

Nevada System of Higher Education

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May 23, 2015

Melissa Woodbury, Chair
Assembly Committee on Education
Nevada Legislature
401 S. Carson Street
Carson City, NV 89701-4747

Re: Support for Senate Bill 227 – Creates the Silver State Opportunity Grant Program

Dear Chair Woodbury and Members of the Assembly Committee on Education,

We are writing to indicate our strong support for Senate Bill 227 and the creation of the Silver State Opportunity Grant Program. As the Chancellor and Presidents of the community colleges and state college within the Nevada System of Higher Education, we interact with the students this program would help on a daily basis. These are the students who graduate from high school academically prepared for the rigors of college-level work, ready to take a full-load of classes within their degree program, but who lose momentum or even drop out along the way for financial reasons.

For many years, Nevada institutions were perceived as some of the most affordable in the western United States. Yet, this perception was based only on the price tag for base registration fees. A more detailed analysis from a student's perspective takes other costs, such as living expenses, into consideration. Based on this analysis, we know that our community colleges are among the least affordable in the nation for students from low income families. For Nevada students from families with a median family income, 18.9 percent of family income is required to pay for one year at a community college, as compared to the national average of 13.5 percent. It is even more challenging for families from the lowest income quintile: 62.4 percent of family income is required to pay for one year at a community college, compared to the national average of 49.9 percent. These financial hurdles are readily apparent when we look at two-year college participation rates for Nevada students from low income families: 6.4 % as compared to the national rate of 15 percent (2012).

We appreciate that the sponsors of Senate Bill 227 crafted the Silver State Grant Opportunity Program as a shared responsibility model. Under a shared responsibility model, contributions to a student's total cost of education are made by partners (student, family, state, feds) that all have a substantial interest in student access to college and their ultimate success in reaching educational goals. Recipients of the Silver State Opportunity Grant are required to make a personal commitment to be eligible: he or she must arrive at an NSHE community college or state college academically prepared, take a full 15-credit load each semester, and enroll in a program leading to a recognized degree or certificate. Our institutional data clearly demonstrate that students willing to make these commitments graduate at significantly higher rates than those who do not.

Thank you for consideration of this important legislation for Nevada's students. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

Respectfully,



Mr. Chester Burton, President
Western Nevada College



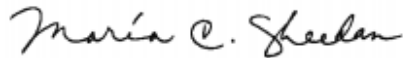
Dr. Mark Curtis, President
Great Basin College



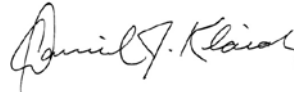
Mr. Bart Patterson, President
Nevada State College



Dr. Michael Richards, President
College of Southern Nevada



Dr. Maria Sheehan, President
Truckee Meadows Community College



Daniel J. Klaich
Chancellor, Nevada System of Higher Education

cc: Crystal Abba, Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs
Dr. Constance Brooks, Vice Chancellor for Government & Community Affairs