Written Testimony of Chancellor L. Carrell of the University of Minnesota Rochester to the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development.

Hearing Topic:

Postsecondary Innovation: Preparing Today's Students for Tomorrow's Opportunities.

June 14, 2023

Opening Gratitude.

Chair Owens, Ranking Member Wilson, and members of the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for your hearing on *Postsecondary Innovation: Preparing Today's Students for Tomorrow's Opportunities*. It is an honor to provide this testimony and to appear before you.

Biographical and Organizational Information.

I am Lori Carrell, chancellor of the innovative University of Minnesota Rochester, a new public university with a Vision to "inspire transformation in higher education through innovations that empower our graduates to solve the grand health challenges of the 21st-century." I also co-direct the national *College-in-3* design experiment with Robert Zemsky, professor at the University of Pennsylvania. Together we are authors of *Communicate for a Change - Revitalizing Conversations for Higher Education* and the forthcoming *College in 3: An Overdue Conversation about Reducing Costs and Improving Quality*, both published by Johns Hopkins University Press. For both the Rochester campus and the *College-in-3* experiment we are committed to three design principles: students are at the center, research informs practice, and partners make it possible.

Preview of Recommendations.

The topic of this hearing is our daily work on my campus and in the *College-in-3* experiment. In this testimony, I will describe the experiment's progress as a viable option, increasing student success in areas of critical workforce demand while simultaneously decreasing student costs. The importance of the federal government's role to allow and support flexibility in higher education opportunities by ensuring a clear path forward for student aid and for new high-integrity designs cannot be overstated.

The *College-in-3* project goal is to encourage stable institutions to provide additional options, shortening the time required to earn a baccalaureate degree to three years. We seek to enhance student success, innovating at the nexus of cost and quality. Twelve campus pilots have experimented for the last two years, hosting broad campus conversations to ask big questions

about the cost and outcomes of college, interacting with employer-partners, and ultimately designing college degree options that are both better and less expensive. Launched during the height of the pandemic, the *College-in-3* experiment has achieved an important milestone by demonstrating the following:

1. Campus conversations to design three-year options are not only possible but have been invigorating, even in a time of disruption and challenge.
2. The prototypes emerging from these campus conversations decrease student costs while also helping stable institutions sustain their financial viability.
3. To achieve better student outcomes, including equitable retention, completion, and career launch, these new programs are using evidence-based learning design; that is, the pilots are applying educational research to practice.
4. Partnerships with employers to discern desired competencies and proficiencies can play important roles in assisting faculty as they develop the necessary curricular designs.

The *College-in-3* experiment is now preparing to launch a national higher education innovation incubator, building on the work of these 12 pilots to bring a variety of new designs to scale. The group is recommending that the Department of Education initiate an "Experimental Sites" pilot to attract additional campus Pilots. Congress can support this initiative through the fiscal year 2024 appropriations process by directing the Department of Education to open the Experimental Sites as a mechanism to encourage additional *College-in-3* designs that address both cost and outcomes. Ultimately, we would like Congress through HEA reauthorization and the Department to ensure financial aid flexibility and mechanisms to encourage even greater accelerated learning pathways.

Context.

Currently half of all four-year American colleges and universities across the United States lose a quarter or more of their first-year students before they progress to their second year of college. This outcome is unacceptable, and we who serve students pursuing higher education are well-positioned to lead the change, in partnership with accreditors, policy makers, and employers. We need not just new, but dramatically different designs -- to achieve dramatically different results. That change is the audacious aspiration of the *College-in-3* experiment, which is supported by a team of advisors that include multiple accrediting agencies.

In broad conversations of the campus community and employers, *College-in-3* Pilots asked critical questions: *Why do so many U.S. students start college and never finish, especially first generation, low income, and students of color? What should a college graduate be able to do, in the emerging context of the 21st-century? What is educational research revealing about how students learn and develop, and how can we implement those results at scale?* And importantly, *how can we work together across roles and disciplines and with employer partners to create new options for this new era?*

From our experimental public and private Pilots as well as other campuses that are now joining the movement, we are anticipating multiple new designs to address critical labor shortages along with changing strategies for varied types of students. At the same time, there are two clear challenges that must be addressed in *all* new designs – decreasing student costs and increasing quality. When we say "quality" we are not disparaging any particular faculty member or type of

degree or campus; rather, we are looking at stark evidence with our eyes wide open: *collectively*, we in higher education have been squandering human potential and that outcome is unacceptable. For us, "increasing quality" means assuring that college students experience transformative learning, complete their degrees, and are prepared for career launch. The *College-in-3* designs seek to accomplish those outcomes by embedding evidence-based practices in an intentionally designed curriculum that will lead to significantly more students completing college and launching their careers – without the longstanding and now exacerbated disparities related to factors outside the students' control.

There are multiple paths to three-year degree designs, including block scheduling; course bundling around challenges, themes, or problems; year-round advising plans that optimize summer term for degree progress; embedded, for-credit, experiential learning provided with an employer partner; high school articulation agreements to maximize pre-college credit; competency-based programs with credit for prior learning; and a tradition-challenging "fewer-than-120 credit hour" approach as well.

The prototype *College-in-3* design, NXT GEN MED, is a year-round program providing career-focused students with a fast-track, lower-cost, world-class University of Minnesota undergraduate degree. This program provides an affordable option which also puts students into the workforce sooner and with more hands-on experience. In this newly designed program, launched on my campus in fall 2022 with employer partner Mayo Clinic, students in a learning community cohort attend year-round, taking coursework in 7-week course blocks bundled around health-focused themes. They also engage in experiential learning through credit-bearing, paid internships provided by the employer-partner Mayo Clinic, progressing toward employer-identified proficiencies strategically designed into their curriculum. Further, students earn badges for their engagement in "high-impact practices," that is, those practices known to support degree completion – from community engagement to undergraduate research to learning portfolios prepared for future employers, and more. Students in the inaugural cohort will complete their Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences degree in December of 2024, ready to launch their careers and earnings with a position at Mayo Clinic in the business and leadership of healthcare.

Designing learning to enhance student success in retention, degree completion, and career launch requires collaboration by multidisciplinary faculty teams with input from employer partners and student development professionals– which is different from the more typical solo design and delivery of coursework. Student development and wellbeing practices embedded in these accelerated programs must also support completion, including student success coaching, learning community cohorts, guided self-reflection, attention to faculty and internship supervisor relationships, and more. In *College-in-3* programs, learning is expected to be relevant, experiential, and career-connected. A change in the structure of higher education curricular pre-design is needed, to ensure employer perspectives are well-understood by faculty in advance of their design. For example, in the prototype NXT GEN MED, Mayo Clinic hiring managers identified industry proficiencies including human centered design, emerging technology, entrepreneurship, and project management as well as Personal and Interpersonal Habits of creativity, curiosity, compassion, and sense of community – all as vital. Those learning outcomes supplement the core competencies on which the employer partner and faculty design team agreed: collaboration, critical thinking, communication (verbal, written, visual), intercultural competence, global vision, self-reflection, problem solving, and data analysis.

As the NXT GEN MED prototype progresses, faculty are studying all aspects of the design with student trailblazers as participants in that research. The University of Minnesota Rochester expects that 1) future iterations of the program will adapt based on the emerging evidence from the inaugural pilot and 2) recommendations will be provided to other Pilot campuses as the experiment scales. Five of the other *College-in-3* Pilots have completed their designs with fewer than 120 credits, focusing on student learning as opposed to the outdated credit hour and seat time approach. They are currently seeking permission from accreditors and/or state higher education commissions. Multiple accreditors serve on the advisory board for the *College-in-3* experiment and are supportive of this innovative approach provided the learning outcomes are clearly delineated and assessed. The remaining Pilots are finalizing their designs and building capacity.

As some of our *College-in-3* Pilots challenge the 120-credit standard, it becomes important to know the history of that expectation in American higher education. The story of the 120-unit requirement comes in three phases. First: Andrew Carnegie needed a definition of a solid university, one worthy of his investing substantial retirement funds for faculty. The answer, he was told by his consultant, was a university whose undergraduate degree was a collection of at least 120 units that came to be known as Carnegie Units. Second -- in the 1970s, the federal government required a meaningful undergraduate education and settled on the old Carnegie Unit definition: only students attending institutions whose baccalaureate degrees consisted of at least 120 credits would be eligible for the new Pell grants and subsequent programs of student financial aid. Then in the early 2000s, a new generation of higher education reformers objected to what they were coming to see as a numerical straight jacket. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching itself published a volume entitled, *How the Student Credit Hour Shapes Higher Education*, co-edited by Tom Ehrlich, former University of Pennsylvania Provost and Indiana University President. What worried Ehrlich and his colleagues was that the "Carnegie Unit may perpetuate bad habits that get in the way of institutional change in higher education."

The Foundation itself objected, noting that the Carnegie Unit had rightly become "the building block of modern American education, serving as the foundation for everything from daily school schedules to graduation requirements, faculty workloads, and eligibility for federal financial aid." That last observation proved the key. The Carnegie Unit prevailed simply because standards calculated in terms of Carnegie Units made possible an efficient, largely fraud-free distribution of billions in federal student aid annually. Probably the question we were asked most frequently as we sought a conversion to a Three-Year Baccalaureate Degree not defined in terms of Carnegie Units or Credit Hours, was "What happens to Pell Grants if we try to implement such an idea?"

It is here that the rest of the story becomes important. Sometime around 2010 a variety of Washington interests started worrying out loud about what they saw as the loose boundaries of a higher education system that, given the growing magnitude of the federal government's investment in student aid, could allow malfeasance to expand. The antidote? Strict rules about credit hour production and similar requirements that could control aid harvesting. This regulatory activity set a standard that did not address educational goals or actual learning, a critical focus for higher education in a new era.

Recommendation and Conclusion.

These high-integrity *College-in-3* designs, focused on student learning and success as well as cost reduction, hold the potential to decrease student costs and increase student success --- including completion of degrees in areas of critical workforce demand. As the Experiment's momentum builds, the opportunity to scale these designs would be buoyed by Experimental Sites status. The federal government's support for higher education innovation is vital for this project to scale. We respectfully request this Subcommittee's advocacy for such an opportunity, as we who develop human potential take the responsibility to craft new options for this new era.

Appreciation.

Thank you Chair Owens, Ranking Member Wilson, and members of this Subcommittee for your time and attention today, and for your service to our nation every day. We share the aspiration to do better for America's college students. I am grateful and honored to provide this testimony and look forward to answering your questions and hearing your comments.