

**President Madeline Pumariega**  
**Miami Dade College**  
**Congressional Testimonial**

**Executive Summary**

Good morning, Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify at today's hearing.

My name is Madeline Pumariega and I am the President of Miami Dade College. I was elected the 5th President of Miami Dade College during the pandemic. My first day as President was January 4th and my number one priority was and still is to ensure the safety of everyone in our college community and ensure we have a strong economic recovery.

Known as "democracy's college," Miami Dade College is the nation's most diverse institution of higher education with a student body representing 167 nations and one of the largest with more than 120,000 students. Changing lives through accessible, high-quality teaching and learning experiences, MDC embraces its responsibility to serve as an economic, cultural, and civic leader for the advancement of its diverse, global population. Very few institutions have had a greater impact on regions they serve than MDC, which has more than 2 million alumni. Its employees, students, alumni, programs and events contribute more than \$3.3 billion annually to Miami-Dade County's economy. Offering more than 300 distinct career pathways, MDC is at the cutting-edge of technology and innovation with hundreds of strategic workforce partnerships with global companies and organizations. We put community at the center of everything we do, and this was evident during our COVID-19 response and reopening.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Miami Dade College's aim has been to reopen as soon as possible while keeping the safety, health, and security of our students and employees as our top priority. In keeping with national, state, and local guidelines, we pivoted to virtual learning at the onset of the pandemic in under two weeks and immediately established a taskforce to review issues and adjust operations on a day-to-day basis. Following CDC recommendations and social distancing guidelines, we brought back select face-to-face classes last summer that could not be replicated in a virtual environment. Following a detailed 3-phase plan, we brought back additional classes in the Fall 2020 term, with more in-person classes added in Spring 2021. We also

introduced new learning modalities such as MDC LIVE to better serve students and their evolving needs. As we work through our phased approach in a deliberate and strategic way, we hope to return to normalcy and a full class resumption in Fall 2021.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act signed into law March 28, 2020, provided almost \$14 billion that went directly to higher education institutions to support the costs of shifting classes online, and for emergency financial aid grants for food, housing, technology, and any component of the student's cost of attendance or emergency costs that arise due to coronavirus. With additional funding announced earlier this year, MDC received more than \$50 million during the first round of awards, which went almost entirely to students through student aid to ensure they enrolled and remained enrolled. The funding recognized the unprecedented financial burden that colleges, universities, and their students faced from the impacts of the pandemic. CARES dollars additionally provided regulatory relief and flexibility to ensure institutions had the necessary resources to keep everyone safe and continue to deliver high quality instruction.

Of important note is the role MDC has played in helping Greater Miami recover from the pandemic by not only offering many free and low-cost courses and programs in emerging industries since the outset of the pandemic but also serving as the largest and most successful COVID-19 vaccination site in the southeast U.S., administering more than 350,000 shots to date.

As we look to the Fall, we are putting measures in place to ensure we are fully operational in a better, more resilient normal. What the last year has shown us is the need to be adaptable and agile. It has taught us that our student population and the community count on us to keep them safe and lead in moments of uncertainty. They are also counting on us to support them in the economic recovery. We continue to see the impact of the pandemic during our recovery, like so many minority and low-income individuals across the country. Many did not have the ability to transition to remote work and lost jobs and wages. We are committed to leading the post-pandemic economic recovery of our community to ensure everyone has the skills, credentials and degrees to meet the changing needs of work. The pandemic accelerated the way we must teach but it also accelerated the future of work. As one of the largest colleges in the country and one of the largest employers in Miami-Dade County, it is vital that we take the lessons learned from the pandemic and build for the future.

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### **How MDC responded**

Miami Dade College took a proactive approach to prepare for and respond to the coronavirus pandemic as early as January. The College already had a robust emergency management program that supports the continuity of operations by incorporating a comprehensive emergency management plan that ensures we leverage all our resources in an interconnected way that treats the College as a whole.

We stayed focused on our people-centered mission as it was important for us at Miami Dade College to cultivate a true sense of safety and preparedness in all our key decisions as they would impact thousands of students and employees.

MDC is a large and complex organization. That is a fundamental consideration as to how we respond to emergencies. We activated our collegewide crisis management team, which included key institutional leadership, and activated the district emergency operation center. This core team streamlines the decision-making process and coordinates all efforts across our 8 campuses and centers. It was important for Miami

Dade College to cultivate a true sense of safety and preparedness in all our key decisions as they would impact thousands of students and employees.

To that end, we implemented an enhanced cleaning protocol at the very beginning of the pandemic and trained hundreds of our environmental staff to promote a healthy and safe campus by cleaning frequently touched surfaces and encouraged the entire MDC community to practice good hygiene practices such as proper handwashing and sanitation of work areas.

A crucial part of this transition was our faculty. Miami Dade College faculty rose to the COVID-19 challenge that required a transition of thousands of classes to remote instruction. In a period of two weeks we transitioned 4,000 in-person courses to various remote learning platforms while training our faculty to transition to new deliveries of learning in a remote environment to support our students and finish. The immediacy of the situation necessitated a level of flexibility and agility not known before in higher education. With a speedy activation of faculty professional development on remote and online delivery, we were able to provide just-in-time-training to hundreds of full-time and adjunct faculty. Considering MDC had just over 2000 faculty, managing change at this scale sparked mobilization of the entire academic enterprise and I believe has accelerated positive change.

Expanding our online offerings became a long-term strategy by increasing the use of blended or hybrid modalities with the goal of leveraging them to meet future College, faculty, and student needs. It was felt that to maintain efficacy as the educational landscape changes, an academic support system prioritizing instructional technology and faculty development was necessary.

### **Student Support**

With tens of thousands of certificate and degree seeking students, the transition to remote learning was a massive undertaking, particularly considering the student population MDC serves. Students at Miami Dade College are traditionally underserved; nearly 60% low-income and almost 50% were non-native English speakers. Knowing that our students had challenges beyond academic ones, we quickly mobilized to address financial and technology needs. As well documented in the research by the Hope Center regarding students enrolled in community college identifying as food and housing insecure, MDC students also face those same challenges. The college provided thousands of students emergency grant funding and expanded our food pantries. We partnered with community agencies to host food distribution events on each campus that served

our students and community. In addition, we partnered with Single Stop to connect students with additional federal resources.

After deploying a student survey to assess needs, we acquired 5000 laptops and set up a distribution protocol to distribute laptops. We also forged a partnership with Comcast to offer free internet access on the Xfinity WiFi Hotspot Network across the community and encouraged eligible low-income students to sign up for 60 days of free “Internet Essentials” home internet service at increased speeds. Additionally, our IT infrastructure was fortified to accommodate exponentially more students in a remote environment, including technical and real-time assistance capacities.

### **Financial Support**

Financial assistance was also a major component of our student support efforts. We waived and paid fees, expanded our emergency aid, and provided stipends, tuition waivers, and books to ensure all our students had continuity of instruction. We also were committed to ensuring their basic needs were met, knowing that our population was disproportionately impacted by the panic. We also hosted various food distribution events at many of our campuses and encouraged students to seek mental health counseling through various resources available through MDC.

Like most institutions, MDC continued to realize increased expenses due to the pandemic as online instructional delivery had many costs associated with it with the adoption of many new software platforms and technology. The CARES Act funding provides us the relief necessary to ensure we were able to provide high quality instruction. The College bought thousands of laptops for students so that they could continue to remain engaged via remote learning.

Beyond education, we also had the physical requirements that the “new normal” compelled us to adapt to – which also brought on costs. To keep our employees and students safe and comply with CDC, Federal, and State guidelines, the College invested in significant resources into plant, property, and equipment, as well as updated operational processes. This included physical barriers such as the glass shields and other barriers and changes that were needed to ensure the safety and health of our students and employees and the increased and enhanced cleaning protocols that remain with us until today. Additionally we had screening protocols and temperature checks to ensure the safety of everyone in our community.

Even with all the financial help we provided, students still had a difficult time staying enrolled and engaged. During this unprecedented time, education was no longer the priority as students switched into survival mode. Instead of learning, focus was on keeping a roof over their head and serving as caregivers for their families. Many of our students come from households that are multigenerational. As family needs shifted and the possibility of COVID infections became a reality, many students stayed away to protect their families.

## **The Future**

As we look to the Fall, we are putting measures in place to ensure we are fully operational in a better, more resilient normal. What the last year has shown us is the need to be adaptable and agile. It has taught us that our student population and the community count on us to keep them safe and lead in moments of uncertainty. They are also counting on us to support them in the economic recovery. We continue to see the impact of the pandemic during our recovery, like so many minority and low-income individuals across the country. Many did not have the ability to transition to remote work and lost jobs and wages. We are committed to leading the post-pandemic economic recovery of our community to ensure everyone has the skills, credentials and degrees to meet the changing needs of work. The pandemic accelerated the way we must teach but it also accelerated the future of work. As one of the largest colleges in the country and one of the largest employers in Miami-Dade County, it is vital that we take the lessons learned from the pandemic and build for the future.

My optimism for the future is possible because of the support provided by the state and federal government. The support our students and institution received to ensure we remained operational with the proper tools and resources through the CARES Act played a large part. I also remain optimistic because our students count on us.