

**Dr. Annette Parker Testimony before the U.S. House Committee on Small Business
Subcommittee on Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Workforce Development Hearing on
Growing Jobs through Infrastructure Investment**

I would like to start by thanking, Chairwoman Velazquez for inviting me here today as well as Ranking Member Luetkemeyer. I would also like to acknowledge Subcommittee Chairman Crow and Ranking Member Kim and distinguished members of the subcommittee.

My name is Dr. Annette Parker, and I am honored to serve as the President of South Central College, with campuses in Faribault and North Mankato, Minnesota. I am pleased to be testifying before you today on behalf of the 30 community and technical colleges and 7 universities that make up the Minnesota State system. I also know that my testimony reflects many of the perspectives of the nation's 1,044 community colleges.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify about the vital role of community colleges in developing a skilled workforce that supports economic development.

As I mentioned, South Central College has two campuses. One is in a small metropolitan statistical area and one in a more rural area, with both communities heavily influenced by agriculture as well as having a strong advanced manufacturing and healthcare presence. Surrounding both campuses are many vital small towns, with some large businesses and with many more small businesses, many of which rely on South Central College to meet their workforce needs. We do this by preparing their new employees with the skills they need to immediately start contributing on the first day of work, as well as upskilling their current employees. These businesses also rely on us to provide career pathways for high school students that allow them to get a head start on rewarding, well-paying careers.

As this subcommittee is aware, there is a significant skills gap that exists across the country – too many open positions and not enough skilled employees to fill them. This situation has existed throughout the economic dislocations of the pandemic. Our nation’s community and technical colleges are uniquely positioned to play a significant role in narrowing this gap and providing the relevant skills needed by the workforce of the future.

Over the years, South Central College has developed strong **public-private partnerships**, with our communities, organizations, and businesses, to provide education that meets the needs of our employers, supports the economic development of our communities, and grows student employment and civic engagement.

These partnerships benefit local employers who have been in the community for years or are entrepreneurs who are just starting out. In addition, the partnerships strengthen our region by developing a workforce that contributes to the vitality of our communities, and by encouraging new businesses that want to locate their operations here, making a significant impact on the local economy. For example, Faribault, Minnesota, where one of our campuses is located, has approximately 24,000 residents. Within this community there are now four foreign-owned companies. Many of our small businesses are suppliers to these companies as well as to each other, which supports the economic development of the community. Our college works with these types of companies in a variety of ways. They have indicated having a community college in town and the relationship we’ve built with them is part of the success they’ve achieved in Faribault and why our college supports their enterprise. I further believe that based on the reputation of our communities working together with the college as a partner in developing the workforce, other companies will be interested in doing business here.

Small businesses, in particular, benefit from a robust business climate, supported in part by their local community and technical college. For years I have seen first-hand – in theory, research, and, most importantly, in action – how public-private partnerships benefit all businesses.

On the research side, in 2013 and 2014, I was privileged to sit on President Obama's Advanced Manufacturing Partnership 2.0 Steering Committee. In the committee's report to the President, titled *Accelerating U.S. Advanced Manufacturing*, **public-private partnerships** were emphasized. As part of this, the report pointed to **work-based learning opportunities**, which include providing students and current employees with portable and stackable credentials through nationally recognized certifications, as well as new, innovative apprenticeship models.

South Central College took to heart this report's research and recommendations and in 2014 created the Minnesota Advanced Manufacturing Partnership or MnAMP – a consortium of 12 Minnesota State colleges and two Minnesota State Centers of Excellence. Together with these partners, we created a work-based learning program focused on providing career pathways in advanced manufacturing, with students earning stackable, portable, industry-recognized certifications while attending college and simultaneously working in their specific industry. To provide this industry experience, we and our MnAMP partner institutions worked with businesses throughout Minnesota to implement a dual-training and apprenticeship program to allow students to get an education in their desired field and industry experience at the same time, resulting in students coming out of college career-ready. South Central College is grateful that the MnAMP program was propelled forward through a \$15 million Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant from the U.S. Department of Labor.

After implementing MnAMP, the college provided testimony and support of legislation

in our state for the PIPELINE dual-training grant program. State PIPELINE grants fund dual-training partnerships between businesses and educational providers. These partnerships enable students to receive instruction to earn short-term industry certifications, and in many cases, a degree from South Central College while gaining valuable on-the-job experience. Since the program launched in 2016, South Central College partner businesses have been awarded nearly \$1 million in PIPELINE grants to support dual-training in employer facilities.

I know that the successes South Central College and the Minnesota Advanced Manufacturing Partnership achieved for our students and our businesses were also achieved by other institutions and collaborations throughout the country, thanks to TAACCCT.

Given the impacts of the pandemic, we are now faced with many low income citizens unemployed at the same time our employers are in need of a highly skilled workforce. And as all know, the economy is in a flux. I believe it is critical for the federal government to fund a community college-led job training program, to both help prepare the skilled workforce needed by the private sector and to meet the requirements of any major national infrastructure initiative.

While our TAACCCT project officially ran from 2014 - 2018, the dual training and apprenticeship models it established continue to benefit businesses today. These dual training and apprenticeship opportunities yield positive results for our students and employers alike. For example, when it comes to small businesses in particular, our structure of having a set time for on-campus learning and a set time for off-campus, work-based experience, has been particularly valuable because it allows small businesses to collaborate in scheduling training that reduces their cost and the cost for the college.

In addition to our strong relationships with employers, as a community and technical college, South Central College also has strong partnerships with K-12 schools. Over the years,

we have worked with high schools on productive pathways that create the future workforce that is important to our employers. Most recently, we partnered with Faribault Public Schools, the Faribault Chamber of Commerce, and large and small healthcare leaders in Faribault to develop a program called H2C – High School to College and Career. Through the program, which begins this Fall, Faribault High School students can take classes at the high school that will prepare them for opportunities in six health sciences career areas, while attaining short-term stackable certifications, and getting workplace experience at area healthcare facilities. Students can complete up to 36 college credits with South Central College while in high school. There's a tremendous amount of interest in the program in Faribault. We have had to add additional high school courses to meet demand, and we plan to expand it into other industries beyond healthcare and roll it out to other school districts in the future. Models like this, that have public private partnerships, are essential for the federal government to support as we ramp up high school programs that create awareness and interest in the highly skilled fields we will need for infrastructure development and building the workforce of the future.

Partnerships such as these serve not only to provide a talented workforce for our employers, but also opportunities for our students and economic development for our communities.

But meeting the workforce needs of our employers requires a strong **infrastructure**. This infrastructure includes up-to-date labs filled with the equipment that mirrors the environment and technology students will encounter when they enter the world of work. With technology advancing rapidly, it's an increasing challenge for community colleges to make the necessary investment to keep up.

I was also privileged to sit on the Advisory Board for the MIT Work of the Future Task Force, which released a report last year entitled *The Work of the Future: Building Better Jobs in an Age of Intelligent Machines*. This report reveals that, contrary to previous beliefs, increased technology will not reduce the number of employees needed, but will require more workers who need be able to augment their work as they use technology. This change in how employees interact with technology will increase the number of skilled employees needed. As I mentioned earlier, colleges like South Central College have been imbedding industry-recognized credentials into our programs in recent years. But to address rapidly changing technology and emerging artificial intelligence, the MIT report suggests it's critical to imbed more short-term credentials into our college curriculum. Over the years, South Central College and other community and technical colleges have continued to evolve their technical education programs to prepare students for current technology and this will continue as industry continues to advance.

The increasing sophistication of technical education has required, and will continue to require, continuous, large-scale capital investments on the part of colleges. At the same time, we also have had to innovate to support the growing virtual online component of our education. South Central College has itself shown this innovation with the creation of a remote access Mechatronics program, which provides the mechanical, electronics, and digital skills needed to maintain modern machinery. However, both remote delivery technology and on-campus infrastructure are costly.

While we are thankful for the state support we receive, it falls short of fully meeting our infrastructure needs. We are also deeply appreciative of our business and industry partners, whose financial and equipment donations help a great deal with specific programs. However, despite what we receive from the state and generous benefactors, in terms of our overall

infrastructure across the college, we are falling far short of need. And it's the same story for colleges across the country. This results in an increasing backlog of unaddressed infrastructure projects and a mounting number of deferred maintenance needs, with an inevitable impact on education quality.

To educate the workforce of the future, we need an infrastructure that supports them. For this reason, South Central College and other community colleges across the country are enthusiastic, and thankful, for the Jobs Plan's \$12 billion community college infrastructure investment.

The President's community college infrastructure proposal is critical and appreciated. In evaluating facilities needs across all our colleges, the American Association of Community Colleges estimates a national total deferred maintenance, needed renovations, and upgrades at \$60 billion. At our Minnesota State institutions alone, the deferred maintenance is at \$1.1 billion. This does not include new construction that colleges hope to undertake in the coming months and years to stay current.

Projects funded through this proposal at our college could include improvements to both facilities and equipment in our advance manufacturing, health sciences and agribusiness facilities programs. Investments such as these at South Central College and community colleges throughout the nation would not only improve instruction on our campuses; it would directly benefit the local community, which often participates in college offerings, providing a boost to local economic activity. Any federal effort should ensure a broad diffusion of funds, both regionally and among types of institutions, including smaller colleges that serve a large number of small and rural business, and that often have challenges successfully competing for funds. Emphasis should be given to facilities projects with a strong local economic impact, because

making a local economic impact is what community and technical colleges do around the country, every day.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention a subject critically important to our students and the workforce as a whole – expanding Pell grants to include more short-term training options. With the changes in technology and artificial intelligence, now more than ever, we see education as a lifelong need in order for workers’ skills to remain relevant. If individuals can complete their education in stages and master a skill or earn an industry certificate by taking advantage of a flexible or shorter-term training, this is beneficial. It allows them to start work with a skill and then return to the college later (long-term or short-term) for additional education that builds on their skills as technology advances. Meeting our students and workers where they are is essential to creating a skilled workforce because what works for students, works for businesses, and therefore works for our society. We strongly support the JOBS Act that has been introduced in both the House and Senate on a bipartisan basis. We believe that helping low-income individuals benefit from our occupationally-focused programs is a sound and overdue policy.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on our college’s experience in helping build a strong workforce and sharing information on the infrastructure and other investments we and our students need to continue to succeed and support the U.S. economy.

I look forward to answering any questions you may have. Thank you.