

Opposition Testimony to Nebraska Revenue Committee LB 873

Hearing Date: February 02, 2023

Senator Linehan and members of the Revenue Committee:

My name is Diane Keller (D-I-A-N-E, K-E-L-L-E-R). As past president of the Nebraska Community College Association Board and current member of Central Community College's Board of Governors I am testifying in opposition of LB 783. I will address this concern from a variety of viewpoints.

First as an employer. I recently retired as the CEO of Memorial Community Health, Inc of Aurora, Nebraska which offers residents of central Nebraska a diverse, modern health care system that includes three family medicine clinics, an acute hospital, outpatient specialty and diagnostic services, independent and assisted living facilities and a nursing home. Throughout my 50 years of service for MCHI I have hired nurses, health technicians, and business staff who benefit directly from a community college education. By removing the local control and authority of local community college boards to assess a levy within the current property tax system, it provides greater uncertainty of program offerings, workforce availability and increases the likelihood of more of our youth and adults leaving our central Nebraska area.

Second, as an elected board member. I have faithfully served not only my local board in central Nebraska, but the statewide NCCA board to conservatively manage our budgets while also recruiting and retaining employees and students to live, work and pay taxes in central Nebraska. I have served on committees seeking to balance needs from metropolitan Omaha and Lincoln to rural needs of western communities like Scottsbluff and North Platte. A statewide system that has worked well for over fifty years of fluctuating land prices, employment demands, and political changes and priorities of governors and state legislators. I am up for reelection every four years – and have yet to have concerns of the local tax levy assessed by Central Community College be a reason for my failure to get re-elected. I specifically represent voters and taxpayers from six counties (Adams, Clay, Hamilton, Merrick, Nuckolls and Webster) of the twenty-five counties served by CCC. I have trust in my fellow board members and our administrators to prepare and implement programs, facilities and educational opportunities for all of our area residents that normally range in age from elementary students to well past retirement.

Third, as a property taxpayer. My husband, Keith and I have been owners of agricultural land for decades, and so I have a first-hand understanding of the impacts of rising agricultural valuations, and the wild fluctuations of farm input prices, commodity prices and other taxing entity levies. As a taxpayer, I appreciate the accountability of seeing the exact dollar amount of my property tax dollars that are going to support local students' education at CCC. I also appreciate that I have had the opportunity to make sure the fiscal investments we are making into our local area communities of Columbus, Grand Island, Hastings, Kearney, Lexington, Holdrege, Ord and all the others in between can be justified and something I can proudly support with our property tax funds.

If you have specific questions about individual community college levies, we have presidents in the room whom can be called up to testify and answer, but from one elected representative to another, I want you to know that I take my position seriously. I know my elected peers do as well. I would appreciate your trust in us as we seek to make the state of Nebraska an outstanding location for current and future employers, taxpayers, and residents who live here by allowing the elected community college boards taxing authority to continue to best serve the students we serve.