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**Senator Fasano Testimony in favor SB 176
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
Thursday, February 28, 2013
1:00 PM in Room 1E**

Senator Bye, Representative Willis, Senator Boucher and Representative LeGeyt and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of **SB 176, An Act Establishing A Higher Education Performance Incentive Task Force.**

Two years ago, the state created the Board of Regents (BOR), placing the CSU system, the Community College system and Charter Oak under one umbrella. While this was done with the best of intentions, the results so far have been mixed. Though there have been some savings, many problems remain. As you are all aware, this past fall the President of the Board of Regents was forced to step down because of a salary scandal and for abusing provisions in his contract. It is time for a new approach to Higher Education in this state.

Performance incentive funding can be a way to reward our constituent units, including UCONN and those under the BOR umbrella, for meeting certain benchmarks developed by the task force this bill would create. Everything should be on the table for this task force to consider, but some of the performance benchmarks could include: (1) total degree attainment, (2) time spent in degree attainment, (3) minority and low income student degree attainment, (4) student retention rates, (5) progression from developmental to college level courses, (6) degrees in STEM and other high priority fields, and (7) administrative efficiency.

One of the great things about performance incentive funding is that each school can have its own benchmarks based on its unique mission and student body. The CSU schools and the Community Colleges can each have their own individualized benchmarks. When the Board of Regents was created, there was discussion about the schools being able to keep their own identity. Recognizing each school's mission in the incentives is one way we can let them keep their identity.

Performance incentive funding has had success in other states. From 1999-2003 Ohio saw their median graduation time fall from 4.7 years to 4.3 years. The state of Pennsylvania has seen an increase in graduation rates, retention rates, increases in faculty production and improvements in their campus diversity and program quality. Massachusetts recently established a Performance Incentive Fund which provides competitive grants to public institutions of higher education that adopt reforms designed to improve graduation rates, close the achievement gap and meet the needs of the modern workforce.

Creating performance standards isn't a new idea in the state. Last session, we passed new education reforms that created performance standards for our teachers. We recognized that performance standards are necessary in order to improve the education of our children and we asked that teachers be held accountable by tying teacher tenure and pay to some standard of performance. Why not take that same idea and apply it to our higher education system? Our publicly funded schools of higher education should be held accountable as well and must adapt to meet the needs of today's students.

A task force of higher education and budget experts could put together a formula that encourages real change and improvement at our colleges and universities. The students at these schools deserve the very best and the taxpayers in the state deserve to know that their tax dollars are not going to waste. I encourage you to pass this legislation. It is time to try something new in our higher education funding.

Thank you, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Len Fasano
State Senator
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