

**Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
Public Hearing – March 10, 2011
S.B. No. 1011 – An Act Concerning a Reorganization of
Connecticut’s System of Public Higher Education**

**Testimony of
Barbara Douglass, President,
Northwestern CT Community College**

I am Barbara Douglass, President of Northwestern Connecticut Community College in Winsted. I am completing my 7th year as the president of the place we like to call-“the Small College That Does Great Things.” Prior to coming back to CT, I was a Vice-President in the Florida Community College system and from 1992-1999 served as the Academic Dean at Capital Community College.

As the President of the smallest community college in the state, I am very familiar with the struggles facing our students, faculty and staff. I am also impressed to see them stand shoulder to shoulder in good times and in difficult times. Recently, Northwestern, small though we are, became the 6th college to offer the Associate Degree in Nursing. This involved and expensive program became a reality because of the grass roots support from the campus and the community and because of the highly developed technical support from our System Office which, under the guidance of Director of System Nursing Curriculum, provided us with a common curriculum already serving the other nursing programs. This proven curriculum saved us hundreds of hours of labor and probably thousands of dollars in curriculum development time. Our Chief Financial Officer was there to assist us with developing a budget. The Chief Academic Officer helped us navigate through the approval process. While state dollars were not forthcoming, we knew that with the support of our Board and the community we could make this program a reality with private, corporate, and federal funds. And we did. Our first nursing class began 7 weeks ago. The support from the Chancellor’s office I somewhat liken to my experience as a First-Generation College student: My parents told me, “Kid we don’t have a lot of money, but we will help make this happen for you.”

My favorite days are those I spend on campus; however, I realize the importance of larger scale initiatives such as transfer. Currently, I co-chair the Transfer Compact Committee with Dr. Jack Miller, President of Central Connecticut State University. In a letter to Senator Bye and Representative Willis, I pointed out that the community colleges and the Connecticut State Universities have made great strides in ensuring seamless transfer. The Transfer Compact spells out the requirements that a community college student must follow to be a dually admitted student at Eastern, Western, Southern or Central. One of these requirements is completion of the Associate Degree. As I like to tell our students, “You can never have too many degrees.” If there is a belief that a merged structure would produce better transfer, please know that governance structures do not produce transfer/articulation agreements; these are academic tasks best left to faculty, department chairs, and deans. Also while transfer is a fundamental

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part of the community college mission, it is important to note that only one-third of our community college students state an intent to continue on to a baccalaureate institution. I say this, not to minimize the importance of transfer, but because our career and occupational programs remain the primary goal for many students.

In conclusion, I quote from an article on the merger of the community colleges and the state universities in Minnesota by Dr. Steve Wallace, currently President of Florida State College at Jacksonville: "Such (academic) mergers should not be attempted without a clearly expressed rationale for dramatic change and a well-articulated vision of what the new form will be and why it will be superior to the old form ...and most importantly, the interests of students and the improvement of teaching and learning must be maintained as the central focus in every phase and in every decision in the process of merging institutions of higher education."

Thank you.