

Testimony of Dr. George Grant, Jr.

President, Saginaw Valley State University

Before the Michigan House Higher Education Subcommittee Appropriations Committee

April 23, 2025

Chairperson Markannen, Vice-Chair Roth , Minority Vice-Chair Longjohn, and esteemed members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Dr. George Grant, Jr, and it is my privilege to serve as the President of Saginaw Valley State University (SVSU). Founded in 1963, the youngest of Michigan's 15 public universities, we proudly serve approximately 7,000 students, offering over 100 undergraduate and graduate programs. SVSU stands out for its exceptional value, consistently ranked among the most affordable institutions in Michigan, reflecting our unwavering commitment to delivering accessible, high-quality education.

Today, I will highlight the profound impact that state funding has on our public university. At SVSU, it has enabled us to achieve significant advancements in workforce development, infrastructure projects, and our ongoing dedication to affordability, student success, and community engagement.

Workforce and Talent Development

SVSU strategically aligns its academic programs with Michigan's high-demand, high-wage careers, effectively preparing graduates to meet the State's evolving workforce needs. According to the Michigan Department of Technology, Management, and Budget, occupations such as Registered Nurses, Accountants, Auditors, and Software Developers are among the State's "Hot 50" jobs projected through 2028. SVSU offers robust programs in 38 of these 50 fields, including Nursing, Accounting, Engineering, Teaching, and Computer Science, ensuring students acquire the relevant skills and knowledge required in these critical sectors.

High-Quality Academic Programs

SVSU delivers exceptional academic programs that equip students with the knowledge and skills for professional success. Strong student performance in national licensure exams and competitive academic teams demonstrate this.

SVSU's nursing program stands out for its rigorous curriculum and comprehensive clinical training. In 2024, nursing graduates achieved an impressive 98.55% first-time pass rate on the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-RN), significantly exceeding national and state averages by over 10%. Additionally, education students consistently perform well on the Michigan Test for Teacher Certification (MTTC), with a first-time pass rate that ranks in the top 20% of all teaching institutions in Michigan. Our elementary mathematics program was one of two institutions in the state to receive the highest ranking.

Safe and Secure Campus

When I started as president at SVSU, my top priority was and still is campus safety. We have proactively implemented comprehensive safety measures, including enhanced campus-wide lighting, advanced surveillance and emergency response systems, and regular training for our dedicated university police force. Additionally, we have increased mental health support services and introduced campus-wide safety education programs to foster a culture of awareness, responsibility, and proactive community engagement.

Affordability and Student Debt

SVSU thanks you for your continued appropriations support to the University. We have maintained the lowest tuition rate among Michigan's public universities through strategic budgeting and cost-saving measures. We also actively work to minimize student debt through various institutional financial aid programs and scholarships, ensuring our graduates are not unduly burdened as they embark on their professional journeys.

Impact of the Michigan Achievement Scholarship

Continuing the conversation about affordability, SVSU appreciates your continued support for the Michigan Achievement Scholarship. At SVSU, over 50% of our first-year students from 2023 and 2024 have received this scholarship. The MAS has significantly reduced the financial barriers to higher education, enabling more students to pursue their academic aspirations and become leaders in those 38 hottest careers in Michigan.

SVSU Alumni Success and Engagement in Michigan

SVSU plays a crucial role in bolstering Michigan's economy by retaining a significant number of its alumni in the state. Notably, SVSU ranks among the Top 5 public universities in Michigan for graduates who choose to stay. More than 80% of SVSU graduates remain in Michigan to apply their skills and knowledge across diverse industries.

ADN-BSN University-Community College Partnerships

SVSU is proud to be innovative in solving workforce and talent development issues. With the legislature's and the Governor's help, SVSU recently formed robust partnerships with several Michigan community colleges—including Alpena, Bay, Delta, Kirtland, and Montcalm—to create seamless transfer agreements for a concurrent ADN-BSN pathway. This allows nursing students to pursue their Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) while pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) at SVSU. This accelerated route addresses critical healthcare shortages and helps develop a highly skilled talent pool, ultimately strengthening Michigan's healthcare system and economic vitality.

Accelerated Certification with Residency (ACR) Program and MI Future Educator

SVSU launched the Accelerated Certification with Residency (ACR) program in 2017 to address the urgent need for qualified teachers. One of the first in Michigan, this program enables individuals with bachelor's degrees to earn teaching certification within three semesters. Over 100 SVSU graduates enter teaching professions each year, totaling more than 750 from this program now teaching throughout Michigan.

We appreciate the legislature's partnership in tackling the critical teacher shortage through the MI Future Educator Fellowship and Stipend programs.

Exemplary On-Campus Housing

Our dedication to student satisfaction is also reflected in the quality and reputation of our on-campus housing facilities. For five consecutive years, SVSU's residence halls have been ranked No. 1 among all Michigan public universities and in the Top 10 in the United States.

Community Engagement and Partnerships

SVSU remains deeply committed to community engagement, fostering meaningful partnerships that benefit our students and the broader community. Over the past year, our students contributed more than 30,000 hours of community service, participating in initiatives such as tutoring programs in local schools, foster care, and Special Olympics.

Capital Outlay Project Updates

SVSU is making significant progress in enhancing our educational infrastructure. Following a fire in 2019, Brown Hall is undergoing extensive renovations. Thanks to a substantial investment by the State of Michigan, this funding has revitalized one of our campus's primary academic buildings, now featuring state-of-the-art classrooms, advanced laboratories, and collaborative learning spaces. Renovations are expected to finish by July 2025 for the Fall Semester.

SVSU also appreciates the planning authorization for the Lake Huron Environmental Sciences Research Station project. With the support of funding from the State, this will be the first university-operated research station on Lake Huron, starting construction in 2026-27. The Station will serve as a hub for freshwater research on Saginaw Bay and Lake Huron, addressing critical environmental challenges impacting the Great Lakes. This facility will foster interdisciplinary collaborations including K-12 students and teachers, attract leading researchers and students nationwide, and substantially contribute to preserving, understanding, and sustainably managing Michigan's valuable freshwater ecosystems.

Conclusion

Saginaw Valley State University is committed to providing a safe, exceptional, and affordable higher education that aligns with Michigan's economic priorities and workforce needs. Through infrastructure investments, innovative programs like our ADN-BSN and ACR pathways, and significant student-focused initiatives like the Michigan Achievement Scholarship, we continue to expand student opportunities and strengthen Michigan's talent pipeline and economic prosperity. Our focus on affordability, quality housing, a safe campus environment, and a prestigious community-engaged designation ensures SVSU graduates are well-prepared, civic-minded leaders who stay in Michigan to contribute meaningfully to its communities and economy.

We sincerely appreciate the legislature's ongoing support and look forward to continued collaboration on initiatives that enhance educational access and quality for Michigan students. Together, we are investing in the future of SVSU and the ongoing growth, vitality, and success of the entire State of Michigan.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Dr. George Grant, Jr.

President, Saginaw Valley State University