

Legislative Budget and Finance Committee

**An Interim Report on the Establishment of the
Northern Pennsylvania Regional College**

**Report Presentation by Jason Brehouse and Louis Day to the Legislative
Budget and Finance Committee, on June 6, 2018.**

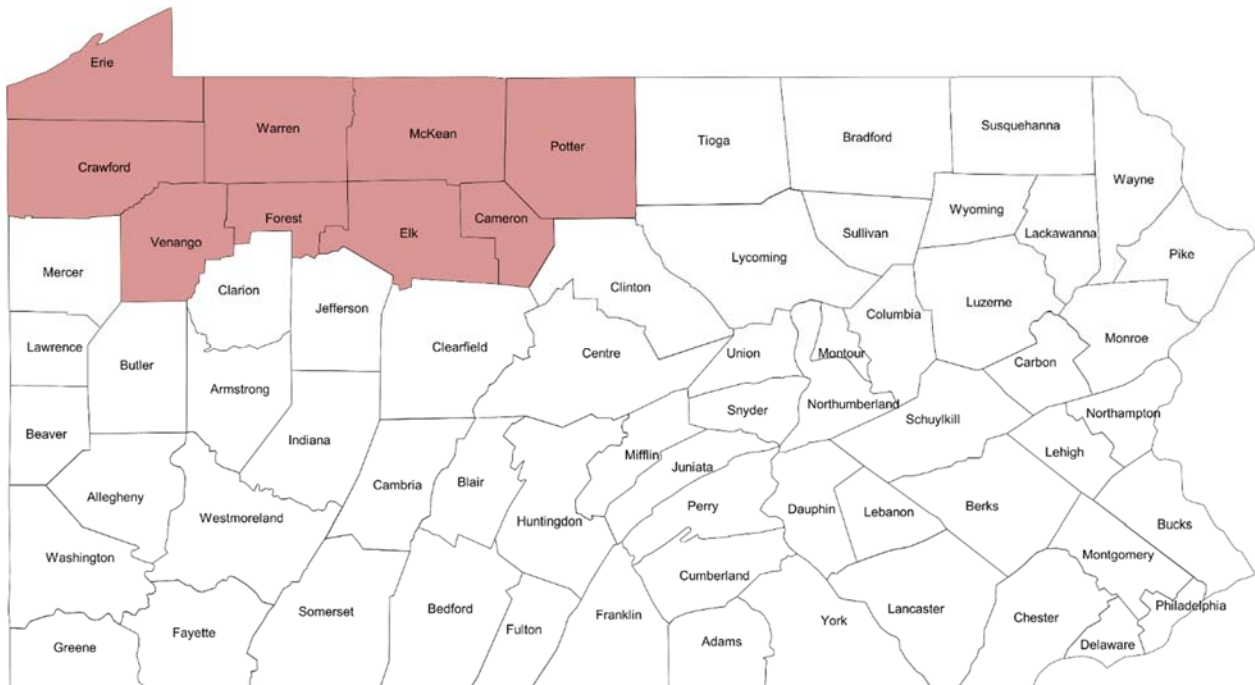
Good morning Chairman Mensch and members of the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee. My name is Jason Brehouse, and I was the Project Manager assigned to oversee this project. Thank you for the opportunity today to present this interim report for your consideration. With me today is Louis Day, the Analyst on the study who did the yeoman's work on this project. With your permission, I'll ask Louis to present the report testimony:

Act 126 of 2014, and subsequently Act 86 of 2016, provide for the establishment, operation, administration, and funding of a rural regional college (RRC) in a multicounty rural area that is underserved by comprehensive community college education and workforce development. These acts also direct the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee (LBFC) to review the success of the RRC in satisfying the goals set forth in the RRC plan approved by the Secretary of Education, and the needs of the multicounty area the RRC was established to serve. The LBFC is required to submit an interim report to the General Assembly by June 30, 2018, and the final report by June 30, 2022. As the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College (NPRC) was only approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) in May 2017, the data required for the interim report was not available. Instead, we

prepared a brief report updating the General Assembly on the progress that has been made to date.

We found that the Secretary of Education designated nine contiguous counties of northcentral and northwestern Pennsylvania—Cameron, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Forest, McKean, Potter, Venango, and Warren—to be served by the establishment of the RRC, and selected 15 representatives of the designated area to serve on the RRC Board of Trustees. The northcentral and northwestern region of Pennsylvania is over 7,000 square miles, and the nine counties are rural, with the exception of the area in and around the City of Erie.

Designated Area of the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College



The Board of Trustees met for the first time and were sworn in by the Secretary in December 2014, with the requirement to submit their proposed RRC plan to the Secretary within one year. However, language in Act 126 directed appropriations to the college, not the Board itself. Therefore, the appropriation was not available to the RRC until the college was established, which required the RRC plan to be submitted to, and approved by, the Secretary of Education.

Due to these funding stipulations, the statutory deadline for the submission of the RRC plan was extended to December 2016, and the Board of Trustees entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the PDE to make payments for the Board for services and fees incurred during the development of the RRC plan. Although language in the Fiscal Code was amended in April 2016 to appropriate funding directly to the Board, as opposed to through PDE and the state contracting system, the Board continued to experience complications accessing their appropriations. Therefore, the Board had to primarily rely on the PDE contracting system throughout the development of the RRC plan. The Board submitted the completed RRC plan to the Secretary for review in December 2016, the plan was approved, and the RRC was established in May 2017. The RRC formally adopted the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College (NPRC) name in January 2018.

The NPRC adopted an education delivery model that provides education to rural students by combining traditional classroom instruction with synchronous delivery of instruction to remote classrooms through the use of live interactive television technology. The delivery model currently includes: six college centers and twelve satellite sites located in population centers within their counties, and each location has classrooms, office spaces, parking space, and networking capability.

In partnership with Gannon University, the NPRC conducted a “soft launch” for the 2017-2018 academic year, with dual enrollment high school students paying tuition of \$60 per credit, and Associate Degree students paying a combined tuition and fee rate of \$198 per credit, which is within range of the tuition and fee rates set at Pennsylvania’s fourteen community colleges. The NPRC is currently offering two Associate Degree programs in Business Administration and Interdisciplinary Studies, and a total of 45 students were enrolled during Fall Semester 2017, and 29 students were enrolled during Spring Semester 2018. During both semesters, 58 percent of the students were enrolled in an associate degree program, with the remaining 42 percent enrolled in a dual enrollment program.

According to NPRC staff, student enrollment during the 2017-2018 academic year was lower than originally anticipated, because, due to time and budgetary constraints, there was little opportunity for a marketing campaign prior to the College’s “soft-launch.” However, the NPRC anticipates increased student enrollment

with an improved marketing strategy and the addition of several non-credit courses and associate degree programs. The NPRC has recently entered into an agreement with the Pennsylvania College of Technology to offer three non-credit technical training courses during the Summer Semester 2018, and anticipates providing two additional Associate Degrees in Early Childhood Education/Early Intervention and Criminal Justice starting in the Fall Semester 2018. The NPRC is also in discussions with the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education institutions about the possibility of taking over several of their associate degree programs, and is seeking to develop additional partnerships with local career and technical institutes to enable the college to offer Associate Degrees in Applied Science to better meet local workforce development needs, such as manufacturing, industrial, and machining-related technologies. The NPRC anticipates a steady increase in the enrollment of Associate Degree and Dual-Enrollment students over the next five academic years, increasing from a total of 80 students in the 2018-2019 academic year to 500 students by the 2022-2023 academic year.

The NPRC has also begun the process of establishing its own policies and procedures, curriculum, and faculty in order to be recognized as a candidate for accreditation. The NPRC anticipates launching as an independent college at the start of the 2019-2020 academic year, being recognized as a candidate for accreditation by the 2021-2022 academic year, and then achieving full accreditation by the 2025-2026 academic year. For this reason, we recommend that the General Assembly

consider extending the final report date from June 30, 2022, to June 30, 2025. This delay would enable the NPRC to establish itself as an independent accredited institution of higher education, and provide enough time for the NPRC to collect the necessary data for the final report.

In closing, we thank Senator Mary Jo White and members of the RRC Board of Trustees, the NPRC President Dr. Joseph Nairn and his staff, and the PDE for their assistance and excellent cooperation during our study. Thank you.