

University of Connecticut
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee Public Hearing

February 27, 2018

The University of Connecticut submits the following written testimony regarding *HB 5195 AAC Student Membership on the Board of Trustees for the University of Connecticut*.

Pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes, Section 10a-103, there are already two voting student members sitting on the 21-person Board of Trustees at UConn. There is one undergraduate and one graduate student. Each are elected by their respective student bodies.

Of the 50 public flagship universities across the country, none include more than two voting student members; 43 have one voting member or no voting student members at all. The presence of students on governing boards reflects the value placed on student voices by these institutions, including UConn. However, the fact that no institution includes more than two voting student members also reflects the importance of having experienced leadership on university governing boards, which are typically composed of individuals who have significant, long-term experience in the private, public, and/or non-profit sectors and can bring that to bear as they oversee the governance of highly complex modern research institutions.

Governing boards for universities are not composed based on the demographics of campuses, or to represent specific campus populations. Rather, they typically include individuals external to the university – meaning neither employees nor students – which allows them to apply independent, unbiased judgement when making decisions. The growth of UConn’s student population over time does not provide a justification for adding additional student trustees any more than shrinking enrollment would justify removing them. Student representation was never intended to be proportional. Related, no trustee is on the board to represent any one “constituency,” including students. The role of every trustee is to act in the best interests of the university as a whole.

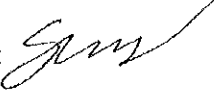
At 21 members, the UConn board is already among the largest in the nation. Enacting changes to the statutes related to the university’s long-standing, well-functioning governance structure would also create a precedent that threatens basic good governance going forward. This is because it invites others to seek to add even more trustees through the legislative process in the future for reasons not contemplated today. This legislation could be cited as justification for doing so. A board that is too large and potentially populated by additional trustees placed there to represent specific constituencies is a recipe for poor governance.

Students and their representative groups have ample opportunity for their voices to be heard through the existing student trustees, the trustee committee process, and of course, like the public at large, are also able to address the board directly during the public comment portion of board meetings, which occur at the outset of each board meeting.

As part of a compromise last year, the University and the Undergraduate Student Government (USG) agreed to permanently assign the undergraduate student trustee to the board’s Committee on Financial Affairs and allows USG to name two additional undergraduate student members to the board’s Committee on Student Life. The matter was approved by the Board in March 2017. Should additional trustees be added to the full board, these committees will return to their previous structures. A copy of the board resolution is attached for your reference.

February 22, 2017

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees

FROM: Susan Herbst 

RE: Notification of Proposed Changes to the *By-Laws of the University of Connecticut*

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board of Trustees amend the *By-Laws of the University of Connecticut* Article V.F.3. – Committees of the Board of Trustees – to permanently assign the undergraduate student trustee to the board's Committee on Financial Affairs and allow Undergraduate Student Government to name two additional undergraduate student members to the board's Committee on Student Life.

BACKGROUND:

The *By-Laws of the University of Connecticut* may be amended at any regular meeting of the board by a recorded majority of all members of the board, provided that notice of any proposed amendment, including a draft thereof, shall have been given at the previous regular meeting. This document represents such notice and the resolution calling for the described amendments could be acted upon at the next meeting of the board.

By statute, two students – one undergraduate, one graduate – currently sit on the UConn Board of Trustees. Each is elected by their fellow students. Their fiduciary duty as trustees is the same as every member of the board, in that trustees act to further the best interests of the university as a whole. At the same time, the student trustees are able to regularly interact with students across campuses and provide a student perspective to the board as it conducts its business.

Additionally, students, like the public at-large, are also able to address the board directly during the public comment portion of board meetings, which occur at the outset of each meeting. Students frequently avail themselves of this opportunity.

The board and the university are appreciative of these student voices and perspectives.

In response to requests from Undergraduate Student Government, the university proposes a change to the *By-Laws of the University of Connecticut* to enhance student representation in the workings of the board, through the Committee on Student Life and the Committee on Financial Affairs.

The By-Law amendment proposed by the university would add two voting student members to the Committee on Student Life, to be selected by the Undergraduate Student Government. It would also appoint the undergraduate student trustee that sits on the full board to the Committee on Financial Affairs. Student trustees have been appointed to the Committee on Financial Affairs from time to time; this would simply make that appointment permanent for the undergraduate trustee.

The Committee on Student Life discusses and acts on numerous critical issues of importance to our students, including the UConn Campus Master Plan, UConn's housing/residence halls, governance and funding for student groups and activities, Undergraduate Student Government, the hiring of senior employees in the Division of Student Affairs, student wellness/health/safety, student services, the Center for Students with Disabilities, sexual assault prevention/training, student conduct, public safety, campus climate, student advocacy, transportation affecting students, the strategic plan of the Division of Student Affairs, the construction of the new Student Recreation Center, student orientation, and protocols following student deaths, among many others topics.

The Committee on Financial Affairs discusses and acts on all significant financial decisions of the university, including approval of its budget, and the setting of tuition and fees, among many others.

The proposed amendment to the By-Laws will add the following provision, effective July 1, 2017.

The trustee elected by the undergraduate students will be appointed as a voting member of the standing committee having cognizance over financial matters. Upon the recommendation of the Undergraduate Student Government, the board shall appoint two undergraduate students as voting members to the standing committee having cognizance over student life matters. This paragraph three shall be null and void if the number of student trustees on the board is greater than two.

For the information of the board, also attached is the original language of Article V.F., with indications of the proposed amendment by adding section 3.

Article V – Committees of the Board of Trustees

(New language underlined)

F. **Membership on Committees other than the Board of Directors of the University of Connecticut Health Center**

1. The Board of Trustees may appoint individuals who are not Trustees to be voting or non-voting members of its committees provided that a majority of the voting membership of all committees shall be comprised of Board of Trustees members. The Board may specify a term for any such appointments.
2. As to any Board action which is permitted to be taken by a committee of the Board on behalf of the Board, the presence of a quorum for such matter and the vote on any such matter will be determined on the basis of only the Trustee members of the committee.
3. The trustee elected by the undergraduate students will be appointed as a voting member of the standing committee having cognizance over financial matters. Upon the recommendation of the Undergraduate Student Government, the board shall appoint two undergraduate students as voting members to the standing committee having cognizance over student life matters. This paragraph three shall be null and void if the number of student trustees on the board is greater than two.