

**Testimony**  
**House Committee on Gaming Oversight**  
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It goes without saying that for many in our region, state and country, the recent economic meltdown has brought about “the worst of times.” In the face of job losses, disappearing 401(k)s and home foreclosures, our friends and neighbors may be overwhelmed by day-to-day demands while attempting to keep the college dream alive for their children and, sometimes, for themselves. For them and for those of us in the field of higher education, it is a time for creative solutions.

In his budget address earlier this year, Governor Rendell proposed a creative solution: a needs-based tuition relief program that could keep college affordable for students attending Bloomsburg University, her 13 sister institutions in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education and all of the commonwealth’s community colleges. Emphasizing accessibility and affordability, the governor also outlined a plan to increase the amount of state funding for the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency, known as PHEAA, ultimately expanding financial assistance for all students at public and private universities.

Governor Rendell’s proposal recognizes the State System’s hard work in holding down the student’s cost of attendance by controlling institutional costs. Currently PASSHE institutions charge \$5,358 for tuition and have an average total cost of tuition and fees (including room and board) of \$13,794. The Tuition Relief Act would, without question, ensure Pennsylvania citizens can afford a quality education at community colleges and PASSHE institutions—including Bloomsburg, where almost 80 percent of our students currently receive some form of financial aid.

The Governor’s proposal does not, as some have suggested, eliminate aid to students at private colleges and universities. Pennsylvania already provides approximately \$200 million in PHEAA grants to students attending private institutions and will continue to do so. In fact, students who attend more expensive private colleges are eligible for larger state grants than those who attend public universities, like Bloomsburg. In addition, some students receive PHEAA grants to attend private institutions who would not be eligible for a PHEAA grant to attend a PASSHE University or a community college.

Public colleges and universities have always played a far different role than private institutions. “Publics” have provided access to high quality educational opportunities to generations of students who otherwise might not be able to pursue a college degree. That remains true today, as again this spring we received a record number of applications for the fall freshman class.

The 112,500 students enrolled in PASSHE institutions – including more than 8,000 at Bloomsburg – are living proof of the tremendous value of our public universities, as are more than 405,000 State System alumni who live, work and pay taxes in the Keystone State.

Students choose to attend Bloomsburg for a variety of reasons – from our strong academic programs and reputation for excellence to our convenient location and, yes, affordability. I believe the Governor’s plan will allow our students to continue to choose Bloomsburg as a place where they may attain a high quality education that is within their family’s financial reach.