



GTAMC

October 19th, 2020

Rob Summers

Chairman - Grand Traverse Area Manufacturing Council

GTAMC - Futures for Frontliners Program

Dear Legislator, or Representative,

We write today in regard to the recently announced “Futures for Frontliners” program. While area employers and workers are excited about this program, and the opportunities that it provides, we have significant concerns regarding some of the underlying workings of the program that we believe should be addressed.

The State of Michigan website represents the program as “free tuition for frontliners – A pathway to a higher wage job”, the reality is that this is not the case for many of our area workers. Details within the program reveal that the state will only reimburse in-district tuition costs. We believe that this program should be uniform in cost for all workers through the state, regardless of their county or service area. We understand the intent of in-district versus out of district tuition as a means to support those who pay taxes to these schools, this program is funded at a state level, and therefore should uniformly benefit all Michigan tax-payers.

In our region’s manufacturing sector, and likely many other sectors, our workers come from several bordering counties to our regional “hub”, Grand Traverse County, which is also where our Northwestern Michigan Community college is located. A cursory look at demographics in the manufacturing sector will reveal that many workers in our Traverse City area come from Kalkaska, Benzie, Antrim or even Manistee and Wexford counties. Workers who live as close as 4 miles away in Leelanau county, or 10 miles away in Antrim county are subjected to a cost that is more than a Grand Traverse County resident would normally pay for in-district tuition under this program; as out of district tuition rates are more than double that of in-district. Managers and supervisors estimate that upwards of 60% of their employees come from outside Grand Traverse County.

These workers, excited about the prospects of furthering their skills, and providing better for their families have been disappointed to learn this program is not actually free for them, not because they sacrificed less through the pandemic, but because of where they live. Business leaders have been disappointed as their employees have been shown an unexpected barrier as it relates to adding to their skills, desperately needed in today’s

unemployment environment. Their feedback is clear: this program should not be drawn along district lines, and ALL workers should be eligible for the same benefits under this program.

In support of our region's businesses, their employees and their families, we urge you to take action and make this program equally accessible to every Michigan citizen, irrespective of their place of residence and district lines. Thank you for your leadership and consideration of this request. We look forward to your prompt feedback, considering the current application deadline of December 31st, 2020.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rob Summers". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Rob Summers, Chairman, on behalf of GTAMC Members