



Testimony of

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Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

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HB 7326 An Act Concerning the Expansion of Contract Policies at the University of Connecticut

SB 837 An Act Concerning Apprenticeship Opportunities for High Growth, High Demand Jobs

Good afternoon Representative Haddad, Senator Bye, Senator Linares and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. I am Lori Pelletier and I am proud to serve as President of the Connecticut AFL-CIO on behalf of over 900 affiliated local unions that represent more than 220,000 working men and women in every city and town of our great state. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today against HB 7236 and SB 837.

HB 7236 is the latest in a long line of attempts by the University of Connecticut to exempt itself from state law and obstruct transparency. It exempts UConn from general procurement standards *and* the State Contracting Standards Board. It instead, allows the university to police itself by establishing its own procurement and privatization policies and guidelines. It is not dissimilar to its previous efforts to avoid compliance with the Freedom of Information Act and maintain the secrecy of the UConn Foundation.

The State Contracting Standards Board (SCSB) was enacted in 2007 as an independent Executive Branch agency after Governor Rowland pled guilty to accepting vacations, airfare and home improvements from contractors who did business with the state. The SCSB is charged with ensuring the effectiveness and integrity of the state contracting and procurement processes and has authority over acquisition and management of supplies, services, and construction; state contracting and procurement processes and practices; and contracts for the construction, reconstruction, alteration, remodeling, repair, or demolition of public buildings. It also has significant authority to oversee the outsourcing of state services. Since 2010, if a state agency seeks to enter into a contract that privatizes services performed by state employees, it must conduct a cost-benefit analysis a business case for the privatization contract.

The University of Connecticut, like other constituent units of higher education, are already exempt from much of the State Contracting Standards Board statute. Instead of providing a full exemption as this bill would do, we should instead be mandating full compliance. Transparency alone is an adequate reason to provide this level of oversight to taxpayers, but when the state is facing budget deficits of more than \$1 billion per year, taxpayers deserve to know that every penny is being spent wisely and efficiently.

The Connecticut AFL-CIO strongly urges the committee to reject this bill.

SB 837 may be a well-intentioned bill, but much of its provisions are already in place. Section one establishes a task force to identify high growth, high demand jobs in the state. The State Economic Competitiveness Commission, of which I am a member, is already doing this work in a very thorough and comprehensive manner. In addition, the Connecticut Technical High School System annually, in consultation with the Department of Labor and constituent units of higher education report these efforts to the General Assembly. Section 10-95h of the Connecticut General Statutes:

The Labor Commissioner shall submit the following to the joint standing committees of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education, higher education and employment advancement and labor: (A) Information identifying general economic trends in the state; (B) occupational information regarding the public and private sectors, such as continuous data on occupational movements; and (C) information identifying emerging regional, state and national workforce needs over the next thirty years.

In addition, the membership of this proposed task force is suspect. Typically, representatives are not named so clearly in statute and these representatives would likely have significant self-interest in the work of the task force. The membership also excludes the entities that have established and managed the most effective and successful apprenticeship programs in our state – unions. This task force is unnecessary and we urge the committee to reject this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.