

Full Draft Speech

Public Hearing on Higher Education & Workforce Development John Yudichak, President, Luzerne County Community College

Chair, members of the committee, and guests.

My name is **John Yudichak**, and I am honored to serve as **President of Luzerne County Community College**, the largest, most accessible, and highest-quality institution of higher education and workforce development programming in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Today, more than **7,000 students** are pursuing their education at LCCC, across our **main campus in Nanticoke** and **seven community-based centers** in Luzerne, Lackawanna, Northumberland, and Columbia Counties.

For **58 years**, LCCC has been delivering academic and vocational training to the residents, families, and businesses of Northeastern Pennsylvania. From the very beginning, our mission has been in our name: *community*. LCCC is proud to serve both our urban and rural populations, breaking down barriers to education and economic opportunity, and helping to build a stronger region.

LCCC is at the forefront of educational innovation in Pennsylvania, establishing regional partnerships designed to enhance career pathways for our students and to address the workforce development demands of northeastern Pennsylvania.

One of the most significant new educational partnerships comes through groundbreaking articulation agreements with the ten universities in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE). Higher education reforms embodied in Act 69 of 2024 that were championed by the Shapiro Administration and a bipartisan coalition of state legislators guarantees junior status for LCCC graduates at any PASSHE institution. The seamless transferability of college credits from the community college system to the PASSHE system has empowered LCCC to create the **Teach in NEPA Project**—a historic educational partnership with Commonwealth University and the Hazleton Area School District that will produce a 4-year teaching degree for less than \$35,000 at LCCC's Hazleton Center.

We call this new higher education model: **Go Here, Graduate Here, Work Here**. Which means for the first time in the college's history, you can go to LCCC's Hazleton Center, graduate from the LCCC Hazleton Center, and secure a teaching job in northeastern Pennsylvania without ever leaving Luzerne County. LCCC's commitment to accessibility is evident in its "Go Here, Graduate Here, Work Here" model that will be featured at its seven campus centers across northeastern Pennsylvania.

The LCCC Centers in Hazleton, Wilkes-Barre, Pittston, Scranton, Berwick, Shamokin, and Watsontown serve as community hubs where students can access academic resources, financial aid assistance, and career advising. LCCC's localized approach to higher education breaks down transportation barriers and fosters a sense of belonging among students, significantly enhancing their chances of academic success.

Our **Skilled Trades programs** have been a pillar of the college and the community. By working side by side with employers and trade unions, we are helping to build not only the region's **infrastructure and economy**, but also the **personal and professional success** of our students.

We proudly serve a wide range of industries, from **energy partners like Talen Energy and Invenergy**, to **manufacturers like Cheetah Chassis and Pride Mobility**, to **construction and family-owned businesses like Medico Construction Equipment**. We work closely with **industrial developers like NorthPoint Development and Mericle Commercial Real Estate** to ensure workforce readiness.

But our partnerships go well beyond industry. We collaborate directly with **PA CareerLink**, the **Luzerne/Schuylkill Workforce Development Board**, the **Berwick Industrial Development Authority**, **CANDO, Penn's Northeast**, and chambers of commerce including Hazleton, Greater Wyoming Valley, Pittston, and the Central Susquehanna Valley. Together, we identify, plan, and address the skills gaps that exist in our region.

We are also proud of a **new partnership with Luzerne County and the City of Wilkes-Barre**, through which their employees can now pursue higher education at a lower cost. The County and City each cover 25% of tuition, and LCCC waives another 25%, ensuring employees can afford to advance their education and their careers.

As we look ahead, our **workforce strategy at LCCC is simple but multifaceted**:

- First, we are expanding industry partnerships by offering **micro-credentials and apprenticeships**.
- Second, we are developing new **health science programs** through partnerships with the **Wright Center and Geisinger**.
- Third, we are expanding our extension centers so that students can **graduate from the center where they study**, overcoming barriers such as transportation to our main campus.
- And finally, we are strengthening our **Technical Advisory Boards and community partnerships** to deliver stronger programs for both job seekers and current workers looking to upskill.

This work has never been more urgent. **Northeastern Pennsylvania is experiencing a dramatic workforce shift**, as highlighted in the Baker Tilly Workforce Gap Analysis. Like many regions across the country, we face the dual challenge of an **aging population and declining birth rates**, coupled with the **outmigration of young workers**. These demographic realities are creating significant imbalances in our labor market.

Employers struggle daily with **language barriers, skills gaps, and shortages of qualified workers**. Manufacturing, which has long supported generations of families in our region, remains strong but is now joined by a surge in warehouse and logistics jobs—roles that demand a very different set of skills and knowledge.

This is why our initiatives at LCCC are built around a single goal: **preparing individuals to step confidently into the jobs driving our region's growth**, from high-tech data centers, to advanced manufacturing, to the skilled trades.

At the statewide level, I also serve on the **Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges**, representing all 15 public community colleges. Collectively, we serve more than **240,000 students**, partner with over **2,100 businesses**, and, importantly, see **90 percent of our graduates stay in Pennsylvania to live and work**. That makes community colleges the most **affordable, accessible, and workforce-focused higher education institutions** in the Commonwealth.

As a former State Senator, I had the opportunity to help pass **Act 25 of 2021**, creating a **sales tax exemption program for data centers**. This legislation positions Pennsylvania as a competitive hub for hyperscale data centers. Virginia, for example, has leveraged similar policies to create more than **74,000 jobs** and generate **\$9.1 billion annually** for their economy. Pennsylvania can—and must—do the same.

But legislation alone is not enough. Pennsylvania faces a projected **218,000-worker shortage by 2032** due to credential gaps, including more than **12,000 workers needed in the trades and maintenance alone**. Without immediate and sustained investment in workforce development, these gaps will only grow wider.

That is why LCCC is proud to be helping lead the new **Technology and Trades Workforce Consortium**, alongside Lehigh Carbon, Northampton, and Bucks County Community Colleges. Our collaborative model is built on three pillars:

1. **Career & Technology Academy** – creating early college pathways with technical high schools.
2. **MicroCredential Academy** – offering short-term, rapid training with chambers of commerce and PA CareerLink.

3. **Construction & Trade Pre-Apprenticeship Academy** – partnering with Building & Construction Trades Unions to create a pipeline of skilled workers.

Through our **Workforce and Community Development Division**, we provide custom training for businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies, with flexible day, evening, and weekend classes across all of our centers. Our programs span from basic literacy to advanced technology certifications, helping displaced workers retrain, supporting lifelong learning, and meeting the needs of employers across the region.

Pennsylvania stands at a pivotal moment in its history. Just as anthracite coal fueled the **Industrial Revolution**, new industries like **AI-driven data centers, advanced manufacturing, and logistics** will fuel the **Technological Revolution**. The question before us is whether we will prepare our workforce to meet that challenge.

At LCCC, the answer is yes. By breaking down barriers, expanding partnerships, and designing innovative programs, we are ensuring that Northeastern Pennsylvania—and the Commonwealth as a whole—will have the **most skilled workforce in its history**.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and thank you for your continued support of community colleges, our students, and the employers who drive our economy forward.