August 28, 2014

The Honorable Edmund G. Brown, Jr.
Governor of California
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 850 (Block) Public Postsecondary Education: Community College Districts: Baccalaureate Degree Pilot Program

REQUEST FOR SIGNATURE

Dear Governor Brown:

On behalf of the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges, I respectfully urge you to sign Senate Bill 850 by Senator Marty Block. This bill authorizes the Board of Governors, in consultation with the California State University (CSU) and the University of California (UC), to establish a baccalaureate degree pilot program.

Specifically, the pilot program would allow up to 15 participating community college districts to offer one baccalaureate degree program each to meet local workforce needs as long as it does not duplicate a baccalaureate degree program already offered by the CSU or the UC system. Participating districts shall submit plans for their program to the Chancellor’s Office for review which will then be submitted to the Board of Governors for approval. In addition to the $46 per unit community college fee, districts would charge an additional $84 per unit fee for upper division coursework, making this program an affordable pathway toward a baccalaureate degree. Districts would be required to commence programs no later than the 2017-18 academic year and have degrees completed by the 2022-23 academic year. The Legislative Analyst’s Office would conduct both an interim and final evaluation of the pilot program in order to assess its effectiveness.

California’s demand for over one million bachelor degree holders in the coming decade sparked renewed interest in the addition of baccalaureate degrees to the California community college mission. The concept of allowing community colleges to confer baccalaureate degrees is not new; more than 50 community colleges across the nation operate almost 500 baccalaureate programs in 21 states.

The establishment of affordable, accessible, and quality baccalaureate degree programs at community colleges is important for two primary reasons: 1) it will help the state meet its need for individuals in high demand technical disciplines which are increasingly requiring baccalaureate degrees; and 2) it will increase college participation rates and improve workforce training opportunities for local residents who are unable to relocate because of family or work commitments.
We firmly believe the time is right for this proposal. SB 850 holds tremendous promise for our system to address critical workforce needs in regions of the state that are currently underserved, as well as to provide access to those seeking baccalaureate degrees who don’t have other local educational options.

I thank you for your consideration and urge your signature on SB 850 (Block). If you or your staff has any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (916) 445-4434.

Sincerely,

Brice W. Harris
Chancellor

Cc: Senator Marty Block