



TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE

Amy Dowell, Connecticut State Director
Education Reform Now Connecticut
February 27, 2020

Re: S.B. No. 104, An Act Requiring Financial Transparency of the Students First Plan

H.B. No 5113, An Act Requiring Legislative Approval for the Merger or Closing of Institutions within the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities

Chairmen Haddad and Haskell, Ranking Members Hall and Hwang, and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide **testimony in opposition to S.B. No. 104 and H.B. No. 5113**. These bills would slow the progress of the Students First initiative, and impede students' access to educational opportunity and inhibit more students, particularly those from minority groups, from completing college on time.

In the fall of 2019, Education Reform Now CT released a report, "[*Less for More: Low Rates of Completion and High Costs at Connecticut's Four-Year Colleges*](#)," which identified low rates of completion and high costs in many of Connecticut's four-year colleges. The study exposed a number of troubling trends in the state's higher education system, including: (1) a group of colleges with low rates of completion as compared to their national peers, especially for underrepresented minority subgroups; (2) a group of colleges that charge an exceptionally high net price to students from the lowest income families, as compared to peer colleges in other states; and (3) a group of "double offenders"—colleges that fall into both categories, both producing lower completion rates and charging higher prices to our most vulnerable student populations. These outcomes fall short for our students and our economy, and Connecticut can no longer afford to just talk about the problems and wait for solutions. It is time as a state, to respond to these realities. Students First is one of the improvements we can make.

The Students First initiative seeks to create greater quality and affordability for students by consolidating the state's twelve community college administrations into a single accredited institution. The effort contemplates academic changes that will help to meet all students' needs, such as implementing the Guided Pathways model—which is a proven strategy for increasing completion by mapping out clear routes that each student can follow to achieve his/her long-term academic and career goals. Currently, a student who attends one community college and wants to take courses at another can face a mountain of paperwork and administrative hurdles, which can cause unintended delays in degree completion. However, Guided Pathways will establish the courses necessary to complete an area of study, develop clarity on transfer and articulation, and provide advisers and interventions to help students stay on track. The model will ensure that students in our community colleges spend

their time and energy on completing their degrees, not on overcoming bureaucratic and systemic barriers to success.

Beyond the academic advantages of consolidating the twelve disparate community college administrations, Students First also calls for sharing resources and staff in a coordinated way that will reduce the number of management roles and eliminate redundancies. This will lead to cost savings in the tens of millions each year, effectively repurposing administrative costs towards programmatic quality.

Efforts like these that create cost savings for students while simultaneously improving academic offerings are precisely what our report has shown Connecticut needs. Too often in our state, we have failed to provide students from underprivileged backgrounds the chance to succeed in school. If Students First proves to be successful, I hope to see similar efforts among the state's four-year programs as well. Right now, I hope you will find constructive ways to support this effort, and reject any efforts designed to create unnecessary red tape and impede the progress of our students.

