



Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges

Service Employee International Union (SEIU) Local 1973 – “Stronger Together!”

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Senator Bye, Senator Linares, Representative Haddad and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

My name is Bryan Bonina and I am the President of the Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges (The 4Cs). The 4Cs represents full and part-time faculty and professional staff at Connecticut's 12 community colleges, as well as adjunct faculty at the University of Hartford. I regret that I am not able to testify in person at the forum on the Community College Consolidation.

I recognize the difficult challenges facing the Board of Regents for Higher Education, but the proposed consolidation has many flaws that put our most vulnerable student populations at risk.

Connecticut's Community Colleges offer high quality, low cost, and flexible educational opportunities to Connecticut's students. Our students overwhelmingly are from Connecticut and choose to live and work in Connecticut upon graduation. Further, our system serves both urban and rural areas of our state.

When the Community College and Connecticut State Universities were put under the new BOR, the goal was to save money and reinvest those savings back into the classroom and student services. However, the BOR continues to spend more of the declining state funds on management rather than resources that directly benefit students. The consolidation proposal, known as “Students First,” adds many more layers of administration, which will decrease efficiency. We are also concerned that some services may be moved to the BOR System office without being fully analyzed to determine the potential impact on students. Even NEASC noted in their initial review of the proposal that “the materials submitted to date have been very clear on the financial reasons for the proposed change but less clear on a rationale tied more directly to the mission of the colleges” (<http://www.ct.edu/files/pdfs/students-first-neasc-advisory.pdf>).

The Community College mission statement, in part, states “The Colleges nurture student learning and success to transform students and equip them to contribute to the economic, intellectual, civic, cultural and social well-being of their communities. In doing so, the Colleges support the state, its businesses and other enterprises and its citizens with a skilled, well-trained and educated workforce.” We are concerned that this proposal may cost Connecticut by

dismantling a system that currently enhances our state, our businesses, and our communities. Colleges will lose their unique identities and their ability to respond to individual communities' needs. In short, we are very concerned about the impact from taking the "community" out of community colleges.

For those of us who have worked in the system for many years, this is one in a long line of proposals that have promised to save money and reinvest it into the classroom and student services. Savings are never fully realized. Our community college students are particularly vulnerable if the latest proposal to save money causes harm to the system. Many of our students rely on public transportation and cannot easily commute to another campus. Most of our students rely on financial aid to be able to afford tuition and require professionals on campus to answer their questions face-to-face. Our students rely on faculty and their advisors to continue to be there to provide guidance as they progress through their programs.

We want to make certain that all questions about this proposal are fully explored before being implemented. We would rather the BOR is inconvenienced by slowing this process down than rushing to move forward and having our students bear the harm. For the faculty and staff that I represent – the people on the ground who are in the classroom with students or directly serving them - our goal is and always has been to put the students first.

Concerns on Community College Consolidation

- The Community Colleges offer high quality, low cost, and flexible educational opportunities to Connecticut's students.
- Community College students are Connecticut's students; they overwhelmingly are from Connecticut and choose to live and work in Connecticut upon graduation.
- Community colleges serve both urban and rural areas of our state.
- The BOR was created less than a decade ago in an effort to save money and direct the savings back into the classroom and student services. However, the BOR continues to spend more of our declining state funds on management positions rather than resources that directly benefit students.
 - o The number of non-unionized management positions appears to increase, while attrition and a hiring freeze continue to decrease the number of faculty and staff who directly interact with students in their communities.
 - o This proposal adds layers of administration that will impede the crafting and development of curriculum leaving academic decisions in the hands of bureaucrats, not the faculty experts who teach.
 - o The plan replaces Department Chairs with Associate Deans or other administrators, which removes an integral aspect of faculty engagement in the administration of academic institutions at the community college level.
 - o The proposal silos some services at the BOR central office, away from the staff and faculty who assist them on a daily basis.
- This proposal may cost our state more as it dismantles a robust system that enhances our state, our businesses, and our communities.
 - o Colleges will lose their unique identities and their ability to respond to individual communities' needs.
 - o The proposed model mimics a for-profit model that will pour more resources into convincing students to enroll with less emphasis on retention or developing curriculums students and businesses need.
 - o It rehashes K-12 concepts that have not borne fruit, such as No Child Left Behind and the Common Core, rather than using student-centered models like Guided Pathways.
- Connecticut's dramatic shift away from adequate investment in affordable, accessible higher education for students has been accompanied by a move toward a big-business model where corporate style boards and their administrators-- most of whom never set foot in a classroom- determine how to spend precious public dollars and tuition revenue. The BOR college consolidation proposal demonstrates an embrace of this corporate thinking.
- The recommended restructuring of 12 successful colleges into one of the largest community college systems in the nation may actually take us further from our mission: offering high quality, low cost, and flexible educational opportunities to Connecticut's students.