

Christine Beck Lissitzyn
90 High Farms Road
West Hartford, CT 06107
860-655-3263

March 10, 2011 – Testimony concerning Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee's public hearing on S.B. No. 1011 - An Act Concerning a Reorganization of Connecticut's System of Public Higher Education.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to present this testimony. I am a graduate student at Southern Connecticut State University in the Masters in Creative Writing Program. I am knowledgeable about the university system, both as a current student and as a former adjunct professor at the University of Connecticut School of Law and an Associate Professor for 9 years at the University of Hartford.

I oppose the proposal to combine the Connecticut State University system with the community colleges because I know first-hand what results when two incompatible academic units are combined. In the year 2000, after twenty years as a practicing lawyer, I joined the University of Hartford as Associate Professor and Chair of the Paralegal Studies Department, which was then one of two departments at the Hartford College for Women. Our students were primarily what are called "nontraditional students," meaning working adults, who for a variety of reasons, had not been able to complete or sometimes even begin, a college education. Teaching working adults after they had worked a full day was a challenge and for me, a far greater accomplishment and inspiration than winning a case in court.

Three years later, the University of Hartford decided, for budget reasons, to disband the academic programs at the Hartford College

for Women and transfer them to the College of Arts and Sciences at the University. Overnight, the Paralegal Studies Department went from being the flagship program of the Hartford College for Women to the “night school” of the largest college at the University.

Did the move save money? Yes. Was it “worth it?” I truly believe the answer was No. The mindset of the College of Arts and Sciences was geared toward the needs and academic abilities of traditional students, ages 17-22. Our program was geared toward students for whom a college education was the answer to a long-deferred dream. There was no “better” group of students. Just different. But we nearly got lost in the system.

In 2009, the Paralegal Program was finally transferred to the Department of Adult and Graduate Services, a separate unit of the University devoted to non-traditional students and non-traditional delivery systems, such as Saturday and online education. I am happy to say that the Paralegal Program is thriving.

My experience illustrates the danger of making a quick decision to save money without considering the effect on the students, faculty, and ethos of an organization.

I should add that I am a proud graduate of state schools. My BA in Linguistics and JD are both from the University of California at Berkeley. We lived through some of the toughest budget times in California history. So will the Connecticut State University system. Our faculty and students are strong, committed and ready to work to make our system better. We stand ready to help.