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Testimony before the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee
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New Jersey Commission on Higher Education

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. My name is Glenn Lang, and I am the Acting Executive Director of the Commission on Higher Education and the Executive Director of the Educational Opportunity Fund program.

I am pleased to be speaking on behalf of the Commission on Higher Education. Commission Chairman Steven Weinstein and our Executive Committee support the comments I will make today, which are consistent with the Commission's views.

Since 1994, the Commission has collaborated with New Jersey colleges and universities to improve access, affordability, and excellence in higher education for all of our state's citizens.

The Commission licenses the three state research universities, the nine state colleges and universities, the nineteen county colleges, the fourteen private colleges with a public mission, eleven rabbinical and theological colleges, two independent two-year religious colleges, and the six proprietary institutions.

Students in New Jersey have reacted to the downturn in the economy by enrolling in our colleges and universities in record numbers. This past fall, 441,374 students (377,456 undergraduates and 63,918 graduate students)

enrolled at New Jersey colleges and universities, a 2.1% increase over fall 2009. Approximately 48% of all undergraduates were enrolled at a county college and an additional 37% at a senior-public college or university. Approximately 12% of all undergraduates were enrolled at a public-mission independent college or university. The number of students graduating from New Jersey colleges and universities also continues to rise to record levels. During 2010 over 75,000 students received certificates or degrees from a New Jersey college or university, a five-percent increase over 2009.

Since 1994, New Jersey has had a decentralized system of oversight and responsibility for higher education. As a result, the vast majority of funds appropriated for higher education do not flow through the Commission. Appropriations are made directly to the senior public colleges and universities; formula distribution of appropriations is conducted by the Department of the Treasury to the community colleges; and most student aid is managed by the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority. I am pleased to note that although the state continues to face challenging economic circumstance, Governor Christie's fiscal 2012 budget recommends stable support for our colleges and universities and an increase for the Tuition Aid Grant program.

Although the Commission board does not recommend specific appropriations for institutions and student financial aid, it adopts an annual budget policy statement that describes Commission priorities for all of higher education. This year, the priorities were support for need-based student financial aid, the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program, and operating support to the colleges.

The Commission is a small agency, with 14 state funded positions, three of which are vacant; the current staff complement is about half of what it was at its peak in of 21 during 2001. This year, Commission staff has focused on the administration of EOF and our federal GEAR UP programs, on licensure and accreditation, and on the administration of the state's federal College Access Challenge Grant projects. These grants focus on increasing the number of students filing applications for financial aid, providing dual enrollment opportunities for high school students, and encouraging the reenrollment of adult students who had completed some college credit but had not achieved a degree. In addition, the Commission has new responsibilities under state legislation, such as reporting on the progress of the Comprehensive State-wide Transfer Agreement, reviewing master facilities plans as required by the Economic Stimulus Act of 2009, coordinating data to comply with the Parent and Consumer Information Act. No administrative funding was provided for these new tasks.

The Governor's proposed budget calls stable support for the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) the Commission's largest program serving more than 12,400 students at our colleges and universities. The Governor's budget also included support for the College Bound program which also serves as the state match to our successful federal NJGEARUP program.

Higher education is an integral part of New Jersey's economy, contributing today to our State's recovery from extremely challenging economic times and building its economic and cultural future. Recognizing that the State continues to face significant financial challenges and that the fiscal constraints to the State are severe and ongoing, the Commission recommends the Legislature view that investment in higher education is an

absolute strategic necessity, for both economic and societal reasons, and that such investment will be certain to pay substantial dividends back to the State and the lives of our citizens.

Our institutions of higher education play a significant role in contributing to the State's collective economic well-being and quality of life. Moreover, strong colleges and universities are critical to improving our State's economic competitiveness by preparing new graduates, retooling dislocated workers, and conducting research and development. Recent census data indicate that more than 44% of the state's adults (25-64 years old) hold at least a two-year degree compared to a national average of 38%. Recent studies of occupational data and workforce trends suggest that by 2018 almost 64% of jobs in New Jersey will require postsecondary education.

New Jersey and the United States are at a critical juncture in establishing what our economy will look like in the new century. The rapidly changing economy of our State and nation require workers with skills at the collegiate level to adapt to new technologies, promote innovation, and learn and grow throughout their careers. Furthermore, university research and development contributes to opening new avenues for business improvement and growth.

The Governor has signaled his commitment to the future through Executive Order 26 which commissioned a high level task force to study and make recommendations for the future directions and contributions of New Jersey higher education. The task force chaired by former Governor Kean issued an extensive report and series of recommendations aimed at helping position New Jersey higher education to meet 21st century challenges. The task force report covers a wide range of issues including governance, mission,

financing and affordability, the role of the state research university and medical education in New Jersey. Among the recommendations were the elimination of the current Commission on Higher Education coordinating structure replaced with a Secretary of Higher Education and a new Governor's Higher Education Council. Additionally based upon recommendations of the task force the Governor signed Executive Orders 51 and 52, establishing the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey Advisory Committee to consider multiple changes to graduate medical education across the state and creating the Governor's Higher Education Advisory Council to advise him on all higher education matters.

As the economy recovers, we anticipate that the longer-term needs and contributions of higher education to protect access and quality, and the role of higher education in economic development, will be considered and supported.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.