

Testimony RE: SB01017

Good morning. My name is Carolyn Karno and I'm here to support SB01017 "An Act Concerning the Consolidation of the State Department of Education and the Department of Higher Education." My professional background is in the field of education, having worked for many years to expand educational opportunities for young students. I have worked in the K-12 system as well as at the college level.

I believe that it would be in the best interest of students to have one seamless Department of Education which would represent the interest of all students from pre-K – college. One of the critical issues we face today is ensuring that all students have access to higher education. The most important step in ensuring access is to make sure Connecticut students are academically prepared for higher education.

Right now we have a system that doesn't foster shared goals and communication. We have programs housed at the Department of Higher Education that are designed to promote college readiness, such as GEAR UP and ConnCAP with little or no input from the Department of Education. The students involved in these programs are middle school and high school students. There are curricular issues as well as program issues that are often addressed without the needed collaboration. When this happens, it's the students who end up losing.

We live in a relatively small state. I believe there are 46 colleges in Connecticut, not including technical schools. From a practical point of view, I fail to see why we need an entire state agency to deal with a relatively small amount of institutions.

I am not proposing that you do away with the critical functions that the Department of Higher Education oversees but I do believe a merged department with shared goals and a cohesive mission to educate all Connecticut students is long overdue.