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TESTIMONY: Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee - Public Hearing on S.B. No. 1011 - An Act Concerning a Reorganization of Connecticut's System of Public Higher Education.

Senator Bye, Representative Willis, and members of the Committee. Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify today. I am testifying today out of concern for some of the ramifications of the proposed higher education reorganization. I have been a professor of Political Science at CCSU for 16 years, many of those years spent as a department chair actively advising students. In addition to advising our own majors in Political Science, I have counseled many students facing academic probation or dismissal. It is concern for all of those students that brings me here today. While I applaud Governor Malloy for seeking to bring more resources back to the classroom, I am afraid this reorganization as currently proposed will potentially do more harm than good for our students, for three main reasons.

First, having a Board governing three large units with very distinct missions risks compromising those distinct missions in a way that will disrupt the programs being pursued with great effort by many of our students.

Second, the ability of the Board to shift 15% of a budget each year from unit to unit could be a permanently destabilizing influence on each unit, always lurking in the budgetary background, hampering planning and affecting both faculty morale and student academic planning.

Most importantly, while the goal of linking a portion of funding to graduation and retention has laudable intentions, my experience with students has shown me that their progress is affected by many forces. Some of those involve transfer of credit and remedial issues, which CSU has already been actively working to address. But for many students whose academic progress is interrupted and delayed, the reasons are often about cost, family finances, or personal and family health issues. Reallocating resources based on graduation/retention outcomes affected by these issues will not necessarily help these students; instead, it may affect them further by penalizing the very institutions which are working these students through their studies in the midst of their complicated lives.

My main fear is that the proposal, while it looks good on paper and has a certain logic to it, will ultimately not serve students in the ways it is supposedly intended. And it is students who I give my energy to serve. To paraphrase technology critic Jaron Lanier, only the students should ever be meaningful in making these decisions. And I'm concerned their distinct needs will be abstracted into a more centralized structure crunching their specificity into a statistical mold. And these students are Connecticut's future – 85% of them at CSU remain here.

Thank you for your time.