



TO: HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE  
FROM: SUE O'CONNOR, PRESIDENT  
GREATER MANCHESTER CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
DATE: MARCH 9, 2011  
RE: CONNECTICUT EDUCATION REORGANIZATION

Ladies & Gentlemen

The Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce, representing 500 member businesses in the Manchester area, has grave concerns regarding the proposed reorganization of higher education in the State of Connecticut. While the Chamber understands the need to trim the cost of State government and applauds efforts to improve the cost efficiency of the educational services that affect every State resident, we feel that the proposal currently under study could harm our community colleges, negatively impacting their students and hampering their continued ability to respond to community needs in providing pathways to employment and economic growth.

We in Manchester, of course, are most familiar with Manchester Community College. And as we recently related to the Appropriations Committee, over the last few decades we have seen a highly productive socio-economic partnership forged among area residents, businesses, non-profits, municipal officials and agencies, and the administrators, staff and students there. And, without demeaning in any way other area Connecticut public education institutions, during that time - and I can speak personally for the last 20 years - we have found that MCC's flexibility and familiarity with area issues and institutions has allowed them to move more quickly and efficiently to address the emerging needs of our community. We fear that the centralization, oversight policies, and political power wielding inherent in the new organizational structure as proposed will actually hurt MCC's ability to continue to function in this same manner, manner that, quite frankly, our community's residents, businesses, and employees have come to rely on.

We are already troubled to hear that the proposed reductions for community colleges in the new State budget are greater percentage-wise than for our entire State university system. And we can't help but feel that in the on-going political battle for State financial resources our community colleges might finish a poor second. This at a time when their vital role in our State's economic recovery dictates that their comparative resource allocation should actually be increased.

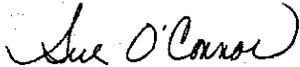
Community colleges like MCC need to have local control over curriculum, fee schedules, staffing, and community outreach. Reducing that local control in the name of cost efficiency is not only a false economy, but - in our opinion - represents a serious lack of understanding of the role the community colleges must play in reaching our State's educational goals, and an indifference to the outstanding and extremely cost-effective performance of these institutions in recent years.

To: Higher Education Commission  
From: Sue O'Connor, President, GMCC  
Date: March 9, 2011  
Page: Two

We at the Chamber are well aware that change is inevitable, and needed. But we hope that the State legislature remembers that old saying, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." In Manchester, and I suspect in virtually every other town in Connecticut, our need for community colleges that are agile, flexible, and quick to respond to local needs will not change. And we sincerely urge the legislature to keep this in mind in both their organizational and budgeting decisions.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sue O'Connor".

Sue O'Connor, President