



Mark E. Ojakian
President

39 Woodland Street
Hartford CT 06105
860-723-0000
www.ct.edu

**Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
Testimony of President Mark Ojakian
Thursday, February 18, 2016**

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis, Senator Witkos, Representative Betts, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on a few bills of interest to the Connecticut State Colleges & Universities System.

**S.B. 25 AN ACT CONCERNING SPECIAL POLICE FORCES ON COLLEGE
CAMPUSES:**

I want to first thank the Committee for raising this bill this session, it permits our community college campuses to have special police forces, and stems from a resolution the Board of Regents for Higher Education passed at its December, 2015 meeting. It is the result of an in-depth study from the Board on this issue with input from experts including Homeland Security and the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, as well as CSCU's own police force members.

The requested change will simply add the community colleges to the list of public higher education institutions that are allowed to establish a special police force on campus under CGS 10a-156b. Special police forces have the same duties, responsibilities and authority as members of a duly organized local police department, with jurisdiction limited to the geographical boundaries of the property owned or under the control of the institutions.

Additionally, the bill requires that any community college that wishes to establish a special police force can do so with the approval of the Board of Regents. A new board policy passed at the December meeting set the criteria for the Board's approval. Campus administrations must demonstrate a readiness to operate a special police force, and agree to ongoing training with the CSU institution in their region, in addition to requiring that all officers be certified through the Police Officer Standards and Training (P.O.S.T.) Council.

P.O.S.T. certification requires a law enforcement officer to complete curriculum and appropriate field training approved by the P.O.S.T. Council. It is the same standard that our municipal

officers, and our officers at the state universities and UCONN are required to meet. To maintain certification, officers must complete certified review training every three years.

During my visits at our schools and in conversations with students, faculty, and staff a consistent theme has emerged: the desire to feel safe on our campuses. This legislation, then, is a response to what I continue to hear. It will bring a fundamental level of fairness and equality to the security and safety we offer our community college students in line with what is offered to students at UCONN and the state universities. These officers will receive the same training and certification as the university officers, and will thus be better equipped to meet the security needs of our students.

While the bill is ultimately about the security we provide for our students, it also indemnifies our officers from liability. CGS 10a-156b provides that “the state shall protect and save harmless any member of the special police force for any institution” designated under the statute as a special police force from “financial loss and expense” arising out of claims against them when acting in the discharge of their duties.

Finally, the designation of special police forces for our community colleges will allow those campuses that wish to have armed officers pursue that option. And while I fully appreciate the sensitivity surrounding the idea of having guns on college campuses, I believe we at CSCU have an obligation to try and address the concerns of our students, faculty, and staff, and make them feel safe.

I am also well aware of the passions that are involved in discussions related to firearms. During my time at the Governor’s office I directed the Administration’s efforts in the negotiation that ultimately resulted in the passage of our state’s gun safety legislation. We are all familiar with the tragic events that triggered that legislation. I am proud of what we accomplished and proud to have been a part of it. The sad reality is that tragic events that have occurred over the last year and a half around the country continue to bring this conversation to our doorstep. It is a consequence of the times we live in and not something I take lightly.

To be clear, this bill does not in any way require that every campus establish a special police force, but it does give permission to those that want to. Each campus will need to decide whether to take that step, and to determine its feasibility. What we have done is create an opportunity for a discussion and a decision to be made at each campus.

Currently, the only community college campus with an armed police force is Naugatuck Valley Community College. This is due to an exemption dating back to 1990 from the time that site was shared with UCONN as the Central Naugatuck Valley Region Higher Education Center. It allowed for all Connecticut state police academy graduates certified as police officers and employed at the center to be armed.

(As a technical note, the only correction we would suggest making to the legislation as written is the addition of Northwestern Community College that seems to have been left out by mistake.)

I urge the committee to support this legislation as an opportunity to afford our students, staff, and faculty at our community colleges the same level of protection students at our other public higher

education institutions receive. But more importantly, it enables them to feel safer as they learn and grow with us—which is a major component of our promise to them.

H.B. 5071 AN ACT REQUIRING CONNECTICUT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STATE AUTHORIZATION RECIPROcity AGREEMENT REGARDING DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMS:

The CSCU system is dedicated to increasing access to higher education, particularly for underrepresented students. You will hear later today from President Klonoski from Charter Oak State College, one of our 17 institutions, for whom passage of this bill is a major priority. We strongly believe in the value of Charter Oak’s courses and certificate and degree programs and understand that in- and out-of-state students who enroll in their courses are getting a high quality education. Having said that, we have some lingering questions on how the quality of programs is determined and how students’ rights are protected under SARA. In addition, we are analyzing the opportunities and challenges SARA presents for our other colleges and universities and for Connecticut students. As we are gathering feedback and questions from a variety of stakeholders, we welcome the opportunity to discuss this in more detail as the session progresses.

H.B. 5072 AN ACT CONCERNING HIGHER EDUCATION CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS:

We appreciate the intent of this bill in bringing transparency and consistency to the various credit and non-credit sub-baccalaureate programs under our purview and are generally supportive of the concept. Some of the information requested is otherwise available at the campus level and employment data for student in credit programs would be accessible through P20-WIN. However, some of the new requests for information would not just be extremely labor intensive to compile, but in some cases are beyond our ability to collect. This is especially true for sub-baccalaureate certificate programs that are non-credit because campuses do not require students to provide their Social Security Numbers, necessary for linking to Department of Labor data. At a time when our system is facing significant cuts in the proposed budget, which may result in program eliminations, reduced resources, or personnel cuts, these additional responsibilities would be particularly difficult to take on. We look forward to working with the committee to provide additional information and input on this bill as it moves through the process and to have a conversation about how we can work together to enhance data collection and reporting.