To: Members of the Senate Regulatory Reform Committee  
From: Michigan Community College Association  
Date: September 15, 2020  
Re: Support for Senate Bill 1055 (Nesbitt)

As you may know, in 2019, Governor Gretchen Whitmer set Michigan’s first-ever college attainment goal\(^1\). Sixty by 30 seeks to build a better Michigan in two ways:

- **Close the skills gap** that poses the single greatest threat to the success of our businesses and our state’s prosperity. Jobs requiring skilled employees today, as well as jobs on the horizon, demand greater education and training than ever before. Increasingly, the best jobs require more than a high school diploma.

- **Increase opportunity** and greater access to the education and skills that create opportunities for better jobs and bigger paychecks.

Among many other strategies, one approach that 23 states\(^2\), including Michigan, are using to increase postsecondary attainment levels is to allow community colleges to confer bachelors, or baccalaureate, degrees in industries that demand bachelor’s degree. Since 2012, state law has granted community colleges in Michigan the authority to confer baccalaureate degrees in four applied and technical program areas - concrete technology, maritime technology, energy production technology, and culinary arts. Senate Bill 1055 would update existing law for today’s needs by including the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree to the existing authority.

**NEED:** According to Michigan’s Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives, nursing is one of Michigan’s 50 Hot Jobs, with 6,620 projected job openings each year, an increasing number of which require a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree\(^3\). Researchers at the University of Washington have determined that the annual need exceeds current annual degree referrals by 161% in Michigan\(^4\), a situation that challenges hospitals in Michigan and jeopardizes their ability to qualify for magnet status.

**ACCESS:** In many parts of the state, access to a BSN program can require a several-hour commute for in-person instruction. Although online programs have grown significantly in recent years, much of Michigan lacks adequate broadband connectivity, particularly in these times where existing internet must support multiple

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1. [https://www.sixtyby30.org/](https://www.sixtyby30.org/)  
3. [https://milmi.org/Portals/198/publications/Hot50_Statewide_2028.pdf](https://milmi.org/Portals/198/publications/Hot50_Statewide_2028.pdf)  
family members working and learning from home simultaneously. Where good broadband access is available, many residents struggle to afford it: studies conducted this year among K-12 students showed that as many as one-third lacked the technology access necessary for quality online learning. Allowing community colleges to confer BSN degrees will provide a much more accessible option for residents to earn this credential and move ahead in the workforce.

QUALITY: Allowing community colleges to confer a BSN only changes the institution where the program is offered. This authority does not change the content of the program, the credentials required of qualified faculty, the standards accrediting agencies use, nor the content of the licensing exams. Already, public and private universities and community colleges in Michigan are all accredited by the same agency, the Higher Learning Commission. Beyond that, Senate Bill 1055 would require any community college that offers a BSN to maintain a national professional nursing accreditation, the highest standard of quality for such programs. Regardless of whether nursing students train at a university or a community college, before qualifying for licensure as a registered nurse, all graduates must pass the National Council Licensure Exam (NCLEX). Data consistently demonstrate that community college graduates pass the NCLEX at rates that are comparable to the pass rates of their university counterparts. There is no reason to believe that extending the extensive training Michigan’s community colleges already offer to nursing students to include BSNs will impair the quality of those nurses.

EVOLVING MISSION: The mission of community colleges has always been to respond to the constantly evolving needs of their communities. Community colleges offer a wide variety of transfer programs, occupational programs, industry-recognized certificates, and other customized training programs for business and industry. Adding the BSN to their offerings is another way in which community colleges can continue to be responsive and relevant as they serve workforce needs in their communities, as well as the state’s broader postsecondary attainment goals.

BOTTOM LINE: If Michigan hopes to be the kind of state that meets its 21st Century workforce needs and attracts innovation and talent, we must be bold. Our state cannot be afraid of new modes of delivery for higher education opportunities. Michigan residents deserve a world-class healthcare system, staffed by residents who live, work, and hopefully have trained right here in our home state. Senate Bill 1055 is one important step toward that vision, and we strongly encourage your support.

5 https://detroit.chalkbeat.org/2020/4/14/21225509/about-500-000-michigan-children-lack-the-internet-access-and-
computers-needed-to-learn-at-home