REP. VARGAS (6TH): Will guests please take their seats. I'm hereby calling the public hearing to order. Our first order of business is in the interest of safety. I would like you to note the location of and access to the exits in this hearing room. The two doors in the front through which you came through are marked with emergency exit signs. In the event of an emergency, please walk quickly to the nearest exit. After exiting the room, go to your right and exit the building by the main entrance or follow the exit signs to one of the other exits.

Please quickly exit the building and follow any instructions from the Capitol Police. Do not delay and do not return unless and until you are advised to -- that it is safe to do so. In the event of a lockdown announcement, please remain in the hearing room, stay away from the exit doors, and seek concealment behind desks, chairs, until an all-clear announcement is heard.

Our first order of business is a RESOLUTION CONFIRMING RENEE D. COLEMAN-MITCHELL OF BLOOMFIELD TO BE COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC HEALTH. Would she please rise and please raise your right hand? Do
you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: Yes, I do.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): You may take a seat and make your introductory remarks. Please make sure that the mic -- both microphones are on.

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: Good morning, Chairman Duff, Chairman Vargas, Ranking Members Perillo and Fasano, and distinguished members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. For the record, my name is Renee D. Coleman-Mitchell and I am honored to appear before you as Governor Ned Lamont's nominee to serve as his commissioner for the Connecticut Department of Public Health. This is a department I know well and I am honored to represent. I am just as committed to its core commission today, of building a healthier Connecticut, as I was when I first set foot in the department 33 years ago as a young specialist, trying to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases in Hartford.

My purpose here today is to accomplish three things. First, I want to give you a sense of who I am and why I'm here sitting before you. Secondly, I want to let you know what my priorities and vision are for public health in the State of Connecticut and the Connecticut Department of Public Health. Lastly, I want to answer as many of the questions as I can, knowing that I've been here for six days in this position.

As a young African-American girl growing up in Waterbury, I was inspired to go into public health by three people, my aunt, who was a nurse, the
actress, Diahann Carroll, who played a nurse on the hit TV show, Julia, and my science teacher in high school, Mr. Morgan, the only African-American teacher I ever had. My mother and my grandmother instilled in me a strong work ethic. I started becoming interested in public health administration when I was a sophomore at Connecticut College in New London because I knew that I could have more impact on the health care system and reach more people.

During those years, I volunteered at the local Planned Parenthood Clinic doing intake interviews for young women who needed everything from pelvic exams to treatment for sexually transmitted diseases and other health services. I learned then at an early age the sacred trust people placed in you when you are caring for them and their health. That has stayed with me to this day thought various roles.

In the 1980s, after getting my masters in public health from the Yale School of Public Health, I did an administrative residency at a large VA hospital in Boston, learning about improving health systems for war veterans, most of them being amputees from World War II, Korea, and Vietnam.

It took my -- I took my first job with the Connecticut Department of Public Health as a disease intervention specialist, finding adults engaged in high-risk behaviors who were exposed STDs so that they could be tested and treated. I helped start the HIV and AIDS unit within the Department of Public Health and helped direct more resources to treat patients who are given a death sentence when diagnosed with AIDS. Following my first years at DPH, I accepted a position at Meredith Community Health Center, Incorporated, serving as its
director. We aimed our services at the most vulnerable population, the young, the old, low-income families, those without a health insurance who were underserved. We started a new school-based dental hygiene program and mental health services aimed at children and adolescents.

It was then I was recruited to become deputy director of Health for the City of Hartford, where we tackled the rising health threats of asthma, lead poisoning, the result of children living in substandard housing additions with many environmental contaminants. From 2002 to 2016, I had the opportunity to expand the Community. Family and Health Equity section of the Department of Public Health. We increased federal funding to treat chronic conditions by millions, establishing Connecticut's first statewide Injury Prevention Program and received federal funding to establish the state's first Violent Death Reporting System.

Our focus was treating and preventing chronic diseases for women, children and adolescents, injury prevention, genomic and oral health programs. We also found ways to make our health programs more effective and cost less, streamlining services, making operations run more efficiently, which we all know, in lean budget times, makes a real difference. During that time, I was also an instructor at the UConn Masters in Public Health program at UConn Health Center in Farmington, teaching maternal and child health, which piqued my interest in working in higher education.

So, in 2016, I accepted a position in Pullman, Washington, where I became executive director of Cougar Health Service at Washington State
University. This was a fascinating assignment leading integrative health services for a student body of more than 30,000 students. I also established the first ever Trans Health Primary Care services, reestablished behavioral health services, and instituted a new integrative delivery model for counseling and psychological services. Based on my experience with the student population, I can tell you that we are looking at a generation of new college graduates who do well academically, but suffer from emotional and mental health issues that the public health systems will have to address.

Upon my return to Connecticut, I was offered this amazing opportunity by Governor Ned Lamont to return to the Department of Public Health as the commissioner. My overall priority for the department is to continue to lead, protect and improve public health of Connecticut's residents. Here are the areas I hope to focus on - DPH workforce development, health equity for all, continue addressing chronic diseases, environmental and local health, drinking water safety, maternal mortality, and to establish a men's health unit. I also want to focus on developing a new generation of diverse health professionals. As the commissioner, I am open to new ideas and/or different perspectives and I want to implement best practices from other states or even other countries.

I am committed to listen to you and the community leaders you represent along with my staff and sister agencies to find the best ways to assess health care needs in a cost-effective manner for Connecticut taxpayers. I owe my career to the dedication of my family, who supported my drive to get educated, and
all of my mentors I've had along the way in learning to really care for people and make their lives better. I want to thank my friends, especially thank my mother, my husband, and my children for always supporting and encouraging.

In closing, I want to thank Governor Lamont for nominating me as the commissioner of Public Health, this committee for allowing me to come before you, respectfully requesting your support of this nomination. Additionally, I am blessed to represent the Connecticut Department of Public Health. And to the staff at DPH, the third time's a charm. I am looking forward to working with each and every one of you. I am happy now to take any of your questions. Thank you for this opportunity.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much for your remarks, Commissioner, and congratulations on your appointment by Governor Lamont. You know, it seems like -- I agree with what you're saying about the emotional impact, you know, modern living has had on people. In the past, it was all; you know, pretty cut and dry. You had your people that everybody said, well, these are the normal people. These are the people that have challenges and emotional issues or psychological issues.

Today, with the stress and pressure of modern living on our -- including our college kids, you know, and all the stress that they're under, it seems like all of us are one point or another the so-called continuum of mental health, and none of us are exactly a hundred percent at all times, especially after traumatic life events like divorces, losing a job, losing a house. We all could need a little bit tender loving care and a little bit of psychological
counseling, and there should be no stigma attached to that. We are a lot more fragile than we think and life is not getting any simpler for any of us.

I am very impressed with your background, your resume. I know you did your masters at Yale School of Medicine. I know you have a bachelors from a community college. We've had a chance to speak before this hearing and I'm sure you'll do a great job. The issues that come to mind are so many with public health. It seems like when you were talking about the mental health issues, it seems like most of our mental health is now being relegated to the Corrections Department. We wait until people do something wrong and then we incarcerate them or they get very little support.

The issue, of course, of legalization of marijuana is a big issue. People are claiming that this is gonna lead to more problems. I'm not one of those that subscribes to that, but that's the things we're hearing. We hear about the vaccination controversy. We have had a second case of measles here in the State of Connecticut. We're being faced with many, many other problems, like the whole opioid epidemic and. So, I just would like to ask you, you know, in terms of your priorities, what you see as the issues that Public Health should be dealing with and what you think should be some of those priorities and perhaps some of the strategies you're looking at to address them.

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: Thank you for that question. I have to agree with you that basically all the things that you've just named will become and are existing priorities as well. One of the things to do is to always look at the data and the science.
In terms of the Department of Public Health, that's where we always come from, that angle. To look at the science behind it, to study, and really look at what it means, decipher it, and then decide what programming interventions that we need to do. And as I stated in my presentation, it was very clear that you want to always look at what other states, maybe even other countries, have done as an example. What has been successful and what has not been.

One of the good things that we did, actually, when I worked at the Department of Public Health in the Community, Family and Health Equity section, is that we had a lot of opportunity where we received funding from the federal government and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, we had opportunity to be innovative, to really come up with ways that we think could work and the we would step back and look at it and assess it, and then tweak it if it needed to be. So, that's kind of one of the things that I have to tell you that we're gonna be doing as all the competent staff at DPH. Because those issues that you listed are numerous, they're wide-spanned, they're multifaceted. There's not one, you know, solution to any of them. And you just really kind of start with looking at the data and then kind of decipher what you go and where you go from there. And you always do an assessment to see where you need to go next, how well you're doing, and then tweak it as necessary.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you for that response and I wish you good luck in your endeavors. At this point, I'm going to open it up for questions from other committee members. Our Ranking Member, Representative Perillo, you have the floor.
REP. PERILLO (113TH): Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Good morning.

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: Good morning.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Congratulations.

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: Thank you.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): A couple of the items that the Chairman mentioned, one of which is an issue that I discuss frequently with certain of my constituents and in some cases I disagree with those constituents, and that's the issue of vaccinations. Could you talk a little bit about your thoughts?

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: Well, we're always gonna go with the science behind a vaccination. And I will tell you that as a department we do support having our vaccinations at this time. To day, we have looked at all the studies and the studies have been very, very clear that having vaccinations have led to not having illnesses and diseases. And so we stick with the science of it and we continue to look at that very much so. We also look at the fact of our immunization rate and we're in the top ten nationwide as a state in terms of our immunization rate. And that's why we can attest to the fact that what was stated earlier, that we only have two cases of measles to date, recognize that came from the State of Washington, which have about 73, could have more at this point. And I was there at the time, and it was very clear that those individuals with measles did not have vaccinations.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Well, thank you, and I appreciate that. Yeah, that's interesting. I often think if my five-year-old can't bring in peanut
butter to school, then I don't know somebody else's kid can bring in, you know, deadly communicable diseases. But one other question. I had mentioned to you that I would ask you this, is your opinion on recreational marijuana.

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: I'm always going to come from a perspective of public health, the science behind it, the prevention and the education. Just as we deal with cigarettes and alcohol, we will have the same position as it regards to recreational marijuana. I will tell you that my experience at the State of Washington, at Washington State University, it is legal. Recreational marijuana is legal. As the executive director of Cougar Health Services, I was able to see and experience quite a bit in terms of our young people having impaired judgment at times when they participated in recreational marijuana use, which would result in bad judgment in regards to their health and decision making, and many times end up in the health center for our students.

So, I can only come from the angle that if it is approved, that we as a department will continue to study it and that we will also look at the impact that I could have on young people, because that is a major concern in terms of our young people with recreational marijuana, and then be able to provide the facts in terms of the impact that recreational marijuana would have.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you, and a great job of threading the needle on what could be a difficult question for you. So, I appreciate that very, very much. So, I see you have staff here today. Do you have family here today?
MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: I do. Family, staff and friends, yes.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): That's pretty cool, huh?

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: It is.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Congratulations.

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Perillo. Senator Moore, you have the floor.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): Thank you. Congratulations, Commissioner.

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: Thank you.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): We've come full circle. I actually have worked with the commissioner in her previous life when she was here doing health equity. So, it's really wonderful to sit on this side. Although you're not a Senate nomination, I'm glad to be here for you today and to know that you have my full support. I've been impressed with what you did when you were here previously. I had some questions. They were also on the vaccinations. Have you had a chance to see the bills that have come out on vaccinations through the Children's Committee?

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: I have not to this date.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): I would ask you to look at those and, even if they didn't make it out to votes, give your opinion and let me know what you think about some of those bills. There's been a lot of pushback about that. And I'm looking at what's going on in New York in a certain community of
children not being vaccinated and wondering how much more can we do to support some of these bills that are trying to move through the Assembly. And then, my other is I want to know if you know anything about the current status of the Connecticut Breast and Cervical Cancer Program. Is it still moving forward and is it still being funded?

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: It's still moving forward and it is still funded, yes.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): Okay. And then the other is the University of Bridgeport had a School of Naturopathic Health. We were up here fighting for a bill to give prescriptive rights to some of the doctors, and we found out that they're closing the school. What do you think can be done to support some of those students that have already gone well through the process and now have no place to land?

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: That's an interesting question, and I can only imagine how those students must feel at this point to have gone through that rigorous curriculum and then now being left without. That would be something I would have to look into, and looking at opportunities to have a discussion about what was next and where they're at with their curriculum and with -- in schooling. I would also probably take a look at what our surrounding sister states are doing and see what can be done, if anything. But I would have to step back and take a look at that.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): So, I'd appreciate your help with that. I've had several of the students come to me and ask what can I do for them, and I don't know
what I can do or how deep I can reach into that. But I'd appreciate some help there.

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: I'm willing to look into that, absolutely.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): And congratulations. I'm glad to see you're here.

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: Thank you.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Moore. The Chair recognizes my esteemed Vice-Chair, Representative Phipps.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Thank you, Chair. And welcome, Commissioner, glad to have you here. Representative Perillo had began to already talk about some of the questions I had regarding vaccines. So, I appreciate your answer. And as someone that has a severe tree nut allergy, I recognize that how important that metaphor is. So, to go on that further, specifically about allergies, we've seen an expansion, I think rightfully so, of Narcan in communities in order to help prevent tragic loss of life because of overdoses and having access and training to that medicine has saved countless lives. Would you -- and do you think the -- your department would be in support of having similar access to EpiPens?

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: I don't understand your question.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): For -- not for substance abuse, obviously. But for folks what have severe food allergies or allergies to insect bites. Right
now, the onus is on the individual to carry an 
EpiPen in their pocket or in their purse. That can 
be inconvenient oftentimes, or if the restaurants 
that you eat at may not there's a cross 
contamination. That leaves -- once again, there's a 
lot of potential for tons of danger. Do you think 
we should have access as a community to lifesaving 
medicines like EpiPens the same way that we have 
lifesaving access to things like Narcan?

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: Thank you for the 
clarification. You know, it's interesting you 
mention that. When I did return back to the 
Department of Public Health in 2002, I was the 
program manager in the asthma program, and we saw a 
lot of asthma and allergy, you know, comorbidity and 
it was quite interesting. And then we spent a lot 
of time with our school nurses in talking to them 
and then looking at the opportunity of having 
EpiPens available in the school system. So, I will 
tell you, just based on my experience in working in 
asthma back in, you know, 2002, that that is 
definitely something that we should look into.

I actually have my old -- my son, who we -- my 
husband and I found out he was allergic to nuts 
right before he went off to school and we had to 
purchase two EpiPens and we had to educate him. I 
pray to God he still listens to that. That he would 
carry that EpiPen on his, you know, his body, on his 
person, so that he would be able to literally use it 
if need be. So, there's a lot of education that 
needs to take place. And then there's also the 
availability and accessibility. So, that is 
definitely something that would be looked into,
because we did pursue some of that back in 2002 with the asthma program.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Thank you for that answer. I mean, I recognize how important that lifesaving medication is. And as someone that worked a pretty prominent Fortune 500 Company at the time, and I wasn't even able to afford the lifesaving medication had I needed it. And they're -- on the low end they're about $400 dollars, as I'm sure folks recognize that. And that's a really hard choice for families and individuals to make to just be ultra-careful or to spend a month's worth of groceries or a car payment or multiple other ways that you can look at $400 dollars.

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: It's very expensive, but it's lifesaving, so you -- it's --

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): And then you also need one at your school. You need one at afterschool care. You need one at each individual place that you're at. So, it's -- it could be very costly. So, thank you for that. Just one last question. It's about the collection of data regarding subgroups. So, right now, when we check specifically about demographics for race, we link Asians all in one group, but the health needs of, let's say, someone of Chinese descent may be incredibly different than someone of Cambodian descent, or even myself, my mom is black American, where my dad is West Indian, and specifically Jamaican and from a rural area in Jamaica, with, not vastly different, but nuance differences in health needs. Do you think the state should start to track and monitor based off of subgroups and would that lead to greater health outcomes?
MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: So, that's an interesting question. My previous time at DPH, before coming back this time, we spent a lot of discussion in-house about that. That it's really important to break out subgroups. When I taught at UConn, the Public Health Program and NCH, we talked about the different statistics and the impact of life expectancy when you break it out in terms of subgroups as well. So, that's a very important matter in regards to really making sure that you have the right programming and treatments for people.

The challenge that we have is that at CDC level with our federal funding, the federal government has these huge categories that clumps, as you know, lumps everyone together. But it is something that we have talked about in-house and sometimes we have taken the opportunity, depending on the programming and the granting, grant funds, that we would break it out. Because some of the particulars in terms of how particular cultures respond to treatment or prevention or education is varying, and so we had to make sure that we did things very differently, depending on that subgroup. So, that is something that definitely needs to be addressed. I know that for the six days that I've been at DPH that has been brought to my attention as well.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Thank you. That's something that I am incredibly in favor of. Although, when I even think about my own district, but to link the needs of, as I said, of our -- like, our Vietnamese population or our Cambodian population. I mean, this is vastly different. And when you extrapolate
that on the state level, there could be severe consequences by not checking.

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: Absolutely, absolutely.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): I think the baseball analogy that things that aren't tracked and aren't measured, they don't count. So, I think we have to count those to make sure that folks get the proper health --

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: And I just want to caution. We're well aware of that in the department. There's some great statisticians at DPH. The challenge, again, is that when we have funding, grant funding, such as from the federal government, they're lumped in groups. This was something we have to report in that manner. We have to collect data in that manner. But recognize we know the difference and we understand that there are definitely subgroups that respond differently.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): So, we've just go to hope the feds get their act together. All right. (Laughter) A little shade in the morning, I'm sorry. I'm new. I can do that.

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: As long as I didn't say it.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): (Laughs) And actually just one last one, regarding kind of the local disparities between our Departments of Health. And one particular example that I can think of, is that if you are a food truck owner and you want to do a festival in Glastonbury and then want to do one in Bridgeport, you need -- you have two vastly different processes in order to get licensed in both. Is there a way that we could, on the state
level, provide some greater efficiency so that, let's say, the food truck owner wouldn't have to go to 169 different municipalities?

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: That's a good question. I know that that responsibility lies at the local level with our local health. It's something we can look into. I'm not absolutely sure about that, but I can look into it. But I do know that that rests at the local level.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Thank you. Okay. And with that, I appreciate you coming here. Your resume speaks for itself and I'm looking forward to working with you.

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: Same here. Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, I think that if there's no -- I'd also like to point out that there are other members of this committee that are very busy in other committees, but they will be voting on the recommendation to confirm your nomination as commissioner of Public Health, and we will be keeping the votes open until 4 o'clock p.m. so they can cast their votes. And every committee member has received the information on your bio and they're very well aware of every nominee here. And some of them, if they're in their offices, also watch us on closed circuit TV, so.

I think that if there's no further questions, I'd just like to once again congratulate you. I'm glad that you've taken this position that your decisions are gonna be research-based and on best practices, and I think that's gonna work very well for the department. And I wish you well. And with that, we have one question we ask all nominees before we let
them go, and that is in your background, do you believe there is anything that might prove embarrassing to the Governor of the state or to this committee?

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: No.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much.

MS. COLEMAN-MITCHELL: Thank you for the opportunity.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Our second nominee deals with the RESOLUTION CONFIRMING BRYAN HURLBURT OF TOLLAND TO BE COMMISSIONER OF AGRICULTURE. Bryan, come up close and before you sit down please raise your right hand. Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

MR. HURLBURT: Yes, sir.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): You may be seated. And at this moment, you may proceed with your initial statement.

MR. HURLBURT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning to the members of the committee. For the record, my name is Bryan Hurlburt and it's an honor to be here before you today as Governor Lamont's nominee to be the commissioner of the Department of Agriculture. Agriculture's a $4 billion dollar industry in our state, made up of nearly 6,000 farms that provide jobs for 21,000 residents, and cover 440,000 acres of land. Some of these small business men and women have farm operations that date back to the colonial era. This is an industry that has stood the test of time, continues to adapt to new environments and will be a part of our growing of the economy.
I'm humbled to be chosen to play a role in this industry and will work hard to ensure that we are creating and supporting policies that will ensure a strong future for the men and women who are farming every day.

For those I have not met, I'm a lifelong resident of our great state and proud University of Connecticut alum. My family lives in Tolland, where I grew up and where I look forward to watching my two daughters grow up. Public service has always been very important to me and the vast majority of my professional career has been dedicated to that end, in both paid and volunteer positions. Over the previous two decades, I've served on staff here in the legislature, been elected twice to the Tolland Town Council, four times to the House of Representatives, and was appointed by President Obama to lead the USDA Farm Service Agency for the State of Connecticut.

When not serving in a public capacity, I've held roles to improve public policy to enact change in the community. Senator Moore left, but I used to be on the executive team at Wholesome Wave in Bridgeport, responsible for national programming to increase consumer access of healthy foods through stamp match doubling and fruit and vegetable prescription programs. I oversaw programs from L.A. to Maine to Miami to encourage and provide a means for long-term consumers and those at risk for diabetes to have access to fruits and vegetables for them and their families, be part of the local, state and the federal government on these programs as well as foundations, local nonprofits and community groups. It's innovative nonprofits that's changing
the minds about how to improve public health and food security.

Most recently, I served as the executive director of the Connecticut Farm Bureau Association, an organization whose mission it is to educate and advocate for policies that would increase the viability of agriculture. It's made up of 3,000 members dedicated to the advancement of agriculture in our state. Each county has a local farm bureau that provides outreach and engagement while also proposing public policy in the state. It's a true grassroots organization that has been responsible for many great public policy changes over the past hundred-year history.

I believe that my background has served me well for this position. During my tenure in the legislature, I focused on agriculture policy, serving as the vice-chair of the Environment Committee and Appropriations Subcommittee on Conservation and Development. Working across the aisle and with outside interest groups and the Department of Agriculture, we were able to drive public policy to open new markets, streamline complicated programs, and create opportunities for farmers. These policies coincided with a local food movement and consumer's demands for better and increased access to locally grown food. As a result of our work, we were able to foster marketplaces that could meet that demand.

At the USDA Farm Service Agency, I was responsible for a team of federal employees across six offices, the agencies responsible for disaster relief, crop insurance type programs, extended and guaranteeing low interest loans to at-risk operations and farm
support programs. As a public administrator, I worked to ensure operational excellence from the agency and staff. I created a workforce engagement committee to recommend ideas for improving the operations, instituted biweekly all-staff meetings to enhance communication and coordination across the offices and held regular training sessions on the complicated programs we were charged with administering. The FSA was an under utilized resource in Connecticut when I took on the challenge to incorporate it into the cult of the agricultural community.

I was regularly out and about in the community, participating in agricultural events and forums, visiting partner organizations and coordinating events with our congressional delegation to increase their knowledge about agriculture in the state. During that time, I was also tapped to serve as a part of Secretary Vilsack's task force to repurpose the agency. Through this task force, the Bridges to Opportunity Program was established and Connecticut played an integral role in developing and executing the design and services for the program. Bridges was designed to take advantage of the local footprint of the FSA offices and provide additional resources and navigation of resources to our farmers for all of the additional programs that existed. We delivered information through a sales force portal to the farmer.

And the resource library was a culmination of state, local, federal nonprofit and for-profit resources. It was an excellent way to incorporate technology to deliver much needed information to our customers. Importantly, the Bridges to Opportunity recognized
that there isn't always a program gap, but sometimes
an awareness gap, and through our footprint, we
could bridge that gap and help producers get what
they needed. I'm happy to say that although the
name has changed, the program continues under USDA
Secretary Perdue.

I bring up these experiences to demonstrate that my
background gives me unique insight into the role of
the commissioner. The commissioner needs to be an
administrator, understand the impact of public
policy, be a collaborator and a champion for the
industry, all of these roles that I have filled in
different parts of my career. If confirmed as
commissioner, I would look forward to using the
position to enhance and advance agriculture in the
state. Agriculture can be a part of the state
solution for our economic challenges.

We can increase the number of farms and farmers in
the state through increased access to markets and
through good public policy, like, legalizing hemp.
Agriculture can attract new and beginning farmers.
Building on the 22 percent increase, we realized
that the last USDA census of agriculture, by
creating strong markets and increasing access to
land. Our farms can help meet the state's
alternative energy goals and improve our environment
and water quality through creating a system that
promotes and cites anaerobic digesters. The
industry can expand and provide access to local
healthy food for our residents and reduce the health
care costs of diabetes through innovative
programming, like connecting at-risk patients to a
better diet by better positioning of local farmer's
markets.
These are all lofty goals that we can play a part of, but I think we need to think big if we're gonna improve the state's economy and help these local businesses. I want to thank you all for the opportunity to discuss my background and qualifications and I'd be happy to answer any questions that the committee members may have for me.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much for that initial statement and congratulations on your appointment by Governor Lamont.

MR. HURLBURT: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): I had the opportunity to briefly serve with you before you were appointed by President Obama to a federal position here in Connecticut. As a former colleague of ours and as a person with experience in this area, I know that when you were with the Connecticut Farm Bureau, you also had advocated for the economic viability of farming in the state, and I'm glad to see that you're gonna be in a position to pursue that. And I know besides farming, you have the whole issue of animals and the aquaculture which you share with DEEP. How do you see that coming along?

MR. HURLBURT: Aquaculture is a growing industry in the state and over the past eight years the University of Connecticut has done a number of reports that capture the activity there. Aquaculture is one of the fastest growing components of Connecticut agriculture. And so, it remains an important piece. We have a Bureau of Aquaculture in the agency dedicated and focused on supporting this
industry, but also making sure that we're regulating it properly.

Oysters, clams are largely eaten raw, and so there's a high risk. And so, we want to make sure that we're balancing the growth of the industry in supporting that while also making sure that consumers have access to a safe and healthy oyster or raw shellfish. And to that end, I believe it was about five or six years ago, there was an outbreak of Vibrio and the department did take measures to redo the process about how those -- that shellfish gets to market. So, I look forward to continuing those and taking that sort of very strategic approach to ensuring that we're protecting the health of the consumer, but also supporting the industry that we're supposed to be regulating.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Although I'm an urban legislator, I've always supported the issue of farming and the health of our farming industry in this state. And a few years back I introduced a bill for hemp cultivation in the state. And now, it seems like with the federal adopting a positive attitude toward hemp and a couple of bills that seem to be doing well at the legislature this session, where do you see that industry going? Do you see that your department can help move that along?

MR. HURLBURT: Absolutely. And that's a great topic to bring up today, Representative. Hemp can be a game changer for agriculture in the state. Connecticut farmers are looking for crops that have a large revenue opportunity. Hemp, on a per-acre basis, is estimated to be between $40 and $150 thousand dollars of revenue for the farm. Now granted, there are costs associated with that, so
it's not all profit, if you will. But creating a system and a regulatory scheme that allows and promotes the opportunity for Connecticut farmers to grow hemp and get it to market and have a marketplace, for consumer access to the CBD and other hemp products is really important.

We have been -- the department has participated and I've participated as a member of the Farm Bureau on a working group that the legislature has convened to see this through and we're actively trying to help craft a bill that hopefully you and the rest of your colleagues will be able to vote on in the very near future, so that Connecticut farmers can take advantage of the hemp growing season this year.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, I'm really excited about that and hopefully it will be a vehicle to keep a lot of our farms as farms and not fall prey to all this development and sprawl that has taken hold of the State of Connecticut. All right at this point, I'll open it up to members of the committee.

Ranking Member Perillo.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Mr. Chairman, thank you. Good morning and congratulations. As I mentioned to you not too long ago, I would like to ask you about agritourism. In my district, which is Shelton, it's actually quite a big thing, especially depending on the time of year. What is the role of the State of Connecticut in, not just promoting it, but also passing or not passing regulations that help farmers?

MR. HURLBURT: You know, Connecticut consumers, you know, one, due to the proximity of just being a small state, we're a lot closer to farms than in
some other states. But Connecticut consumers are really demanding access and have an interest to be on farms for on-farm activities. And Terry Jones and the Jones Family Farm, you know, a great agritourism business in the state has been able to fit that blend of agritourism with active production agriculture. Through good public policy, I think we can create the framework of enticing and enhancing agritourism.

And one of the -- there's a bill out there this session on revising the Liquor Control Act. And one of the reasons that's important to agritourism is because it would redo statutes relating to farm-based wineries, breweries, cideries, distilleries and meaderies, and to encourage and get the consumer more and better access and parity across all those different types of business. The consumer wants to have access to these businesses. Connecticut farmers want to be able to meet that demand. And so, making sure that the process is clear, certain and available becomes really important. So, we would look forward to do that.

The other piece that we can do is coming from the Farm Bureau. I understand the role that our partners can play in advancing some of this and the Farm Bureau has a very active program to go out and educate municipalities on how to set up zoning laws to allow for agritourism activities. Right -- generally, a farm is not located in a, you know, an industrial or a commercial zone. Generally, they predate most of the zoning laws for the community. And so, how do you work with a local farmer, a landowner, to create agritourism activities within the zoning code. And we could use our partners to
help carry that message forward, but also direct Connecticut farmers or interested parties to some of our partners who can help facilitate those conversations if we can't.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): You know, and I appreciate that because we passed farm distillery legislation not too long ago, actually at the request of a constituent of mine, and my zoning commission came to me looking for advice on how to draft its zoning regs in order to help this individual start the business he was trying to start. So, I appreciate that very much. I also appreciate the fact that you informed me that the word, meadery, actually exists. I had never heard of it actually, so. So, I'll take what I can get. Thanks.

MR. HURLBURT: Thank you, sir.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Representative Yaccarino.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Commissioner. It was good speaking to you last night. I know you're new into the role, but you were active when I saw you at the Farm Bureau dinner back in January. What is the health of the farmers in Connecticut? I know North Haven, where I'm from, at one time it was just a strictly farm town. And now we have a couple -- just a couple small farms. I mean, it was pretty much all farm. And mainly the farmers left or went out of business because of capital. So, I don't know if the health of the industry is -- I know some of my farmer friends are doing really well in other towns. But as far as the state, do you have a pulse of that yet?

MR. HURLBURT: So, that's something that I think about a lot, Representative, and thank you for
Nationally, the farm economy is down 50 percent over the previous ten years. International and national policies have created disparities in the marketplace. Trade is a major issue, that although many of Connecticut farmers don't participate in international trade, the goods that they produce do. And so, you know, moving our -- moving of a product out of, you know, a country allows for Connecticut products to fill that space.

So, as things stay here, it creates a surplus and drives down costs. And so, you know, we've got to be mindful that we -- I was just at a meeting earlier this morning and I heard that two dairy farms are likely to not be planting this spring and are going to -- I don't know if they'll be going out of business. I need to learn a little bit more about their individual situation. But the dairy industry is one that's in crisis right now. For five years, prices have been below the cost of production. We have in the State of Connecticut a program that does support Connecticut dairy farmers. I think we should be looking at other ways to support farmers.

And what's -- to tie this in with Representative Perillo's question, you know, a lot of Connecticut farmers are thinking and looking at different ways to continue their business. And so, agritourism becomes more important. Direct consumer becomes more important. I had a conversation with Senator Bergstein yesterday about the role that organics can play. And so, there -- you know, what's great to be a part of agriculture is that they are constantly thinking about different ways to meet the customer's
demand and provide for it, one, for them to stay in business, but it creates innovation in the industry.

With access to capital, when I was at the USDA Farm Service Agency, we actually ran a loan program for at-risk and higher-risk producers. And so, these programs were designed to fill that need for Connecticut farmers who couldn't get access to commercial credit. In Connecticut, you know, there's not as many options as, say, Nebraska, right, for farm loans. And so, through the USDA, we had direct programs and guaranteed programs to help support those farmers who had a year or a couple of bad years, to give them the opportunity to build their business back up and get back on their feet and then graduate to commercial credit.

So, having some understanding of, you know, not only the Connecticut programs, but also through my time at the Farm Bureau, with our nonprofit programs, and my time with the feds, you know, I think there's a lot of different ways that if a farmer is in need that we can navigate the programs that are out there before we would come to the legislature to advocate for a new program.

REP. YACCIARINO (87TH): Right. And the program we spoke about last night for the farm that went out of business, I'd like to try to work with that to try to get the town and other people buy-in to have farming. So, and another -- one last question. We had spoke at the Farm Bureau dinner in January and you mentioned it to the good Chairman about the hemp. To make -- that we have to make it clear that it's the Connecticut growers that serve from -- it doesn't -- they don't just make profit from that.
It actually helps the soil. It regenerates soil. When you grow hemp, it regenerates the soil.

I'm not sure why. I'm not a biologist. That's correct. So, hopefully we could, you know, keep to that, and obviously, no THC, and let them thrive. But it also helps the land besides everything else. I have a good friend who's a farmer the next town over and they discovered growing hops a couple years ago. Deer cannot eat a hop. There's a hook in a hop and that's why the hop industry in Connecticut is growing so rapidly. So, it's very important. So, I really wish you the best. I hope we can work together and try to do something for North Haven, but really the whole state as a whole, and protect our farmers.

MR. HURLBURT: Thank you. I look forward to that.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): We all talk about it, but the fact is we've lost a lot of farms in Connecticut and we can't continue to lose farms. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Yaccarino. Any further questions or remarks? Yes, Representative Godfrey, you have the floor.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Bryan, good to see you. Like Ed, I served with Brian. In fact, I remember when Bryan actually just worked here and then became a state rep. from out east and he was a very conscientious and passionate and hard-working member of the legislature, who has gone on to better things and bigger things, and I'm delighted you're returning to government in Connecticut as the commissioner of Agriculture. I could not think of anybody more qualified or more
ready to go to work. And it's been interesting as I've been listening to my colleagues here this morning, because when I was growing up in Danbury, there were actually still dairy farms. They're long gone. They've all been developed. The sprawl has happened and you have to go pretty far north of Danbury to now find actual working farms, up toward New Milford.

And in spite of being an urban legislator, I truly am concerned about the difficulties of dairy farming, which has long been a staple in agriculture in Connecticut for centuries. Rocky soil makes it easier to plant stuff that cows eat than actually trying, like, put in a vegetable patch. So, I'm very happy that you're following that issue very, very much. And I'm also pleased to hear you talking about innovative ideas and local zoning.

I've got a gentleman down in Danbury who has this really interesting idea for a vertical farm, which is one of these incoming technological things. And they won't let him start because local zoning says you have to have five acres at a minimum to put in a farm. Maybe we need to work from the state level to say if you're going up -- they're basically towers on which you grow vegetables and fruit. That this is viable, especially in an urban setting, for a whole lot of really good reasons, not the least of which is to have fresh produce available in town. We have a small farmer's market. It's very tiny. So, I'm hoping we can work on issue like that.

And then, as you know, we're looking at legalizing recreational use of marijuana, which is going to affect growers. I have no idea how that's gonna work or how it's gonna turn out, and I think that's
something we're still wrestling with here in the legislature. But I'm very excited to hear at your appointment. And I'm hoping you will get involved in more and more of the new technology that's breaking for the agricultural community. In my district, the best people have is maybe a garden plot or a flower box, but we do follow this stuff because we know, no farms, no food.

MR. HURLBURT: Absolutely. And thank you for those comments, Representative Godfrey, and it's always great to see you. When I was USDA, one of the things that we were able to work on, not -- and unfortunately, we weren't able to get this done in Connecticut. But Massachusetts had the first USDA loan given to a small farm operation that was putting their farms in shipping crates, and so they could locate it on a parking lot, essentially. And because of the number of harvests and you're, you know, essentially directly getting access for the plants, for all the nutrients that they need to grow quicker, you could get a lot more production for the small area that you were using. And they were selling directly into the Boston restaurant market. And so, it's those sorts of things that would allow us to continue an expand Connecticut agriculture. Just by thinking a little bit differently about what we do and creating the opportunity for farmers to take advantage of it.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): Thank you very much. I'm hoping to work with you on this over the next year or so, because we've got cities that have been called food deserts because the bigger chain grocery stores just won't open there for whatever reason. And to be able to provide alternatives, even in a
relatively short growing season, to people in the Hartfords, in the New Havens, in the Waterburys and the Stamfords I think is a step in the right direction. But we have to get towns and municipalities out of the mindset that a farm needs a barn and horses and, you know, a whole lot of, you know, the south forty and all of these kind of myths to be able to really bring it into the 21st century. Thank you and good luck. Congratulations.

MR. HURLBURT: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Godfrey. Any further remarks or questions from committee members? My Vice-Chairman, Representative Phipps, you have the floor.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Welcome, Commissioner. Glad to see you again.

MR. HURLBURT: You as well, sir.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): If you could just speak to urban farming specifically around -- actually, Bryan, I'm gonna take this more in a general question, regarding the cultivation of bees and what role our state should have in protecting that valuable resource.

MR. HURLBURT: So, the Department of Agriculture actually is not as involved with bees as some other departments of agriculture in the nation, but we work closely with the Connecticut Agriculture Experiment Station, which does have a bee inspection program to help people get set up to have backyard bees or to create, you know, a bunch of colonies to harvest honey from. The legislature's been
proactive with pollinator legislation over the past few years.

In fact, when I was at USDA, Representative -- then Representative Albi gave me a call and he said what do you know about bees? And I said, well, I know enough to point you in the right direction. And we had the head of the USDA Pollinator Committee help guide the policies that came out of the Environment Committee that year. So, it's, you know -- it's a vital resource for farmers for the benefits, the side benefits that they provide in agriculture, and we need to be very mindful of it. And so, I'd want to see how the legislation that was passed and has been enacted is working and see what else we can do to build on it.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Well, most of the questions I had have already been asked by my colleagues, so I will just finish with saying that I look forward to working with you. Over the years, when I've ever had agricultural questions, you were probably one of the first people I've gone to, so I look forward to continuing to call you on those sort of questions. But I also wanted to say a specific thanks. When I first got involved in, we'll call it, partisan politics back in 2005 after graduating from undergrad, one of the first meetings that that young professional group was with you and now Attorney General Tong. And you encouraged me to stay involved and get involved and said I can see you being in the legislature one day. And I'm glad that I can now be able to appoint you now. So, looking forward to continue working with you, brother.

MR. HURLBURT: Thank you, sir.
REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Phipps. And if that concludes questions from the committee members, I'd just like to, on behalf of all the committee, congratulate you again on your appointment by Governor Lamont as commissioner of Agriculture, and wish you well in your position. And before I let you go, there's a question we ask of all our nominees. And that is, is there anything in your past that you believe may prove embarrassing to the Governor, to this committee, or to the State of Connecticut?

MR. HURLBURT: No, sir.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much.

MR. HURLBURT: Thank you, sir.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): That brings us to our third nominee, which is a RESOLUTION CONFIRMING SIBONGILE MAGUBANE OF HARTFORD TO BE A COMMISSIONER OF MOTOR VEHICLES.

Before you take a seat, would you please raise your right hand? Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

MS. MAGUBANE: I do.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): All right, please be seated and at this point the committee will hear your opening presentation.

MS. MAGUBANE: It's now afternoon, so, good afternoon, Senator Duff, Representative Vargas, Senator Fasano, Representative Perillo, and members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. I am honored that Governor Lamont nominated me to serve as the commissioner for the
Motor Vehicle Department. Thank you for allowing me to speak to you about my desire to serve in this position.

When my family left South Africa, I was just nine years old. Our journey in Connecticut began from California after my father received his Ph.D. from UCLA. When he accepted the position as professor at UConn, my family traveled across America to arrive in Connecticut. That became my home. After I graduated from UConn, I actually moved and have lived in Connecticut ever since. My first experience with our government was a positive one. It was Senator facade actually supported my family as we first tried to become citizens. His staff actually helped us navigate the system to become not only permanent residents, but citizens of the United States. That was an absolutely pleasant experience.

My father retired from UConn after 25 years and I too call myself a proud UConn Husky. I moved to Hartford, where I've lived since graduating from UConn. I care deeply about our state, one that has given me tremendous opportunities and has shaped my life to this day. I am no stranger to challenges. Whether it was learning English in a new country, leading change in my community, or confronting challenges in my career, I faced those tests with drive and conviction. My career includes over 40 years of experience in leadership roles at large and small companies. I have worked in union and nonunion shops, environments partnered with business leaders to develop both people and technology strategies. I have identified solutions to tough business problems. In most of those roles, there
was one common thread - to fix business process and technology problems.

I recognize that both the challenge and the opportunity before me is to improve the experience of Connecticut residents when they visit the DMV. I will use my expertise to assess and improve underlying business processes, gain efficiencies and engage employees to improve the customer experience. The work done by the agency is very important. For many residents, the DMV is actually the first time that they interact with their government. Because of this, I wanted to personally assess what was happening in the branch offices. Today, I have visited twelve branch offices to see firsthand what our customers are experiencing. The visits were enlightening and showed me that we have a dedicated workforce who want to serve our customers, but need the tools and supports to do so.

I saw customers spend an inordinate amount of time in lines waiting to be served. We need to do better. I want every Connecticut resident to have the positive experience with their government that I had when I first interacted. I believe this is achievable. Serving as -- and I accept the challenge because I believe that it is achievable. Serving as the commissioner of the DMV would be a privilege. Thank you again for your consideration and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, congratulations on your appointment and I wish you very well in this. And I have to say, for full disclosure, that I'm very proud of her appointment, being a Hartford resident from one of the neighborhood that I like a lot, the
west end of the City of Hartford, represented by my colleague, Matt Ritter. And I know your activity in the community with the West End Civic Association and I know you'll do a great job.

MS. MAGUBANE: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And I know it's an agency that has challenges and one was the whole transition to the new computer system. Do you have any thoughts on that?

MS. MAGUBANE: Yes, I do. Any technology initiative over multiple years is very difficult. And because of the type of organization that the DMV and the services that -- and the number of clients, sometimes it's difficult to run those types of projects over the years and have a successful outcome. But I do believe that right now we have an opportunity to make a difference. I'm fortunate that that project, even though it's caused much pain to Connecticut residents, has laid the foundation for the work that we're gonna be doing going forward.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, I'm happy to hear that and -- because it did cause a lot of heartache to many.

MS. MAGUBANE: It did.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): I'm glad you have a great team working with you.

MS. MAGUBANE: I do.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): I recognize that your deputy commissioner, our former colleague, Tony Guerrera, the state rep from the Rocky Hill area, was a dynamo here at the legislature last year.
MS. MAGUBANE: He's been a tremendous support for me during this process.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Last year, he championed the whole toll issue, which was a tough issue, and came very close to getting that through and hopefully this year we might be able to do that. I know that there might be some disagreement on the other side of the aisle on that issue.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): There might be some disagreement on this side too.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Okay. All right. Well noted, Representative Godfrey. The -- but all in all, I believe, you know, having met with your before and having had the chance to speak with you and looking through your resume, I believe that you're more than qualified to lead this agency and I congratulate you again on your appointment by Governor Lamont. And at this moment, I'll open it up for questions or remarks from fellow committee members. Our Ranking Member, Representative Perillo, you have the floor.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon and congratulations. You know, I appreciated our opportunity to speak, whether it was yesterday or last week. The days have --

MS. MAGUBANE: It feels like years ago.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Yeah, I don't even know. But I do just have one question. We often hear about DMV and whether or not certain functions can be privatized, whether -- you know, that's up for debate whether or not it's a good idea or a bad idea. I'd just like to hear your thoughts.
MS. MAGUBANE: Right now, I'm doing an assessment. Because as an agency, we partner with many external vendors and what we look for is the experience of those vendors in being able to enable us to deliver a positive customer experience. So, therefore, if I look at what vendors to partner with or not, my key focus will be how does this enable a better customer experience for our customers as well as how will it help us alleviate those lines and how do we work with them or how do they work with us to help us design processes that will ensure that the touch points with all of our clients are positive. So, it's an open question. I think there's a lot of relationships that we already have that are positive and I will continue to look at those opportunities.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Well, and that's a very fair answer given the fact that you've been around for a week, maybe two. So, I appreciate that and the fact that you're looking at it with an open mind and really trying to figure out exactly what holes might be able to be filled by private contractors and which would not be appropriate. So, I appreciate that.

MS. MAGUBANE: One of the first things that I've looked at in my week, though, is really the customer experience from the time that they arrive at our doors to when they're -- they complete their transactions. I find that we need to relook at that because that interaction actually begins when they're at home. We need to be able to provide people the information that they need to go through the process and have a successful first-time transaction. So, we focus a lot about its [inaudible - 01:02:44] partners, but I think there's
a lot of work that we have going to do as a team to really focus all of our processes around that experience.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): That's great and I'm really happy to hear that. And congratulations and best of luck to you.

MS. MAGUBANE: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Representative Yaccarino, you have the floor.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you. It was a pleasure speaking to you last Friday. I just have one question and then just a couple of remarks. Well, in North Haven we have the Nutmeg Credit Union and that's been very successful with the DMV. But you had mentioned, Friday, one and done, and that really struck me, which I think is a good approach as far as. So, to do that, you would obviously have to change, you know, the setup as far as each DMV. When you go to the DMV, you had said you want to know where you're gonna go. Instead of going one, two and three, you're gonna go one. And hopefully you'll -- you know, that's something you're gonna, with your team, you know, achieve.

MS. MAGUBANE: We're very focused on that. In fact, we are reorienting the organizations and the processes to really look at how do people enter and interact with us from the first point of contact, and that is going to be my focus.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): But by speaking to you Friday and just reading about you, besides your great experience in the private sector, it's your
volunteerism I think that's gonna serve you well and serve the people of Connecticut well. And I think you're gonna do well and I just wanted to say that on the record. And I'm looking forward to working with you and your team and I think -- I really do believe you're gonna do well because you have the great business experience, but it's that interaction with people that is gonna bring -- I think serve you well, so.

MS. MAGUBANE: Yes, it is. I think that experience allows me to be able to look at the business from the outside in. I've met a lot of people in my capacity as a volunteer and listened to their issues and what they need. And, for example, as we think about a transaction, a lot of us have credit cards, but many people deal in cash. So, as we think about those positive transactions with the DMV, do we have an ability for someone to process a transaction quickly when they -- when we're doing cash? So, we are very focused on that.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): I didn't realize it until you said that Friday. I didn't realize that sometimes somebody could wait in line and not be able to pay because they have cash and they don't have a credit card.

MS. MAGUBANE: Well, they can still -- when they get to the window --

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): It's just harder.

MS. MAGUBANE: -- they can pay, but many of our processes online require that you have a credit card.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Right, a credit card, yeah.
MS. MAGUBANE: And we want people to move online, but we have to be cognizant that not everybody has a credit card to be able to do that.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Well, thank you again and I wish you all the best. And thank you, Mr. Chair.

MS. MAGUBANE: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Yaccarino. Representative Godfrey, you have the floor.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): Thank you. Hello again.

MS. MAGUBANE: Hello again.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): We had a good talk last week and I was very encouraged by your focus and certainly your background because I think the DMV is like the worst agency in the state because we deal with --

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Except for DCF.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): Except for DCF? Well, we have a new commissioner there too. The jury is still out on that. But because, as you said, you're dealing with my constituents every day and I'm really happy to hear you refer to them correctly as customers. And the customer is always right and we need to make sure that their experience is a good one. And you and I chatted about the long lines that are relatively new. And I spoke of my own experiences, you know, times ago when I had to go get my drivers license renewed, I had to have a picture taken. I walked in, went to the place where the camera is, handed in my paperwork, they took the picture. I was out of there in like twelve minutes.
The last time, it took me more than an hour because I had to go and stand in line to get a number to sit in line, to finally be taken care of by the cashier. And then I had to stand in another line to have my picture taken. That's not a positive direction, as we discussed.

But what fascinated me most was the idea you advanced. There -- it is the 21st century. There needs to be an app for that.

MS. MAGUBANE: Yes, they do.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): Yeah. You know, I -- being what I am, I'm standing in line, so I start asking questions of everybody else in line. And, like -- there were like twelve people in line when I first went in, and, like, three of them just wanted to drop off their old license plates. Why you have to stand in line for 20 minutes just to drop off license plates was beyond my understanding. And I'm glad you said -- well, if you can, you know, use your cell phone to saying to this I just want to drop off plates, bingo; it can be taken care of. Could you expand on that idea for us?

MS. MAGUBANE: Yes, I can. For starters, we're looking at know before you go. Because before you really embark on coming to the DMV to execute a transaction, you should really know what you need. And so, the cell phone could be a way that somebody can go in and with a wizard, ask, okay, I want to register an out-of-state vehicle. What do I need? We should be able to arrive at the door knowing exactly what transaction you need. And once you get there, before we even -- in Wethersfield, you go to the second floor to execute your transactions. I
believe that before you even go to the second floor, you should know that you have everything that you need to be successful.

Once again, it includes technology because you could check in and say I'm coming. I have all my documents. Hey, if you do that, you get on the express lane and we know that you've got everything that you need, you go upstairs. As we redesign a customer-centered process, customers who don't have all of their documents to complete a transaction should actually be told immediately. They should -- we should know that they can be successful. We send them to an express lane and off they go. If they're not, revise what they need. And technology's gonna play a big part in that. As you enter our website in the future, you will see I need to update my license. We will say, oh, do you know that you can do that online? If not, if you're coming to the branch, bring this.

So, those -- that's how the customer experience process flow is very different than your normal process flow because you're looking for the experience. And we -- I counted. We have at least five moments of truth today where we interact and have touch points with the customer. The first time that they realize that they need to come to the DMV and get some important transaction. The second time, when they start planning, if we don't tell them what they need, we've failed them there. If they show up in front of our door and they still don't have the right equipment and we let them go inside, that's a second failure point. If they get reviewed and don't have all of the documents, but still get to the window, that's another failure
point. So, we really have to look at those moments of contact and make sure that we enable an immediate success before somebody gets to the window. And those -- so, that's how we're gonna merge process redesign along with new technology and along with online transactions, along with reminders to your phone in the future.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): And I just love the whole idea. You're focused on the customer. You're focused on getting people in and out and getting the business that they have to do. And they have to do it in order to continue to drive and make the experience a better one for them so you don't have to take an entire day off from work because you don't know how long you're gonna be in line and you don't know -- if you get to the window and they say, oh, no, you've gotta go home and get this document and this document. It's really refreshing.

And I understand it is a part of, I think, the overall State of Connecticut in all three branches have, I think failed to keep our information technology systems upgraded and up-to-date. The legislature is still running Windows 7 for crying out loud and Microsoft doesn't support it anymore. And we have too many agencies, not yours, but that just -- their computer systems can't talk to each other. And I'm glad that Governor Lamont is focusing on that. But certainly, DMV is probably the most critical need for all of these upgrades simply because you are dealing with customers and I thank you for that. Congratulations.

MS. MAGUBANE: Thank you.
REP. VARGAS (6TH): Yes, the Chair recognizes Representative Verrengia.

REP. VERRENGIA (20TH): Good afternoon and thank you. And I actually want to start by thanking your staff and yourself for reaching out and offering to meet with me. Unfortunately, our schedules didn't work out, but nevertheless, I appreciate the effort on behalf of your staff. I just have a quick question, and I know you haven't been on the job that long, but nevertheless I think it's worth asking. Is have you had a chance to set any initial priorities going into this job and in the short time that you've been there?

MS. MAGUBANE: Not necessarily the priorities. But what I have set is a direction in terms of support, the ease of use of the client and balance of the work -- work life for the employees, which means that we have to really look at the processes. That is going to drive how I prioritize the work that's already on the table. Right now, we have many projects, many initiatives going on, but I'm not sure that they are centered around this idea of making it easy for people to transact their business in a timely manner. I call it we lose the lines and balance the work life for employees.

So, that is my priority right now and I will then be looking at IT projects, process redesign initiatives to say what are the ones that are gonna help us in technology projects to help us achieve the flow. Because it's a polarity, if I want to reduce the lines, if I'm not careful, the unintended consequence would be the employees are working even longer. And I learned that on any given day, the branch staff actually don't know what time they're
gonna be going home because we have a policy of closing the door, but with the people that are there, and they cannot go home until all the people have been served.

For someone who was a single mother, the idea of not knowing what time you go home is not pleasant, because you've got babysitting, you've got priorities, you've got many other things. So, that is what we're working on. Losing lines as well as balancing the quality of life for our employees.

REP. VERRENGIA (20TH): Thank you. And we all have our own strengths and weaknesses. I'd like to think I have more strengths than weaknesses, but maybe some would disagree. But anyway. You have a very diverse background and I think a good fit as far as taking on this very important position and I'm sure, as my fellow colleagues would agree, that, you know, I can't think of more complaints that I get from my constituents, that most of them have to do with DMV, and they're very similar to the very things that you've identified today. So, I was happy to hear some of your comments and I think if there's any agency that really needs to move forward, particularly when it comes to technology, it's this one. And given your background, I think you're a perfect fit. So, I wish you the best of luck.

MS. MAGUBANE: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Any further questions or remarks from committee? Yes, Representative DiMassa.

REP. DIMASSA (116TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Congratulations. I think one of the things that strikes me is your positivity and your drive. I think it's tremendous and I think you hit the nail
on the head when you talked about your, you know, your first experience with government. For many of my constituents, whether they're going to get a license for the first time, take a test, it may be their first experience with state government. So, certainly, you know, to all of my colleagues' point, as far as the lines and streamlining services and bringing things online and. You know, I'm terrible with technology, but, you know, with an app and all that stuff. But bringing that stuff to the forefront, I think will do a tremendous amount to give people a positive experience with state government.

And then, of course, you know, like the Chairman pointed out, I would be remiss if I didn't congratulate you on some of your staff. You know, former Representative Guerrera, he was a larger-than-life figure on the floor of the House. There's no doubt about it and tremendously a hard worker and a passionate guy and he's gonna do a great job for you, and I wish you all the best. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MS. MAGUBANE: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Yes, my Senate Co-Chair has the floor.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you. Good morn -- good afternoon, Commissioner. How are you?

MS. MAGUBANE: Good. How are you?

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Good. Thank you. I believe we're gonna have the opportunity to sit down next week to chat one-on-one, but I just wanted to congratulate you on your nomination and thank you
for taking on this position. Certainly, we know that over the last few years, there's been difficulties with the DMV. That goes without saying. Much of that is because of the lack of investment over decades, upgrading systems and getting systems to talk to one another and modernizing our Motor Vehicle Department. So, when that eventually does happen, it turns into some of the mess that has led over the last few years.

With that said, what has also, I think, compounded that issue, at least in my area, has been the lack of being able to renew licenses or other conveniences at our former AAAs, and that has caused additional lines at the DMV. Your staff has been very good and the former commissioner has as well about working to try and find other ways in which we can reduce the lines at the DMV, at the branches, and also try to find photo licensing centers at various places. I think Representative Yaccarino was probably raise -- it seemed like he was raising the same issue when I walked in.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: It was successful, though.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Successful, yes. It is - it was very successful before it was closed in Norwalk. So, I know how successful it will be. We just gotta get it back. And that'll be something that I'll be pressing on the agency, yet again, to ensure that we have that service because the Norwalk branch is extremely busy and we see people standing out in line hours before it opens up. And that, again, as we talk about how this is people's one and sometimes only interaction with the state government, we must do better and we can do better. So, that has to be
a priority and it has to move more quickly than it has moved so far.

So, I would just impress that upon you and I'm -- based on everything I've read about you and what the Governor has said, I know that customer service is first and foremost on your mind and working to ensure that we have better opportunities from a data standpoint that people can go do things more online. Know before you go. I think that's pretty good, and that we have a system that people don't roll their eyes about, but they can actually feel good about this branch of state government. So, again, thank you. You've got your work cut out for you and I look forward to working with you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MS. MAGUBANE: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Duff. Any further remarks or questions? If not, I would just like to, once again, on behalf of the committee, congratulate you on your appointment. And as I was listening to people, I remembered one of my pet peeves, which was -- and this probably has to do with policy in my city, the City of Hartford, but there's been a couple of times I've been up there, and it seems like every time I go to Motor Vehicles there's a hold from the City of Hartford. And when I get back to the City of Hartford, it turns out to be like four cents, five cents.

And I was wondering if maybe you could encourage these municipalities not to put holds for, you know, amounts like that. Just roll it over to the next tax bill. Because that really -- and as I remember, after making a line over there to pay my back tax
and they tell it's like four cents, the lady who took care of said, you know, you're not the record. The record was two cents. So, I mean, I thought from a customer service point of view, that doesn't make any sense. But anyway, congratulations and I know you'll do a great job and we're looking forward to a great success at the motor vehicles department. And before I let you go, there's a question we ask of all our nominees. And that is, is there anything in your past that you believe might prove embarrassing to the Governor, to this committee, or to the State of Connecticut?

MS. MAGUBANE: No.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much. And that concludes all our executive branch nominees. I believe the next one is a legislative nominee. And it's a RESOLUTION CONFIRMING MATT FLEURY OF HARTFORD TO BE A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF REGENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION.

Matt, before you take your seat, raise you right hand. Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

MR. FLEURY: I do.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): You may take a seat and you may proceed with your initial statement.

MR. FLEURY: Thank you. Thank you very much and good morning, Representative Vargas. Thank you, Senator Duff. Thank you, Representative Phipps, and Ranking Member Perillo, thank you. He's still here. Yes. I'm trying to keep track of attendance in the room, which fluctuates, but it's amazing to see you all at work, doing so many things at once.
REP. VARGAS (6TH): It fluctuates, but we keep the votes open until 4 o'clock so every committee has a right to vote and we also, you know, make sure that everybody has the bios and the materials, every committee member has the information, so. But anyway, proceed with our initial.

MR. FLEURY: Well, thank you. My name is Matt Fleury. I am honored to appear before this committee as the Minority Leader's nominee for the Board of Regents for Higher Education, a renomination for a role I've served in for some years now. I wanted to recognize, she was here and probably will be back, one of my fellow regents, Elease Wright, also from Hartford, who's a good friend and probably one of the finest examples of the quality of the membership of the board, which I'm privileged to chair. And our president, Mark Ojakian, is here as well.

I wanted to just share with you a few bits about what drives me to do this work, and then, if you'd indulge me, say a few things about why I think together we have an enormous responsibility ahead of us with regard to public higher education. I also note that I'm fortunate, or unfortunate, to follow a succession of truly exceptional nominees who you have reviewed this morning for executive branch positions. There's some wonderful talent coming to work for the State of Connecticut.

I devote my professional life to education in my role as the president and CEO of the Connecticut Science Center here in Hartford. There, we inspire families and students across the state to see and share science, technology, engineering and math, sometimes called STEM, in their education, lives and
careers. At this time, when Connecticut employers are offering tens of thousands of excellent jobs to STEM-ready talent, we have an extraordinary moment to connect individuals with opportunity and to provide our industries with the workforce they need to be successful here in Connecticut. The bridge from an inspired child to inspiring adult carries a student through school and most often college. As a volunteer member of the Board of Regents, I am equally motivated by the power of higher education to transform lives and to move our state, through its educated citizens, forward to a vibrant, intelligent, productive future.

I recognize that you have questions about the particulars of our work at the board, which I'm honored to chair, and happy to respond to in the conversation today. Given the opportunity to have your minds for just a few moments, though, I'd like to devote my opening remarks to the broader question of the role of higher education and how we must support it.

I, myself, was a community college student in the mid 1980s, and primarily because that was the only affordable option within my region. But for my community college, there really was no road that I saw beyond my youthful endeavors of managing the hardware aisle at Zayre Department Store, which some of you may remember, pushing the carts around the parking lot, mucking stalls for the farm down the road or various other jobs, like mowing lawns. All of which I'm proud of and are honorable endeavors, but which certainly were limiting but for the opportunity I had with the local community college. Even community college in 1983, financially, was a
stretch for this student, as it was for many of the students I attended with and who attend our community colleges now.

I was a work-study student, a Pell Grant Scholarship recipient, and I shared lodging with friends, sometimes several. I was among the great many students who paid very little for college by contrast to other institutions, but still could barely make it work financially. These were and are for so many students powerful, character-building experience, but they are also the challenges that confront so many of our public higher education students and too often force them to give up or delay or take on crushing debt to continue, even in the most affordable options of our community colleges and state universities.

These challenges have been compounded by the continual decline, not just in Connecticut, but across the country, in public funding for higher education. This decline has forced a continual rise in student-paid tuition, which only deepens the strain of making ends meet while covering the cost of college, taking care of a family in many cases, and having the time to do the work between jobs and school. This represents a potentially devastating disinvestment in the kind of society we all want and it is not without consequences. We risk further disenfranchising economically challenged segments of our society, driving further reliance on public subsistence long-term, and starving industry for talent so much that companies move away. Not for cheap talent, for capable talent.

It is the Board of Regents' responsibility under these circumstances to continue to argue as I am now
that higher education is a strategic, smart, economically-wise, moral investment. I respectfully but earnestly ask you to advocate and legislate from that perspective to the extent you are able. You are well aware of our efforts in this regard to manage the resources that you're able to give us and the students are able to give us to the best of our abilities, primarily through what's known as the Students First plan. With regard to community colleges, this plan aims to shift investment from administration to teaching and student-facing services. It aims to reduce the red tape that adds further stress to students' lives and to alleviate pressure on tuition by managing expenses. And, yes, it could save us enough money to help keep the colleges' campuses that serve your communities going in a sustainable way.

It's been suggested that somehow the economic arguments for Students First are in conflict with the objectives of better serving students academically. Those of us who remember, as I do, what being a student of modest means was really like, appreciate that these are not separable. It is entirely faithful to the ideals of public higher education to keep college as geographically close as possible to the student, be that in New Haven, Hartford, Winsted, Killingly, or the other campuses.

It is entirely appropriate to respect and address the importance of finances to students' success, and it is our responsibility to look to our administrative expenses first to put students first. We should do these things. And we must continue to ask you to support and defend sufficient investment to protect and strengthen one of the most glorious
achievements of our state and our nation - quality, affordable, local public higher education.

It's an honor to be considered. I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you and I thank you for your time and would be happy to try to answer your questions.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much for your initial statement and congratulations on your reappointment by House Minority Leader, Themis Klarides, and for your willingness to serve in a position, a voluntary position. And, you know, for full public disclosure, we've known each other for many years and you're doing a great job there at the Science Center, and I've had the opportunity to be there and take my picture with Hartford kids. And I think it's an outstanding asset to the city and to the State of Connecticut.

And I know you bring your past expertise with the communications industry, having working as a volunteer in many nonprofit organizations in the area, and I'm sure the Board of Regents is all the more effective for having a person like you serving there. I know this is not a new appointment. You're being reappointed after serving there. The question I'd like to ask is a question that's on everybody's minds, the whole controversy over the community colleges and the consolidation plan, you know. It's been a controversial issue and some people have supported it, others have opposed it. Any thoughts on that?

MR. FLEURY: Indeed, and thank you. Thank you so much for your comments and for your question. You know, prior to ascending to the chairmanship of the
board, I chaired the finance committee for some years, and there spent successive years in what we refer to as budget hearings, though they were somewhat less formal than this, where every campus, led by its administrative team, would present to us their budget proposals and every campus almost without exception, year after year, would tell us how difficult it was to make ends meet. And we were seeing, in many cases, not the failure of leadership at the campus level, but the failure of a construct which burdened every campus with replicated, duplicative functions that in this day and age could easily be consolidated in a way that would save administrative expenses and allow us to lighten the load on tuitions to cover those, while allowing us to also reinvest in the things that most directly reach students.

So, while there is certainly a fair and ongoing conversation about the wisdom of some of the particulars of the plan, it seems to us, and I think has been very clear to me, that it is, as I said, our responsibility as the governors of the system to attend to the administrative structure that we do control, unlike the per capita benefits and salaries, which typically are state established, to try to find ways to perform those administrative functions more efficiently and at the same time redirect services to students' needs academically as well.

There's one example that I think we can be very proud of that is I think a small anecdote that reflects what we can do when we get this right. Through the attrition of various personnel across the system over the years, we've had the opportunity
to test, if you will, the idea of a president leading a couple of campuses. So, James Lombella, who's the very talented president at Asnuntuck Community College, took on the leadership also of Tunxis in Farmington, and very quickly found ways to save upwards of a million dollars and immediately posted some new faculty positions. The faculty can now see that the plan and this approach will lead to the investment of the right kinds of things. And that's the kind of scale and the kind of innovation that we think this rethinking of the way we can administer the system can work at a larger scale that's envisioned in the Students First program.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you for sharing that with us. And at this point, I'll open the committee for any questions or remarks members may like to make. Ranking Member Perillo, you have the floor.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. And good afternoon, and congratulations on your reappointment. Just very briefly, what do you see is the role of private businesses in perhaps teaming with the university system here in Connecticut and the community college system here in Connecticut to, a) better educate students, and b) find them jobs here in the state?

MR. FLEURY: I would in many ways look at our customers as being the private sector employer base and the student populations that we serve. So, there's the very direct relationship in that we are in many, many cases, and this is demonstrable by statistics, the pipeline for students and for talent, I should say, ultimately for our employers here in Connecticut. Ours are the students who stay
in Connecticut and populate those jobs and make those employers successful when we do our job for the long-term.

In terms of our ability to do that effectively, the employers are a voice that we must hear from, and do listen to, so that we can tune our programs and our curriculum to their needs, so that particularly in their vocations which are hiring now, advanced manufacturing, for example, we're able to double down on those kinds of certificates and degrees so that our graduates or people who go through just a small program that may not even come out with a degree in the traditional sense, will come out ready for those jobs.

And we have seen that in advanced manufacturing in particular. President Ojakian has presided over the opening and expansion of numerous advanced manufacturing centers across the system. One, incidentally, is now at Tunxis Community College, opened by President Ojakian and President Lombella when he moved over to also lead Tunxis, and it's been enormously successful. So, it is, quite frankly, and this would not surprise you as folks who labor in the public policy arena, it is a challenge for government and public sector education and public sector enterprises to operate quickly enough to keep pace with the changing needs of the private sector employers who specialize in moving faster.

But I think we can be very proud that here in Connecticut our community colleges and state universities do think that way and evermore think that way. And just looking at my colleagues around the Board of Regents and their continual drumbeat
about this as a priority, you can be assured that we're very focused on that.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thanks, Matt. I appreciate that. And that actually leads to a follow-up question. So, in our community colleges and educating, because I don't know the answer, how do you balance the importance of and the offering of certificate programs and programs that aren't necessarily leading towards a degree and, you know, the two-year student who's four-year degree bound? How do you balance those two?

MR. FLEURY: Well, you offer both. And I'm really glad you answered this question -- asked this question so that I could respond to what is really a hot-button issue, particularly for those of us who are passionate about community colleges. If you look at traditional graduation, i.e. college success criteria, community colleges continually do not perform well by that standard. When, in fact, the reality is that by and large a student at a community college is less interested in an associate's degree than he or she might be in a certificate, to get that job that's gonna pay $70,000 dollars a year next year, with no debt because the employer is gonna actually cover that education for them.

So, we need to not be distracted by the sort of pressures of, I don't know, sort of a prestige-oriented view that to be meaningful in higher education, you have to have a certain graduation percentage in the traditional sense, but think about the question of are we serving the needs with which a student comes to us. And certificate programs are very often exactly what they're looking for, and for
them, they're walking away with what they came to get. And we should celebrate that as mission accomplished. And there are even noncertificate programs, where it's one or two courses about a specific topic that can make you more valuable to your employer; that can help you go from a job at one level to a promotion at the next level. That's the job of community colleges and it makes it, frankly, I think difficult for people to fully appreciate the importance and true value of these institutions.

I'm -- I did receive an associate's degree and I'm enormously proud of that and it was the basis upon which I could go on to Charter Oak State College and then to UConn. For that path, community college is often a well to provide that option. But I hope I've been responsive in just taking a moment to say I think that the alternative path is also immensely important and valuable.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Yeah, that's helpful, because I can imagine that balancing the resources from certificate program, or like you said, that one-class program to help somebody, versus the associate-bound student, must be difficult. So, you're trying to weigh the needs of the marketplace and trying to help students weigh the needs of the marketplace so they're not, honestly, spending time and money on something that's not going to get them anywhere.

MR. FLEURY: Right. There are two specific efforts that the system has undertaken to aid those who are seeking a degree and their movement, which the system uniquely provides now that we have the colleges and universities together under the Board
of Regents NCSUS banner. One is the transfer and articulation policy which assures that you don't leave behind credits that you might've earned in the associate's level at community level when you move on to one of our state universities. And there are a great many people who have worked to make that possible and it's been immensely helpful to students.

The other is an initiative called Guided Pathways, and this is where we are working to define in lesser, sort of the chaos of the cafeteria menu where you go in and you can have any number of things that may not add up in the end to a strategic use of your educational dollars and time, where there are now upwards of 20 options in the Guided Pathways mode where you can have not only a clear path to a place you're getting in terms of your destination academically and professionally, but also the support along the way in terms of advising, maybe even relationships, to your point, Representative, to employers along that route.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you. I appreciate that and I appreciate the fact that you're so attuned to it and you know that it's a priority for students. Thank you and congratulations again.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you. Senator Duff.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you. Thank you, Matt, for being in here today and for all your work that you do. I just wanted to just take a moment to say thanks for the hard work because, especially with our community colleges and some of those plans that are potentially going forward, they're not without controversy, obviously, and we appreciate those who
are stepping up and working to be on the Board of Regents and taking this opportunity to put our students in a better place.

You know, community college is not the place where it used to be, where 18 or 19 year olds go. Now, we have a high degree of second-career, third-career people who go in. And so, it's -- I just look at even places like Norwalk Community College and the people in and out of those buildings. It's far different from when I was a college student. And having folks who are attuned to that and are understanding the needs of not only today, but to the future is appreciated. So, I just wanted to say thank you for your service and continue to work with the legislature on these important issues for the fact that we need to be good partners in this. These are the ways in which we invest in our future and keep our young people here in the State of Connecticut. So, thank you.

MR. FLEURY: Thank you, Senator.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Duff.

Representative Godfrey.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Congratulations. Glad to see you. I'm from Danbury so near and dear to my heart as a state agency is Western Connecticut State University and that we have a very viable and vibrant extension of Naugatuck Valley Community College right on the corner -- right in the middle of downtown. It's a great resource. And my constituency is the downtown area. I'm an urban legislator. And the opportunities in the community college, as you observe, are just incredible.
And I can see what's going on there, lovely windows and lots of light, and it's not the 18 and 19 year olds, as Senator Duff talked about. It's especially helpful. I've got a large immigrant community and it's the second generation. This is their biggest opportunity after high school to begin to get the technical skills, especially. I'm delighted with the community college's work with Danbury Hospital.

They -- Naugatuck Valley offers a great series of health care-related courses. And I find both them and, especially, John Clark, at Western, has such a wonderful relationship with the labor market, the business community, from New Milford down to Ridgefield and out to Newtown, and even, thank you, into New York State, which is certainly part of Western's catchment area, and provides a lot of increased resources and students. And I want to continue to see that kind of thing, so I'm very happy to hear that these are your priorities too.

One of the other ones that I know President Clark has been working on, there is -- they've also -- Western has done a great job of outreach into local public schools. One of the issues that faces higher education in general is traditional students, mostly, are coming in and lacking in some of the academic skills they should have had. And we've got a big math lab; that's with an A, at Western. But they also reach out to high school juniors and seniors to try and make sure that they're ready to come to a university system. And I'm hoping you can spread that kind of thing throughout the system.

The --- Western, of course, also with an RN program, registered nurse program, also works very closely with Danbury Hospital. It's a great synergy that is
created. They're only a couple of -- you know, they're within walking distance of each other. They're very close geographically. And Western still probably teaches more kids how to become teachers than anything else. A huge percentage of music teachers, for example, in the State of Connecticut are graduates of the music program at Danbury with that wonderful new building, the arts building.

So, I'm hoping we'll see that. And I know there's challenges. You know, Governor Lamont has pretty much kind of signaled he doesn't want a bond for both higher and public education, which makes people like me nervous. And having to deal -- and I -- having to deal with such an interesting set of circumstances must be a challenge. So, I'm hoping that your continued success includes ensuring that not only the business community and the colleges get together, but the business -- that -- but that public schools and the colleges are also working together to provide the knowledge and skills to get a good -- not a good job, but have a good career coming out of our state public universities. Thank you.

MR. FLEURY: Thank you, Representative Godfrey. We're on the case and it's nice to hear those specific examples with the interface of our institutions with both K-12 education and with industry, in your case, in the case of the hospitals.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much, Representative Godfrey, for those comments. As seeing no further questions or remarks by committee members, I want to, once again, on behalf of the
entire committee, congratulate you on your reappointment to the Board of Regents of Higher Education. And at this point, we ask all our nominees before we let them go a question, which is, is there anything in your past that would prove embarrassing to this committee, to the Governor, or to the State of Connecticut?

MR. FLEURY: No, sir.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much. That concludes all our nominees for today. I do have an individual from the public that would like to speak. So, the person is Yvette Highsmith-Francis and she's from the Community Health Center, Incorporated, and she's here to speak about our new -- our Public Health commissioner designee. Before you take a seat, would you please raise your right hand? Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

MS. HIGHSMITH-FRANCIS: I do.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Okay. You may proceed with your remarks. We limit remarks to about three minutes. Thank you.

MS. HIGHSMITH-FRANCIS: Okay. So, good afternoon, members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. I am Yvette Highsmith-Francis, regional vice president with Community Health Center, Inc., and we are a statewide network of federally qualified health centers with a home base in Middletown, Connecticut. And I'm here this afternoon really pleased to offer CHC's enthusiastic support of the nomination of Renee D. Coleman-Mitchell as commissioner of Public Health,
Ms. Coleman-Mitchell brings a distinguished record of career accomplishment and a deep commitment to public health, especially the health of the underserved. Her 10 years of experience at the Department of Public Health provides a unique and valuable perspective on the health care needs of Connecticut's people and the attributes and the vision required of the department's leader.

As those of us in health care are well aware, these are challenging times and the threats to public health are many, and in this context, the Department of Public Health has an extensive mandate to promote good health, to prevent disease and to protect our people from harm. It must reduce disparities, strengthen our existing delivery system, and to foster a workforce that is equipped to navigate the fast pace of innovation that's gonna be inherent in 21st century health care. And we believe that Renee Coleman-Mitchell has the leadership skills, the experience and the determination to address these challenges and to make a difference to the people of our state.

The Community Health Center was founded in 1972 with the premise that health care is a right and not a privilege and we hold to that mission to this day. So, we're very pleased to claim Ms. Coleman-Mitchell as one of our own. She served as the second director of our Community Health Center in Meriden, and while she was with us she helped cultivate a practice that continues to serve people from addressing disparities in accessing care and in treating and in treating people living with HIV and AIDS are legacies of her tenure at CHC.
Commission-designate Coleman-Mitchell has demonstrated the strategic and results-driven mindset needed of Connecticut's next generation of agency leaders and we look forward to partnering with her in advocating in our shared values as we take care of the public health needs of the state. I thank you for your time.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much for that statement. Any questions or remarks? If not, thank you very much. I also have your written testimony here which we'll enter into the record. And we also have received a couple of written -- three written communications regarding the nomination of the new commissioner of Agriculture, Bryan Hurlburt. One is from Don Tuller, president to the Connecticut Farm Bureau Association. He writes in support of the nomination.

A second one, from Maggie Bridge, a member of the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Nursery and Landscape Association, also in support of Bryan Hurlburt's nomination for commissioner of the Department of Agriculture. And finally, a third one from Susan Pronovost, who's executive director of the Connecticut Greenhouse Association -- Growers -- Connecticut Greenhouse Growers Association, and she's also writing in favor of the nomination of Bryan Hurlburt to be commissioner of Agriculture for the State of Connecticut. So, those three communications will be entered into the record. And now we'll take a couple of minutes break and we'll reconvene for our meeting following this public hearing. We'll keep -- this meeting will be held open until everyone has an opportunity to vote, until 4 o'clock p.m.