To: Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee  
From: Charlene LaVoie, Community Lawyer  
Re: Testimony on SB 817  
Date: February 14, 2019  
Emailed to: HEDtestimony@cga.ct.gov

AN ACT CONCERNING HIGHER EDUCATION.  
To require the Office of Higher Education to study issues relating to higher education.

It’s been eight years. Time for an evaluation.

Since 2011, when the legislature abdicated its historic oversight role of public higher education, there has been one failed plan after another from the Board of Regents at a cost of hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars.

After five presidents and ill-conceived proposals with misleading names such as Transform 2020 and Go Back to Get Ahead, the Board of Regents has wasted a quarter billion taxpayer dollars and created a bloated central bureaucracy that costs $35 million a year. The recent “Students First” plan may be the most dangerous. Certainly, the most embarrassing. The accrediting agency described it as “half-baked”.

In the 1960’s, the Connecticut community college system was created by legislative charter and subject to legislative oversight. In 2011, CGS 10a-6 established a Board of Regents for Higher Education, created a new bureaucracy and empowered this administrative body with the authority to close or merge colleges with a 2/3 vote and without legislative oversight.

In 2015, in response to the BOR plan to close community colleges, Public Act 15-2 was adopted to restore legislative oversight. The Governor vetoed it. The 2015 plan failed for other reasons, but the debacle revealed the flaw in CGS 10a-6. The legislature did not follow-up.

Restoring legislative control is imperative and it is the original intent of the legislature. Such far-reaching decisions must not be the purview of an insulated and unaccountable bureaucracy. The General Assembly must take back its historical and crucial role over public higher education before this delegation of authority goes too far and destroys the jewel in the crown of Connecticut.

It’s time for an examination, analysis and review to determine the impact of CGS 10a-6 on public higher education.

Adopt SB 817 to require the Office of Higher Education to study issues relating to higher education.