State of Connecticut
Department of Higher Education

Testimony
by
Michael P. Meotti
Commissioner of Higher Education
before the
Appropriations Committee
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Good morning Chairman Harp, Chairman Walker, distinguished members of the Committee. For the record, I am Michael P. Meotti, Commissioner of Higher Education. I come before you today to discuss the Governor's recommended 2012-13 budget for the Connecticut Department of Higher Education, and his proposal for a unified leadership approach to governing Connecticut public higher education. I will keep my formal remarks brief, and will then be happy to respond to questions.

As is the case for the entire state, Connecticut higher education is being called upon to do its part in the shared sacrifice required of us all in order to right our fiscal situation. For the Department, the Governor is recommending $64.1 million for fiscal 2012, a reduction of 8.5 percent over this year's spending. This translates into level funding for most of our programs which, as you know, are many and varied given our 28-member General Fund staff.

Among our major state responsibilities, we license and accredit all academic programs and institutions, oversee the state's 66 private occupational schools, and operate the Alternate Route to Teacher Certification and the Minority Advancement Program. Funding for these services has been maintained at current levels, allowing us to continue our consumer protection functions, graduate teachers in shortage fields and help minority students succeed in college.

The vast portion of the Department's budget, however -- 89 percent -- goes to support the state's three student financial aid programs. Level funding is proposed for two of these programs, the Connecticut Aid to Public College Student Grant Program, and the Capitol Scholarship Program. The latter program serves students who attend both public and independent colleges.

Regarding the third program, the Connecticut Independent College Student Grant Program known as CICS, the Governor has proposed a two-year moratorium on grants to new students. Under his proposal, no student who currently receives a CICS grant will lose their aid. The moratorium holds all current recipients harmless while the program's purpose is re-examined in light of the growth of for-profit institutions and the endowments of the participating nationally-known institutions. You may remember that the CICS Program was presented in the RBA forum in December, and that limited data availability has affected our ability to ensure accountability and favorable outcomes.

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This time of shared sacrifice requires us all do to more with less, and to do it smarter. The Governor's proposed unified leadership approach for governing public higher education does just that. Change isn't easy in our land of steady habits but we must adapt to the way in which 21st century students attend college to assure their success, and halt our state's further slippage in national educational attainment rankings. Our fall from #1 in 1990 to #4 today -- behind Massachusetts which is now #1 -- should serve as a wake-up call to everyone in this room. The Governor's proposal rests squarely on returning Connecticut to its position of national leadership.

Simply put, the Governor's proposal is about providing new governance and leadership for Connecticut public higher education that better fits the educational pathways of today's students. It contains no campus mergers or closings, no diminution of campus decision-making, nor any impact *whatsoever* on campus missions, daily business, academic freedom, or faculty bargaining: NONE.

Rather, it speaks solely to the 62 members of four separate boards, and to their 200+ employees who work mostly within a half mile of each other on Woodland Street, and suggests there is a different and more efficient way to meet the needs of 17 campuses through one board, with one central office. It proposes that there is a smarter, more responsive way to meet the needs of today's 21st century public college students than the system of separate silos founded more than 30 years ago. Shouldn't we govern higher education in the way that best meets student needs, not academic hierarchies? Let's look at today's students who attend Connecticut's community colleges and Connecticut State Universities, frequently at the same time:

- Virtually all students who attend the community colleges and CSU are Connecticut residents.

- The vast majority attend a community college or CSU in their backyard where they work and raise families.

- Enrollments at both the community colleges and CSU are surging with both adults and younger students, but it's the growth in the number of young students that's most striking. Over the past 10 years, students aged 25 years old and older actually account for a *decreasing* proportion of students attending the community colleges and CSU.

- More and more students are enrolling with an intent to earn a degree. Survey results show that more than three-quarters (78%) of students attending the community colleges in fall 2008 planned to get a degree, up 11 percent from 2002. Of these, 57 percent plan to earn a degree beyond the associate's level.

- Increasing numbers are moving across the two systems, and not just in traditional transfer patterns. Rather, they are taking classes in each system at the same time. A study of Connecticut public high school graduates of the class of 2004 reveals that between then and now, more than one-third who enrolled at a CSU campus also took classes at a community college during the same period as they pursued an undergraduate degree. While an estimated 40 percent were transfer students, some 60 percent had periods of overlapping enrollment – a pattern that better fits their needs. In short, students are changing the way they attend college, in so doing bypassing traditional notions of two-year and four-year educations. If it's one system to many of them, shouldn't it operate as one system from a governing and policy perspective?

A unified leadership approach places students at the heart of governance decisions, and changes the focus from building resources around central offices to placing priority on teaching and learning. It's a fact that administrative costs have grown faster than spending on instruction. From 1992 to now, the costs of the CSU and community college system offices have increased significantly as a share of their block grants.

Teaching and learning. Student success in the 21st century. These must be our guiding principles in making Connecticut higher education the best it can be during the worst fiscal crisis to hit our state in years. Unifying the leadership of our public higher education system into one office, while retaining distinct campus missions and operations, is a sound and reasoned approach to meeting the needs of a dramatically changed economy and student market.

Thank you. I would be happy to respond to questions.