

**Testimony of**  
**Dr. Paul Broadie II**

**President, Santa Fe College**

Before the **United States Senate Special Committee on Aging**  
Hearing on “*Aging with Purpose: The Positive Impact of Seniors in Today’s Economy*”

December 10, 2025

Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the critical role community colleges play in empowering older Americans to remain active, engaged, and economically secure. I am honored to speak on behalf of Santa Fe College and the more than 1,000 community colleges serving over 10 million students nationwide—institutions that stand at the intersection of lifelong learning, workforce development, and community well-being.

Community colleges are designed for expanding access to all learners across our communities and regions. They serve learners of every age, background, and stage of life. Today’s hearing topic - *Aging with Purpose: The Positive Impact of Seniors in Today’s Economy*- aligns directly with the mission of our institutions.

**I. Older Americans Are a Growing and Vital Part of the Community College Population**

Community colleges have become one of the nation’s largest access points for older Americans seeking new skills, new opportunities, or a renewed sense of purpose. According to national data from the Association of Community College Trustees, more than 90,000 individuals aged 50 and older earned a degree or credential in the 2023–2024 academic year, a substantial share through community colleges.

Older learners enroll because they are:

- Reentering the workforce
- Pivoting into new career fields
- Seeking rapid reskilling

- Remaining mentally active
- Engaging socially and civically
- Reskilling for a second career
- Pursuing lifelong passions

Their participation strengthens the workforce and enriches classroom learning.

At Santa Fe College—a reflection of national trends—462 degree-seeking students were age 50 or older last year, with more than 1,200 over age 40. These students are enrolled in areas such as Health Services Administration, Nursing, and Programming & Analysis.

The stories of our older graduates illustrate the deep value of community colleges as engines of lifelong opportunity.

- *Judith*, age 65, completed her associate degree after first enrolling four decades earlier.
- *Carlos*, age 81, graduated from our Phlebotomy certificate program, excelled during clinical rotations at UF Health, and continues to pursue additional credentials today.

These individuals embody purpose, persistence, and the spirit of learning that fuels America's economy.

## **II. Community Colleges Offer the Most Affordable and Accessible Pathway to Rapid Reskilling and Economic Mobility**

Older Americans often seek education that is affordable, flexible, and aligned with real employment opportunities. Community colleges deliver on all three.

### **Affordability**

Community colleges remain the most cost-effective institutions in higher education. Many states - including Florida- allow residents aged 60 and older to audit courses at no cost, providing robust intellectual engagement without financial strain.

### **Accessibility**

Community colleges are geographically embedded in nearly every community - urban, suburban, and rural - making education physically accessible to older adults.

## **Workforce Relevance**

Community colleges collaborate directly with industry partners to offer short-term, employer-driven programs in high-demand fields such as healthcare, IT, advanced manufacturing, and public service. For older Americans seeking rapid reskilling, these programs provide pathways to sustainable employment and economic stability.

### **III. National Exemplars of Community College Innovation**

Across the country, community colleges design programs tailored to adults experiencing transitions, returning to the workforce, or supporting multigenerational households. Santa Fe College demonstrates two such models that illustrate how community colleges can transform lives on a national scale.

#### **The Displaced Homemaker Program: A Lifeline for Adults Re-Entering the Workforce**

For more than 50 years, Santa Fe College's Displaced Homemaker Program has provided critical support to individuals - often older adults - who must return to the workforce after the death of a spouse, divorce, or a major change in life circumstances. Many completers of the program have landed gainful employment opportunities as a result of the skills they learned.

More than 4,500 individuals have benefited from:

- Career counseling
- Digital literacy training
- Job readiness and professionalism workshops
- Personalized financial literacy support
- Confidence building
- Job placement support

Programs like this, mirrored in other states, demonstrate how community colleges help older adults overcome barriers, rebuild stability, and access high-demand careers.

## **The ACB Excel Program: A National Award-Winning, Two-Generation Model for Economic Mobility**

Another nationally recognized example is Santa Fe College's ACB Excel Program, which takes a powerful, innovative approach to strengthening families and improving economic outcomes. Although rooted in our community, it represents the type of visionary model that can be scaled across the nation.

ACB Excel empowers entire families by providing parents and their school-aged children with simultaneous access to academic programs, support services, and enrichment activities. This two-generation framework is free for all participants and has proven to be a catalyst for economic and social mobility. It also addresses the growing trend of grandparents raising their grandchildren and needing to reskill to enter the job market.

### **Parents:**

- Enroll in rapid credentialing programs that lead to high-wage, in-demand jobs
- Receive personal financial literacy education
- Work directly with academic and career success coaches
- Build connections to employer partners through job placement pipelines

### **Children:**

- Engage in hands-on STEM and literacy activities
- Participate in teamwork and resilience-building programming
- Receive social-emotional and academic support
- Experience a stable, enriching environment while parents pursue training

The program fosters deep community impact through:

- Volunteer opportunities
- Mentorship and internship connections
- Employment pathways
- Cross-generational learning and engagement

By strengthening both parent and child simultaneously, ACB Excel directly enhances economic stability, workforce participation, and long-term family well-being. It exemplifies

the kind of community-integrated learning model that community colleges nationwide are uniquely positioned to deliver.

#### **IV. Lifelong Learning Supports Healthy Aging, Mental Well-Being, and Social Connection**

Community colleges also play an essential role in supporting older adults outside the traditional workforce.

Nationwide, colleges offer:

- Noncredit lifelong learning courses
- Arts, humanities, and enrichment activities
- Health and wellness education
- Technology and digital literacy workshops
- Civic engagement opportunities

Programs like Santa Fe College's Community Education program- where more than 65% of students are age 50 or older- provide critical social connection, intellectual stimulation, and community belonging. These are proven contributors to healthy aging and reduced social isolation.

Community colleges further strengthen communities through intergenerational learning, where older adults serve as mentors, volunteers, research judges, and advisory board members.

#### **V. Policy Recommendations to Support Purposeful Aging Through Community Colleges**

To enhance the role community colleges play in strengthening the lives of older Americans, Congress may consider:

- Expanding federal support for short-term, stackable workforce credentials
- Supporting two-generation learning models that benefit entire families
- Investing in digital literacy initiatives for older adults
- Funding wraparound services that reduce barriers for older learners

- Supporting replication of programs like Displaced Homemaker and ACB Excel

These investments strengthen not only older Americans, but our workforce, our communities, and our economy.

## **Conclusion**

Older Americans bring wisdom, experience, dedication, and purpose to our campuses and our communities. Community colleges- accessible to all and responsive to local needs- are uniquely positioned to help them continue contributing to the nation's economic vitality and civic life.

Through rapid workforce training, two-generation learning models, enrichment programs, and community-based partnerships, community colleges provide older Americans with the tools to remain engaged, productive, and connected. Programs like the Displaced Homemaker Program and the ACB Excel Program show what is possible when community colleges are empowered to innovate.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony. I welcome your questions and look forward to working with the Committee to strengthen opportunities for older adults across our nation.