Dr. John Downey
President, Blue Ridge Community College

Remarks to the Health and Human Resources Subcommittee
Senate Finance Committee

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Senator Hanger and Members of the Health and Human Resources Subcommittee:

My name is John Downey, and I am the president of Blue Ridge Community College in Weyers Cave, Virginia.

I would like to give you some additional background about how the partnerships between Virginia's community colleges and Community Services Boards evolved, and then give you an example of how this arrangement works well at Blue Ridge Community College.

In the summer of 2012, the Chancellor of the Virginia Community College System asked each of the 23 community colleges in Virginia to examine their role in directing students or staff to mental health services. Based on his interest in developing a consistent approach across all colleges, in September he approached the Virginia Association of Community Services Boards and their former executive director, Mary Ann Bergeron, to explore working more closely with them for mental health services for our students and to pursue strengthening the relationships between Virginia's 23 community colleges and Community Services Boards throughout the Commonwealth.

These discussions led to the VCCS's Advisory Council of Presidents adopting a change to the VCCS's policy manual on October 17, 2012 to clarify that the role of the VCCS was to refer staff and students to mental health services when necessary, and to establish a designated point of contact at each college to communicate directly with a designated staff person at the Community Services Board(s) in their service region. The action to establish a designated point of contact at each college also required the approval of the State Board for Community Colleges and this action was approved on November 15, 2012.

Two revisions were made:

- Language was inserted that college staff may provide initial assessments and referrals to appropriate mental health services when necessary; and

- Colleges must obtain the name(s) of an emergency clinician at each Community Services Board in the college's service region to serve as a contact person. Each college president must designate a college staff person to prepare for and respond to potential emergency situations, to include requesting an assessment to determine whether a student, faculty, or staff member poses a threat to self or others.

As Ms. Faison mentioned, legislation was enacted in 2013 (SB 1078—Barker and HB 2322--Surovell) which codified the State Board's policy and outlined the ability for community colleges to establish relationships with community services boards or other mental health providers for referral and treatment of persons with less serious mental health needs.

At Blue Ridge, we have an agreement with the Valley Community Services Board. BRCC already had a relationship with the Valley CSB prior to enactment of the 2013 legislation. This agreement includes responsibilities for each party for initial referral, evaluation and involuntary hospitalization, confidentiality during referral for evaluation, outpatient treatment following discharge, and mandatory outpatient treatment. This agreement also stipulates the assignment of a licensed mental health professional to our Violence Prevention Committee and Threat Assessment Team.

I would add that Threat Assessment Teams are in place at each of our 23 colleges, their members are trained, and that each college also has a Violence Prevention Committee.

The relationship between Virginia's 23 community colleges and the Community Services Boards serving the colleges is strong and we believe that Community Services Boards are the logical partner for serving our students, all of whom live in our communities and commute to our colleges.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity this morning to address this important topic.