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March 5, 2026

The Honorable State Senator Sasha Renée Pérez
Chair, Senate Education Committee
1021 O Street, Suite 6720
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SUPPORT – *SB 968* (Becker) – Making SMCCCD Free College Permanent

Dear Hon. Chair State Senator Pérez,

For seven decades, the San Mateo County Economic Development Association (SAMCEDA) has been a leading voice for the economic engine that is San Mateo County. SAMCEDA believes in the power of a strong economy driven by an appreciation of what that engine provides to our ecosystem on the Peninsula.

By working with employers of all sizes and industries, engaging with our public sector and our elected leadership, recognizing that we have 21 individual jurisdictions (20 cities and one county) and collaborating and communicating with the Chambers of Commerce, non-profit organizations and our educational institutions, SAMCEDA tackles the most difficult challenges through goal-oriented solutions.

On behalf of SAMCEDA, I am pleased to support *SB 968*, which would remove the sunset date and make permanent the successful *Free College* pilot program at the San Mateo County Community College District (SMCCCD).

Launched in 2023 under *SB 893* (Becker, 2022), the program allows the District to use existing local revenues to cover tuition and fees for San Mateo County residents. In just three years, *Free College* has helped more than 33,500 students attend Cañada College, College of San Mateo, and Skyline College tuition-free.

The program is producing strong outcomes. Students participating in *Free College* are two to three times more likely to complete their degrees than non-participants, demonstrating that removing financial barriers improves both access and student success.

Importantly, this program operates without state General Fund dollars, demonstrating that locally funded strategies can expand access to higher education while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

Free College has already helped thousands of local students pursue higher education and build pathways to careers in our region. *SB 968* will ensure students and families can continue to rely on this proven program into the future.

For these reasons, SAMCEDA respectfully encourages your support for *SB 968*.

Sincerely,

Rosanne Foust
President & CEO, SAMCEDA