

Good morning **Members of the Committee**. Thank you for your time today.

My name is Joe Odenwald, and as you can tell I am not a native Michigander. My wife, Laura, and I are Louisiana natives and moved to Michigan in 2017. Our son, Joseph Franklin was born the following year, and we are proud he is a native Michigander. I serve as President of Southwestern Michigan College, with campuses in Dowagiac and Niles.

For most of my life, I have lived in rural areas, both in Louisiana and here. I deeply appreciate rural life, and have committed much of my professional life to helping rural students, kids who grew up like me, pursue their education. A better educated and trained population can ensure a continuing quality of life for our region.

The matter at hand is one of access, quality of life, and economic development. With respect to access, what we are interested in doing, offering a bachelor's degree in an acute workforce field, aims to provide local access to a degree often necessary for skill-specialization or advancement. I do not see us as a competitor to the in-state public and private universities for these students. I think we are looking at a different segment of the population. By the way, I think it is relevant to note that some of our four-year universities offer associate's degrees, which are typically offered by community colleges. **Northern Michigan University** offers 29; **Ferris State University** offers 43. My guess is that these make sense for those institutions the way a potential workforce bachelor's degree makes sense for some of us.

With respect to **quality of life**, providing more and better trained employees for our rural systems is imperative. We are facing a period with a much older population and it will impact rural areas most dramatically. Globally, in 2019, one in eleven people was sixty-five years old or older; by 2050, the number will be one in six. Thirty percent of the world lived in urban areas in 1950; by 2050, it will be sixty-eight percent.

With respect to **economic development**, I commend the Legislature for its efforts to improve our Michigan economy by recruiting business and industry. We know the fundamentals of economic development. We must have **high-quality education, transportation infrastructure, and healthcare**. Rest assured, I view our work in the community colleges as economic development. This week, in addition to being here, I am touring a

manufacturing facility in our service area to develop an employee training program for the use of robots.

Southwestern Michigan College and our peers, by way of offering workforce development bachelor's degrees, can help with the three fundamentals of economic development I cited today: high-quality education, transportation infrastructure, and healthcare.

We can offer enhanced local education to better support our region. I am bullish on the ability of our rural communities to prosper... if we position ourselves well. **HB 5361** and **HB 5362** would hamper our ability to better our region. I respectfully ask that you reject them.

Thank you for your time.