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Testimony of President Mark E. Ojakian

For the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee

Senator Duff, Representative Janowski, Senator Kane, Representative Buck-Taylor and members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. My name is Mark Ojakian and it is an honor to be appointed as a Connecticut Delegate to the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) by Governor Dannel P. Malloy. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I recently became the President of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities system, which includes our four state universities, 12 community colleges, and Charter Oak State College. In my new role I have focused on providing leadership and stability to our system, listening to students and staff, and learning first-hand how our system critically impacts student achievement and the growth of Connecticut's economy and businesses. In the short time I have been President I have been a fierce advocate for our state colleges and universities, our students, to the legislature, the Governor, and the public at large.

Additionally, I am working to help our system meet the five strategic goals set out by our Board; increase successful student completion of their first year, graduate more students with the skills to achieve their life and career goals, promote affordability and sustainability, foster innovation and economic growth, and work to eliminate achievement disparities. Serving on the Board of Delegates for the NEBHE will provide another venue for me to advocate for these goals on behalf of our students.

I have worked side by side with many of you over my years of previous service in state government, most recently as the Chief of Staff for Governor Malloy. Before that, I served as a Deputy Secretary at OPM, and as Deputy Comptroller for 16 years. Over the years I have served on a number of boards including the Hartford Housing Authority Board, Love Makes a Family, and the Multiple Sclerosis Society.

NEBHE has a great impact on public higher education in our state and across the region. Connecticut already has powerful advocates for our state on the board, including Senator Beth Bye, Representative Roberta Willis, and representatives from UCONN and our independent colleges. I believe together we will be a strong delegation for Connecticut.

More importantly, this will allow me to be a more effective advocate for the CSCU system. Raising awareness for the incredible work our schools do, and the critical role they play in driving Connecticut forward is one of my top priorities as President. Throughout my career and my short tenure as President, I have met and worked with so many successful individuals that have graduated from our state schools including some of you here today. As a delegate I will have the honor of promoting those many examples of success, help bring more attention to our system, students, and faculty, and to help shape the discussion around the role of higher education in our region.

I want to thank the Committee again for the opportunity to speak to you today, and Governor Malloy for the opportunity to serve our state as a delegate to the NEBHE. I welcome any questions you may have for me.