

Board for State Academic Awards

Charter Oak State College
Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

March 10, 2011

Testimony by Ed Klonoski

Senator Bye, Representative Willis and members of the Committee, I am Ed Klonoski, President of Charter Oak State College and I am here to speak about Governor's Bill 1011.

That bill proposes the creation of a Board of Regents to unify governance for the Connecticut State University, the Community Colleges, and Charter Oak State College. The Bill tasks the Regents to create a master Plan for public higher education, call for the Higher Education Coordinating Council to establish measurable goals for the 17 institutions, and gives the Regents authority over budgets and personnel.

I would like to speak to this Bill in relation to the Program Review and Investigations Committee's December report on Higher Education Governance.

Both the Governor's Bill and the PRI Report speak to the necessity of a higher education strategic or master plan, and I believe that such a plan is necessary, wise, and overdue. In addition, both the Bill and the Report point to the necessity of producing a set of institutional outcomes that are measurable and connected to workforce development (jobs). Again, I agree and the College has already been travelling down this road. The College has been a founding member of the Transparency by Design project which has produced a set of institutional measures, including program level outcomes, that are available to the public through a third party website—College Choices for Adults. Our data and that of 18 non-traditional, adult serving institutions are publically available, comparable, and consistent. So as a longtime supporter of learning outcomes measures for our students, I am also here to speak in support of the creation of institutional outcomes for Connecticut's public higher education sector. Both the Master plan and the institutional measures are long overdue.

The Governor's bill set clear goals matching those set by the PRI Report, and that is its strength. I do have concerns about the lack of detail around the management and operations of the Board of Regents. The Bill details Board membership and the creation of a Student Advisory Council, but it does not describe the operational activities of the new Board. As someone who is responsible for the operational success of the College and the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium, I have several questions to put before the General Assembly.

The Board for State Academic Awards, our current volunteer Board, meets six times per year for two hours at a time to handle our critical decisions, budget, personnel, our six graduations, and oversee our critical activities. Even if we assume that Charter Oak will no longer report as much detail to its new Board, that board would still need at least an hour to handle our core business decisions at each of its meetings. As a single college, Charter Oak's oversight requirements are typical of what each of the 17 colleges and universities will require, meaning that the Board of Regents could face 17 hours of routine business oversight at each of its meetings. I would like to know how the new structure plans to handle the combined business oversight of 17 colleges and universities using the time available from 11 volunteers.

Clearly, no volunteer Board can be expected to handle that volume of work. The two solutions are interesting but not addressed in the Bill. One solution is to give each of the 17 colleges and universities far greater autonomy than they currently possess to operate their business—probably not what most of you are imagining—or more likely the

Board could create a staff to handle to majority of these business decisions. Interestingly, this is the solution that CSU and the Community Colleges created and which is now being criticized. But one of these two approaches—greater autonomy or another system structure—will be required if our current Boards are merged into the Board of Regents.

My second concern arises from the focus of that the Board of Regents. The Commissioner of Higher Education rightly points out that there is a problem with remediation in the student bodies of CSU and the Community College. The Bill and the PRI report also suggest that at least the CSU system office needs reform. Finally, putting DHE, CSU, the Community Colleges, and Charter Oak together will produce a single entity with over a \$300 million dollar state allotment.

But Charter Oak State College does not have a remediation issue; instead we have a 63% six year graduation rate, second only to UCONN. We also do not have a system office. We operate as a single institution. And perhaps most disturbing, our budget would be less than 1% of the Board of Regents budget, making us the equivalent of a rounding error in those collective calculations. Without an approach that firewalls the Charter Oak budget and mission we might be lost in the face of the Board's primary concerns.

So what is my solution? I believe, as the PRI Report argues, that the state public higher education sector needs a plan. That plan should, of course, include UCONN, and it should include institutional outcomes that are measurable and connected to the budgets of each institution. I also fully expect that Charter Oak's state support should rise with success and fall with failure around those institutional outcomes. Therefore, I believe that a plan which includes institutional outcomes captures the essential elements of what the Governor demands as well.

But because I am responsible for the operational success of my organization, I also believe, as the PRI report suggests, that this plan and the recommended outcome measures should be created before reorganization is undertaken. As the Commissioner of Higher Education testified, it is not the shape of governance that is the critical dimension of success for public higher education; it is the leadership that makes the difference as it works to achieve the goals created for each institution.

I respectfully submit that we need a plan and specific institutional measures before we reorganize. I also promise you that the College and the CTDLC will participate vigorously in creating those plans and measures and then focus our energies and resources on meeting them.