Testimony of Dr. Aisha Francis, President & CEO, Benjamin Franklin Cummings Institute of Technology

Submitted to U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business & Entrepreneurship on May 7, 2025

Good afternoon, Chair Ernst, Ranking Member Markey, and distinguished members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you and share the achievements and progress of our Center for Energy Efficiency and the Trades and how Franklin Cummings Tech is bringing economic opportunity to our graduates and supporting small businesses and our economy through this program.

Benjamin Franklin Cummings Institute of Technology is directly connected to our namesake, Benjamin Franklin, who left 1,000 pounds to the City of Boston for the purpose of teaching people a trade so they could be self-sufficient, prosper, and become contributing members of society. We are proud to continue that legacy today.

From the application process through job placement, Franklin Cummings Tech empowers students to achieve their career goals and attain economic advancement through affordable, flexible, and hands-on technical and trade education.

Our alums have an 84% job placement rate and a median income of about $57,000 within 1 year of graduation. 46% of our students are first-generation college students, and 98% receive financial assistance. We have a growing early college education program in which students can graduate from high school and be well on their way to completing college-level programs.

Throughout its history, Franklin Cummings Tech has adapted its curriculum to meet the current needs in industry, technology, and the economy, which prepares our graduates for in-demand jobs. Soon after this college opened in 1908, there was a line of people around the block wanting to sign up for classes on servicing Model Ts. Today, students are eager to learn the latest on electric cars.

The Center for Energy Efficiency and the Trades (CEET) is a perfect example of how Franklin Cummings Tech prepares graduates for well-paying, in-demand jobs by aligning the skills we teach with the immediate needs of the job market and society's needs. The CEET does this by bringing a focus on sustainability and renewable energy across the college's technical programs.

The affordable, high-quality programs offered through the Center for Energy Efficiency and the Trades (CEET) expertly train untapped and diverse talent for well-paying roles in

sustainability areas where hiring demand far outstrips supply, including solar and wind energy technology; electric and autonomous vehicle technology; heat pump technology; green building technology; electric power generation technology; and much more.

Programs offered through this Center provide a pathway to economic security for our students and their families, and they provide the diverse, skilled workforce that small businesses and all businesses need right now. Our new Business Management program teaches students how to run and market their own business, which is part of our desire to see our graduates become small business owners.

The CEET program received a tremendous boost when Senator Markey and Senator Warren facilitated the $800,000 grant to Franklin Cummings Tech through the Department of Labor.

This grant brought greater resources and structure to the CEET program by allowing us to fund and hire an executive director and an assistant executive director to ensure the Center had the guidance it needed for success. We were also able to hire an additional HVAC&R faculty member, which is crucial to growing instruction in areas like heat pumps and smart building technology. The grant also allowed us to hire a career navigator to build connections between our students and companies looking for employees trained in green tech skills and to guide our students in securing a job after college.

The grant provided infrastructure for the CEET in the form of software platforms that help us to track our students' progress and retention, allowing our students to take exams off campus to meet their work schedules.

The college also used the grant funding for marketing and recruitment efforts to create a stronger pipeline of prospective students into our existing and new energy-efficient programs in automotive technology, construction, and clean energy technologies.

The most essential parts of the CEET helped by the grant are research, partnership development, and demand analysis to ensure that we align the training we provide to with the immediate green-tech and energy efficiency skills in the highest demand. We have been able to strengthen our curriculum development and introduce more hands-on project-based learning to target the skill gaps identified by local employers. This enhances student engagement and skill acquisition while providing small businesses and larger companies with the skilled employees they need. Further, we have developed strategic partnerships with NASRCC, IBEW, and Jewish Vocational Services to align our program development with employment needs in clean energy and the trades.

Clean energy, energy efficiency, and green-tech are no longer outliers in construction, building management, automotive, and manufacturing; they are established disciplines

and drivers of our economy, creating opportunity for small businesses, entrepreneurs, and the students we serve.

Today, the CEET has excellent small-business partners who help us develop curriculum, train our students, and hire them. These include:

- Construction firm Dellbrook/ JKS of Quincy
- The building automation company, American Energy Management of Westborough
- Facility management company UG2 of Boston
- 128 Plumbing of Wakefield
- And Cummings Properties of Woburn

It is projected that Massachusetts will need to grow the clean energy workforce by nearly 40%. In comparison, almost 90% of companies responding to a Mass Clean Energy Center survey say they have difficulty finding skilled labor. Franklin Cummings Tech and our partners are working to meet this demand, grow this workforce, and place our graduates on the pathway to economic advancement.

Funding like the grant we received for the CEET, and continued funding for these types of workforce-building programs here and at our peer institutions, will continue to produce a significant return on the investment for individuals, small businesses, and our economy.

Thank you.