50% of students earn less than \$30,000 per year and 65% are from households with incomes less than the Pennsylvania median. Pennsylvania has the third highest average student loan debt at \$39,375 (2021). Seventy six percent of community college students are studying subjects aligned with high priority occupations identified by their regional workforce development board and 40% are studying STEM-H Programs (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math, and Health). There are more than 18,000 high school students earning community college credits and 31,000 students transfer to other colleges and universities. Ms. Bolden reported that the annual economic

contribution of Lehigh Carbon Community College for 2019 to 2020 was \$230.5 million and taxpayers received an average rate of return of 10% (2022).

Michael Dotts, Higher Education Expert, at the Pennsylvania Department of Education, described a community college as two-year, public post-secondary, higher education offering credit bearing programs for certificates, diplomas, and associate degrees. They also offer non-credit programs in workforce development, business and industry training, ESL, adult education, and professional development. Additionally, community colleges offer avocational and recreational classes. He presented logistics for Establishing a New Community College in Pennsylvania and noted that the procedure has crystalized since the state underwent the process of establishing Erie County Community College in 2020. Pennsylvania law requires that the community college has a local sponsor who appoints the board of trustees and approves the annual budget. There are three funding sources for the community college – student tuition and fees, Commonwealth appropriation for both operations and capital projects, and the local sponsor appropriation. An application submitted to the Pennsylvania State Board of Education for a new community college requires a sufficient population for sustained minimum enrollment, sufficient funding from the local sponsor, and that the area is not adequately served by postsecondary education.

Anna Brown, Vice President of Lightcast, and research author of *The Economic Impact of the Proposed Susquehanna Valley Community College*, explained that the first 10 years of operations would infuse \$78.5 million into the economy. She said that at 10 years the community college would enroll about 3000 students and contribute \$16 million annually to the local economy with an estimated \$4.2 million in added tax base.

Chris Gray, Founding President, Erie County Community College, shared that since doors opened in Fall 2021, there has been a steady increase in enrollment starting at 250 in August 2021 and 370 in August 2022. He explained that they are proceeding towards accreditation with Middle States Commission for Higher Education in the development of the EC3 policies. He also noted that one of the highest expenses in their budget was the IT Learning Management System at \$725,000. Dr. Gray pointed out that one of Erie County Community College's strongest opponents has become one of their most devoted advocates.

Keynote Speaker, Fritz Heinemann, President of the Central Region Andy Russell Foundation and resident of Snyder County, presented the remarkable story of the start of the first American community college at Joliet, Illinois in 1901. The experiment was an alignment between the superintendent of the Joliet School District and the president of the University of Chicago to accommodate recent high school graduates by offering the first two years of a four-year baccalaureate degree locally within the Joliet community and then transfer to University of Chicago for completion. There were six students in the initial cohort and now there are 30,000 credit and non-credit students. He reminisced about a national board where he served with Mary Gates who bemoaned that her high school age son, Billy, lacked ambition as a student and tinkered around in the garage. Bill Gates eventually went to Harvard and created a multi-billion-dollar computer and software empire. Fritz asked the audience to consider 'What is the value of a community college in a rural area?' It is an open door for those who are dreamers, budding entrepreneurs, and risk takers who care not about being laughed at...those who need employable skills and employers who need specialized skills training. Central Pennsylvania CEO's are facing challenges in finding qualified mid-level employees with basic knowledge of math, science, chemistry, and common sense. We have plenty of jobs...we need employees to handle technological issues.'

SVCEP board president, Meghan Beck, shared that there have been 5000 petitions collected and more than 1000 surveys from residents across multiple counties in the Greater Susquehanna Valley. The Regional Public Anchor Community College Public Interest Survey findings show that of 974 individual responses, 93% support the creation of a new regional community college, 91% think a lot of people will attend, 825 would support a modest tax increase of \$14.00 per household and 92% would support county government to sponsor the new community college.

For more information about the project to establish a new Pennsylvania community college in the Greater Susquehanna Valley, visit newcommunitycollege.org or contact Dr. Lenaire Ahlum at 570.898.4334.