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March 7, 2011

Representative Roberta B. Willis
Legislative Office Building
Room 1802
Hartford, CT 06106-1591

Dear Senator Bye,

I write to you as an employee of Southern Connecticut State University, where I have been a professor for the last thirteen years in the English department, and where I also serve as assistant chair. I write, as well, as a holder of Master's and Doctoral degrees earned at UCONN, and as someone who has experience as a teacher at three different UCONN campuses and at Capital Community College, as well as at SCSU.

I attended the public hearing of the Appropriations Committee on February 28, and I plan to attend the Higher Education Committee's meeting this week as well. In the remainder of this letter, as briefly as possible, I'll offer my thoughts on the three closely interlocking topics currently before these committees and the legislature as a whole: the threat of budget cuts to the Connecticut State University system, Governor Malloy's proposal to merge the state university system with the community colleges, and his proposal to balance the budget on the backs of state employees.

So very many bad ideas have been proposed over the last couple of months that an adequate response to all of them would require a book—one that I don't have time to write nor you to read. The bottom line is that while the current higher education proposals promise cost savings and educational improvements, those cost savings are illusory and the actual results of the proposed changes would be lasting and serious damage to public higher education.

Regarding consolidation:

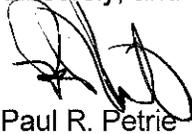
- **Consolidating all public higher education (but UCONN) in a single bureaucracy is highly unlikely to save money.** The Minnesota experience has been cited repeatedly as a source and model for the governor's reorganization plan. Most studies indicate that Minnesota has yet to realize any savings. Any savings that might be realized from consolidation in Connecticut would likely be very slow to materialize. (Minnesota's reorganization has taken four years and is not yet complete.) Combining such a large number of institutions of such different sizes, missions, constituencies, and geographical locations under a single super-bureaucracy is bound to be a slow, chaotic, and very expensive process.
- **Consolidation ignores and threatens the distinct missions, identities, and student constituencies of the individual institutions to be combined.**

Regarding projected budget cuts to the CSU system:

- **CSU universities are engines of Connecticut's economy; yet, while other states (Virginia, Kansas, North Carolina) are reinvesting in their public universities, our state plans drastic cuts to an already perpetually underfunded system.** When the economy goes bad, citizens go back to school; and when family finances contract, students who formerly attended more expensive private institutions head for the relative bargain that is the CSU universities. The CSU's teaching needs, therefore, are greater now than ever before, and yet the CSU System now faces draconian cuts, on top of budget cuts already executed over the past three years, that promise to become the new baseline for all future funding. Because of their CSU education, Connecticut college students become better creative, analytical, and critical thinkers, better citizens, and better workers. 93% of our student body comes from our own state, and 9 out of 10 of our graduates go on to live, work, and pay taxes in Connecticut. The taxes these students pay on the significantly enhanced income they earn as SCSU graduates repay many times over the tax dollars invested in their education: the state's investment in the CSU system generates an estimated \$800 of economic activity for every \$100 of money from the General Fund. Even in tough economic times—*especially* in tough economic times—how can the state of Connecticut afford to pass up this kind of investment opportunity? Cuts to the CSU budget at this time might plug a budget gap for a year, but the longer term consequences for both the state's economy and its budget constitute a threat rather than a remedy. It's never a good idea to eat the seed corn.
- **The perception that there is plenty of fat to be cut at CSU is false.** In my thirteen years at SCSU, our state appropriation has persistently shrunk from year to year, making even the prospect of maintaining a current services budget impossible. During those thirteen years, we've undergone three distinct rounds of multi-year budget-cutting, which has had distinctive negative impacts on our students' education. In the English department, we have gone from an even balance between full-time and adjunct faculty to an adjunct pool that outnumbers full-time faculty by almost 3 to 1. This is an educationally unsustainable situation, and yet another round of budget cuts on top of those sustained during the last two academic years cannot be absorbed with cutting bone and muscle from Southern's educational mission. Whether this cutting takes the form of larger class sizes, fewer course offerings, or faculty vacancies and less qualified faculty, there are no cuts left to be made at this point that won't directly impact the academic experiences of students, further depressing our rates of retention and graduation. Decades of ranking in the upper forties among the fifty states in per capita spending on public higher education has now undeniably caught up with us.
- **The proposal to tie institutional funding to student retention and graduation is absolutely counterproductive.** SCSU and the other CSU universities have been making real progress in increasing retention and graduation rates, but virtually all the current higher education proposals would be certain to reverse this progress. Students at SCSU have trouble staying in and completing school for very obvious reasons: many of them come to the university academically underprepared; many of them work, often full time, while attempting to continue their studies—in effect, attempting to do two or three full-time jobs at the same time; many of them are first-generation college students, unacculturated to the particular demands, discipline, and routines of college study, which must be learned gradually and with much trial and error; many of them

I find that these matters are so immense and so troubling in their implications that I have struggled with the content of this letter for weeks and still find that much that needs to be said has been left out. I ask you to do everything in your power to resist the ill-advised quick-fix solutions to the wrong problems that the current spate of higher-education-related proposals constitutes. I don't have any magic bullet solutions, any more than you and your legislative colleagues do, to the very real challenges faced by the state today. But I know that these proposals constitute a threat to the viability of public higher education in the state of Connecticut, and that they are being proposed by people who seem to have little if any real knowledge of the educational work that goes on in the state's post-secondary institutions. As you and your colleagues continue to work on these challenging issues, I urge you to seek—early and often—the knowledge and expertise of those who know the universities and colleges and their students best: faculty.

Sincerely, and with apologies for this letter's length,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul R. Petrie", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Paul R. Petrie