

CHAIRPERSON: Senator Will Haskell

SENATOR: Hwang

REPRESENTATIVES: Arora, Doucette, Haddad,
C. Hall, Rochelle, B.
Smith, Turco

REP. TURCO (27TH): Somehow it's comforting that even when we're meeting virtually and even by Zoom that we're always 15 minutes late. Can't get away from legislative time, huh? Okay. I think in the interest of everyone's time, I'm sure that Rep. Hall will join shortly, but I'd like to call the virtual meeting to order and provide an opportunity for vice chairs and ranking members to say a few words. Very briefly, I just want to say I'm so thrilled that we have such an esteemed list of faculty members and I believe even some students signed up to testify. Just because the legislature's not in session, I continue to believe that the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee plays a really critical role in oversight of this process, this historic and challenging in more ways than one process of bringing students back to campus and/or continuing remote learning opportunities. So I really look forward to hearing everybody's perspectives today. I know that we'll learn a lot and we will have a lot of questions to bring back to both private institutions, but also the CSCU system and I know they have representatives watching this hearing as well. Are there any vice chairs or ranking members who'd like to say a few words? Senator Hwang, go right ahead.

SENATOR HWANG (28TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, I'm really glad we are having this conversation because going back to school is one of the critical kind of rights of passages, but it's been so turned upside down and there's so many challenging issues that have yet to be addressed, not only for faculty as well as the administration of the schools, but also for parents and the students that are beginning their college careers or nearing the end of it so I think the more information that we can gather, the more guidance that we can provide is absolutely critical.

STEPHEN MONROE:

REP. TURCO (27TH): Questions from Committee members?

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thanks so much, Representative Turco, and Maureen, always wonderful to see you before this Committee. Thank you for your testimony today. I just have a [inaudible - 00:41:59].

MAUREEN CHALMERS: I can't hear you.

REP. TURCO (27TH): I think we, I think we're --

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Adequate level of testing you think?

MAUREEN CHALMERS: Well, I recognize it's \$140 dollars a test for each student as you mentioned earlier. I think it was Senator Hwang that said that, but having a temperature check for people coming into the building I think would be a bare minimum. If my IGA grocery store can do a temperature check for me going into the building, I don't know why the community colleges can't have

that. At the recent meeting with the DOR, I think it was Professor Blitz was saying that these COVID tests are only going to be as good as the first time a student goes back home for the weekend, which as we know, many of our colleges, our students return home on the weekend so we're spending a lot of money to protect the residential students, but they're going to be sitting right next to a person who is taking a course and you know is a commuter and they're not even gonna be temperature checked. So we're spending a lot of money to test students you know for COVID, but we're not testing people for symptoms as they come into the building and I'm not sure about the state universities. The community colleges have been doing a really good job. I want to say they've been working really hard so this is not a criticism. It's just I'm concerned that we're spending money on testing that is only as good as the next weekend and community college students deserve to be assured that the person they're sitting next to doesn't have a fever or is somewhat symptomatic or asymptomatic completely so we're putting some of our students on a pedestal and giving them the protections, but we're not doing it for other students and you know I want my faculty and staff to be checked too so they're not spreading this amongst the employees at the college, not just spreading it to the students.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): That's helpful to know. Thank you so much, Maureen. Thank you for testifying today. It was good to have you.

MAUREEN CHALMERS: I would like to say I want to commend the board, the HR Department, Chris Henderson and Andy Kripp, vice-president Andy Kripp. They were instrumental in getting us out of harm's

way working with the unions. We had people out at spring break and I think that's one of the reasons the State of Connecticut has such low COVID numbers now because we were able to act so swiftly. You know college students and K-12 students, they're the number one transmitters of this disease according to some of the information I've been receiving, so I wanted to thank them for working so hard on that and I just want, you know I don't want to be a complainer. I want to also give kudos where they belong.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Senator Haskell, any additional questions? Representative Haddad?

REP. HADDAD (54TH): I've got to unmute myself. Thank you very much for your testimony and let me just, since it's my first time speaking, I'll also thank Representative Turco and Senator Haskell and the Committee, rest of Committee leadership for putting this opportunity for us to hear from members of the public together. It's really important for us to sort of stay on top of what's going on in our college campuses and this is an important component of that. Understanding that you're not representing the system office obviously, but a thought, it's been a month since you know we had a hearing where they were in front of us so I'm gonna ask this question of you and really any other speaker as they offer testimony if you have knowledge of what I'm about to ask, which is just can you tell me from your sense, what percentage of instruction is happening on person, on campus and in person versus virtually? I was talking to the campus director at UConn's Hartford branch the other day and she said, the associate director said that 14 percent of their typical offerings are being offered in person and

that helps me sort of contextualize you know exactly what's going on at campuses. Do you know what percentage of instruction is happening virtually versus in person at our community colleges?

MAUREEN CHALMERS: I don't have a percentage, but I will tell you that the majority of the courses are gonna be offered online. The only classes that I know for sure will be offered on grounds are Allied Health, Manufacturing, to some degree Culinary Arts, and then I was just told this morning that some art courses are gonna be done on grounds so that, there's been a massive change to the way the schedules are for a lot of the courses. They've expanded the time between classes because for on-ground classes you may be able to walk in one direction in a hallway and so you might have to go all the way around downstairs back just to go to the office, the classroom to your right because the flow is to the left so they've spread that out. They've made it so that classes end significantly before the next class begins so students will not be congregating in the hallways so there has been a lot of work by the community colleges on each campus being slightly different. The one campus that we've talked about that has always worried me is Capital Community College. It's an 11-story college with four elevators and only two people are allowed in an elevator, but who's making sure that that stays two people in an elevator. Somebody's gonna say oh it's just one more, I'm just gonna jump in so I'm glad to know that the majority of the classes are happening remotely.

REP. HADDAD (54TH): And I guess that's good to hear. I mean I think as we move forward, you know I'd like to know that the colleges and universities

are doing whatever they can to offer remote instruction where possible. I know that that is really part of all of their plans. I just didn't know if you had an indicator and I agree with you and I share your concern about essentially student behavior. You know there's, there are two things going on here. One is that we are setting up guidelines and rules for how our institutions should be run and be conducting themselves, but the sort of wild card is personal behavior and whether or not people actually follow those rules. You know I know talking to our local school district, the K-12 district, I know for the first two weeks of school here in Mansfield, they're gonna put a monitor on every school bus so that the school bus driver doesn't have to be the person sort of making sure that kids who are getting on the school bus and going to school are wearing their masks and sitting appropriate distances apart, but that's the kind of preparation that I think is required to make sure that at least initially right from the get go, the message is clear that these kind of behaviors are not gonna be tolerated if people aren't following the rules. And so I share your concern and I think that that's a place where our committee together with some of the suggestions that came from our previous speaker and as we go through this hearing that we can compile a list of relatively simple suggestions and questions that we can pose to our institutions and collect you know those responses so we can be relatively assured that a lot of these concerns are gonna be addressed to the best that they can when school starts, but thank you very much for your testimony.

MAUREEN CHALMERS: You're welcome. I hope that you'll be able to talk to people about having some type of a temperature check at the community colleges. These students are equal to residential students at our state universities and should be protected. Thank you.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Any additional questions from committee members? All right. Seeing none, thank you so much for your testimony and we look forward to working closely with you on this issue. Next we have Dr. David Blitz.

DR. DAVID BLITZ: Thank you. Can you hear me now?

REP. TURCO (27TH): Yes, we can.

DR. DAVID BLITZ: Senator Haskell, Representative Turco, and other members of the Higher Education Committee, my name is David Blitz. I've been a faculty member at Central Connecticut State University for over 30 years. I am currently chair of the Philosophy Department, coordinator for our Peace Studies Program, and Thesis supervisor for the Honors Program. I am currently chair of the Faculty Advisory Committee to the Board of Regents for Higher Education and an ex officio member of the board. My concern is that the guidance providing a baseline for Connecticut state colleges and universities is insufficient to assure a successful reopening and continued functioning of those 16 CSU institutions with on-ground courses. There is a stark contrast between CSU measures for testing and those proposed at other institutions of higher learning in the state. Let me mention two. Yale will be testing all or almost all students, faculty and staff who have in-person interactions. UConn will be testing most if not at all, but at CSU

system, only residential students and residential hall directors will be tested at the universities and at the community colleges, nobody will be tested. I quote from a slide presented at last meeting of the Board of Regents by members of the BOR. "No testing is recommended for faculty or staff at the universities other than resident hall directors. No testing is recommended for faculty, staff or students at the community colleges."

As I noted at the recent special and emergency meetings of both the FAC and CCSU Senate, Yale and UConn are wealthy institutions relative to the CSU's and can afford extensive testing assisted by their affiliated hospitals and healthcare services, but that does not explain why the institutions with the highest proportion of low and middle-income students and the highest proportion of minority students as well, the CSU institutions, have the least testing. Much has been made in the recent application by CSCU to the regional accrediting agency, NECHE, that an essential goal of the proposed consolidated community college is to combat racial and class inequities. That does not appear to apply to testing where the least testing is being conducted, where lower income and minority students are most present. It might be the CSCU lacks the resources to pay for more extensive testing, but I don't think so. Recently, CSCU hired an interim president, interim provost, three interim associate vice-presidents, and an interim CFO as well as three regional presidents, already hired for Consolidated College, which won't exit until 2023. I estimate the cost to be at least \$1.5 million dollars a year in addition to the more than \$40 million dollars annually spent on administration at the CSU system

office. When millions of dollars are needed for a priority, that money is available from the aggregate state funding to CSU. Cannot some funds be found for more adequate testing at the state colleges and universities? I leave the answer to you legislators who determine and oversee that funding. Please note, I do not wish to attack the individuals involved. Actually, I think the recent appointed one community college interim president and interim provost are well-qualified academic leaders who are or have been presidents of successful community colleges, even though I consider the overall planned consolidation to be misconceived and wrong. This is not a [crosstalk] but a continued short-sighted policy to which I wish to draw your attention. Thank you.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Thank you, Dr. Blitz. Do we have questions from community members? Seeing none, I will ask a question. Dr. Blitz, what has the response been from the system office in regard to the lack of testing? Have they comminuted to faculty that it's because of the cost or are there other policy reasons they've given?

DR. DAVID BLITZ: I brought this up at the last meeting of the Board of Regents along with a number of other related issues. The statement from the commissioner of public health, who is also an ex officio member of the board, was that that was the guidance from the state. At that point, I said that it seems to me that the CSCU as representing most of the public institutions of higher education can go beyond that and I was criticized for suggesting that it was just a minimal level that was being proposed as part of the state guidance, but I return to the same issue. I think we can do more. I think a

mistake has been made and quite simply, we should correct it [crosstalk] by providing additional measures including random testing of all students and faculty and staff as well or pooling of test results, which is something they're doing at UConn, and that reduces the average cost. If you pool ten together, then you know to check back if there is a positive result, but if there isn't, it's only cost you one-tenth of the individual cost.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Thank you. Any questions from committee members? I don't see anyone with their hand raised. Thank you so much, Dr. Blitz, for your testimony and your input and next we have Mary Ellen Junda.

MARY ELLEN JUNDA: Thank you. Can you hear me?

REP. TURCO (27TH): Yes.

MARY ELLEN JUNDA: All right. Chair Haskell, Representative Turco, and esteemed members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, my name is Mary Ellen Junda. I'm a professor of Music at the University of Connecticut and currently serve as President of the UConn Chapter of the American Association of University Professors, representing 1800 faculty members and coaches in collective bargaining.

Thank you for this opportunity to address the community regarding reopening at UConn, and I'm here to encourage you to support the University by providing funds to cover financial losses due to COVID-19.

UConn like all higher education institutions in our country has been significantly affected by the pandemic, and protecting the health of our students,

faculty and staff is of paramount importance in this moment. Yet, the drastic changes needed to respond to the pandemic have disrupted our financial stability. On May 20, President Katsouleas and the Executive Vice President and CFO, Scott Jordan, apprised the Board of Trustees that the University will have a potential deficit for the fall semester of between \$47 and \$129 million dollars due to the impact of COVID-19 at the stores and regional campuses. Two specific areas cited for the deficit were out of the University administrative control, the loss of revenue from reducing housing and dining to comply with the gating conditions required by the Higher Education Sub-Committee of the Reopen Connecticut Task Force and the loss of tuition by both graduate and undergraduate international students who aren't able to travel to return to UConn due to state and federal travel restrictions.

The total loss from these two areas alone was projected to be \$29.4 million dollars; however, since that time, numbers for campus housing have decreased and this week, to further de-densify the campus as recommended by the State Department of Health, President Katsouleas announced that an additional 800 out-of-state students who are enrolled in only online courses will not be permitted to live in University housing for the fall semester. These reductions will increase UConn's deficit.

This lost revenue due to COVID-19 compounds university's preexisting financial challenges. The state continues to bill UConn for the unfunded accrued pension liability even though the state as a whole accrued that liability. So clearly, a significant part of the fall budget deficit incurred

by UConn is the result of circumstances beyond the control of the UConn administration.

We know that Connecticut is fortunate that it's rainy day fund is approaching \$2.8 billion dollars. Connecticut was able to generate such a surplus mainly because of the 2017 CBAC agreement in which state employees including UConn faculty and staff through pay freezes and benefit reductions saved the state \$1.7 billion dollars in the first biennium, and about a billion per year thereafter. The rainy day fund grew significantly in just the last month due to increased tax returns and the Governor also has reduced his spending and the estimated savings are substantial. This puts the state in a position to provide critical support to the University intermittent his moment of crisis. [Crosstalk]. Therefore, UConn AUP respectfully asks for financial assistance from the state to make up for the significant lost revenue due to COVID-19 and the costly protocols required to safeguard the health of our faculty, staff and students. Thank you.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Thank you so much for that testimony. Questions from Committee members? Representative Haddad?

REP. HADDAD (54TH): Yes, and I want to thank you as well for your testimony. I thought that the University made the right call a few days ago when they did an assessment of the number of students who would be, who were coming from out of state, but were enrolled only in virtual coursework to essentially disinvite them to come to Mansfield and live here despite the fact that they were doing all of their coursework virtually, and I know that you're right in sort of saying that that decision,

which was right from a public health standpoint, will have a financial impact on the University. It seems to me that all of our, both our public and our private universities are gonna be stressed by this pandemic. It's serving really as a catalyst for something that preexisted the pandemic though, which is you know we see a demographic change in the number of students.

More and more people across the country are predicting that as the number of the college students in the traditional age bracket declines, colleges and universities will find it harder and harder to stay in the black and that we will see a commensurate reduction in the number of institutions. We've been sort of protected in Connecticut from that long-term impact. We saw St. Vincent's merge with Sacred Heart a year or two ago, but more recently we saw Goodland and Sacred Heart and Paier College of Art begin to offer programs at the University of Bridgeport. They put a very rosy face on that, but that essentially is a precursor to a consolidation and the loss of an institution that I think we need to take very seriously. The pandemic is really serving as a catalyst for those long-term impacts and really making it very difficult for colleges and insurance to stay in the black and I'll also mention one last thing, which is you know the traditional business models for colleges and universities that have a residential component is for them to essentially make money off of room and board and use that to subsidize the rest of their operations. We might be seeing the end of that as a useful tool during their, in their business model, you know the reduction in the density on campus is essentially in half, right

they're cut in half. I wanted to [crosstalk] ask you if you could correct that if I'm wrong. I think typically UConn houses somewhere north of 11,000 students and this year is something on the order of 6,000 students so I wanted to ask you [crosstalk].

MARY ELLEN JUNDA: I think it's about 5000.

REP. HADDAD (54TH): 5000. It's dropping precipitously cause I know that they made an offer for housing to as many as 8,100 students, but as students are getting their course schedules and seeing that they're only having, they only have virtual courses or very limited requirements to be on campus at all, that they're choosing to stay at home and not pay for room and board.

MARY ELLEN JUNDA: Right.

REP. HADDAD (54TH): So I just didn't know if you had a broader comment about the you know not just the situation we're in now but what the implications are for higher ed as a whole and for institutions as a whole as we go through these difficult times and how many of these implications are gonna be long-lasting.

MARY ELLEN JUNDA: That's a big question. I don't know if I have a big answer. I don't know if anyone has a big answer, but I do think that first of all, we're in a very small community so bringing a large number of students back from throughout the area was not the wisest thing to do for our area so I think we have to balance that with the safety of our community and the safety of our students and the safety of our faculty. I'm very concerned that as we get into financial trouble, those who are not tendered, who are APIR's, who are adjuncts, who are

our faculty who are taking care of childcare and elders are gonna be stressed beyond belief during this time and I hope that we can support them through this semester and through the year so that they can keep active research and teaching careers. They certainly earned their spots at UConn and we want to sustain their careers at UConn and financially, we want to make that feasible for them. The lecturers are very, very vulnerable and as we do classes online, they don't always have the resources to do that and we can give them the technological resources to do that, the computers, but life is complicated and it's not always easy to teach at your slotted time.

So I think UConn has done a really fine job of giving faculty some choice in that and that we have been able to teach at home. They've provided us with the resources, but that doesn't mean it's easy. I think our faculty have done a fabulous job of stopping research and restarting research, putting artistic programs online that were supposed to be in person and continuing their scholarly work and their teaching online so we want to continue what we're doing and keep you know the Husky nation the best nation it can be and we just need your support in making that happen.

REP. HADDAD (54TH): Thank you for those comments. That's all, Mr. Chair.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Thank you, Representative. Senator Chairman Haskell, the floor is yours.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thanks, Representative Turco. Mary Ellen, thank you so much for coming to testify today. I learned a lot from your comments and I share your resolve to make sure that we're

fully funding our flagship university so that students and faculty alike can succeed. I just want to get a better understanding of what it's going to be like and I realize this is slightly off topic perhaps, but we hear so much about how teachers in the K-12 environment are preparing to teach students who are in class and also learning from home at the same time, and I'm wondering if you can give us some insight into how your classes will work, if you've thought that far ahead, given the fact that you'll be educating students who are both as I understand it, physically present, but also working from home.

MARY ELLEN JUNDA: Not for my class. My class is all online because singing is not an area that we're going to be doing at any time in the near future in groups, but I think most people -- there are certain classrooms where you can teach online and have it stream simultaneously so I think the University has set up a number of classrooms where that can happen and others have, I think there are six models right now that they can follow and the students can choose so there's fully online, fully synchronized. There's some classes that meet at a designated time. There are some that are more flexible meeting times and so the good news is that the professor has a choice to say what's best for the students and what's best for the content that they want to deliver so I think there are a variety of protocols and our teaching and learning center has helped they said hundreds and hundreds of faculty this summer to make sure that they're ready for the fall semester.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Wonderful. Thank you so much and thanks for being here today.

MARY ELLEN JUNDA: Thank you.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Any additional questions from anyone on the Committee? Okay. I don't see any. Thank you for your testimony. I appreciate your time.

MARY ELLEN JUNDA: Thank you.

REP. TURCO (27TH): All right. Next we have Louise Williams.

LOUISE WILLIAMS: Hi, can you hear me?

REP. TURCO (27TH): Yes, we can.

LOUISE WILLIAMS: Okay. So thank you very much for inviting us to speak today. I'm Louise Williams. I'm a Professor of History at Central Connecticut State University and also President of the CCSU-AAUP. As has been said so many times, COVID-19 has revealed the inequalities that we've been ignoring for a very long time and nowhere is this more clear than in public higher education. Because of years of funding cuts, the Connecticut State University System is now face with a situation where universities are forced to put their employees and students at risk because they don't have the money to do otherwise. I won't talk about testing. I will only give you some examples of my experience as the leader of the faculty union at Central. Because Central relies so heavily on money from residential students, they've bent over backwards to give the illusion that the fall is going to give students a normal college experience including on-ground classes and to answer Representative Haddad's question, we're having about 35 percent of our classes will be on-ground. But Central to its credit is very concerned about safety and has done a great deal for safety so administrators came up with

the idea of using the so-called high-flex model and we are only using two models at Central. There's the high-flex model and online education so in high-flex, this involves a socially distanced classroom with maybe a dozen students in it. Everyone's wearing masks, the professor is behind a Plexiglas shield. The class is live-streamed to perhaps another 25 to 30 students who watch it remotely. In some classes, the students can participate by chat. In other classrooms they can't participate at all. I don't know if anybody can speak. It seems like a good plan. Some of our faculty embraced it and are willing to teach that way, but 75 percent of our faculty do not want to teach in the high-flex model and this is a problem because the Board of Regents specifically told AAUP that faculty do not have a choice of how they teach in their opinion. If they're assigned to teach on-grounds in a high-flex classroom, they have to do so unless they have medical proof along CDC or ADA guidelines that they're at high risk and they do require a doctor's note.

But there are many legitimate reasons I think for faculty objecting to this sort of teaching and why I think they need to be given a choice. There are some health concerns of the faculty and their family members that are not covered by the CDC or ADA. For example, one faculty member is six months' pregnant. She doesn't know what COVID might do to her unborn child. Another was traumatized by already having COVID and doesn't want to go back to do that. More than one are sole caregivers of elderly parents with underlying conditions. There are also some teachers that may put the community at risk. One faculty member's spouse works in a hospital and they have

more than once been quarantined because of exposure and this faculty member does not want to bring, potentially bring the virus to his students, but none of these are considered [crosstalk]. Excuse me?

CHAIR: Three minutes is up, please.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Go ahead and finish your thought then.

LOUISE WILLIAMS: Well, none of them are considered reasons for excluding them. I also wanted to speak about pedagogically how many faculty don't think that this is a good pedagogy cause we have more active teaching styles. So basically, all I'm saying is that I think Central is doing a good job, but because of financial constraints, they're forced into this position where students aren't getting the best quality of education and faculty and students are put at risk.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Thank you very much. Questions from Committee members? Chairman Haskell, you have the floor.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thanks, Representative Turco. Professor Williams, thank you for your testimony. I just wanted to give you an opportunity to talk about some of those pedagogy concerns in terms of what the professors have expressed to you.

LOUISE WILLIAMS: Well the high-flex model works very well if you lecture because you have all these students who are watching you lecture to two students in the class [crosstalk].

REP. TURCO (27TH): Jamie, could you mute your?

LOUISE WILLIAMS: So we were talking even if we had two students in the class [crosstalk] they still have to teach on-grounds because we pay for these high-flex classrooms. So faculty members have to lecture. Now a lot of us use more active pedagogy. I use complex role playing, historical role-playing games where students have to get into groups and they have to go and talk to each other and negotiate. You can't do that when you've got five students in a classroom and then the other 25 online who can't even talk. Lots of faculty used small groups. They do a lot of work. I've done these role-playing games on Zoom. They worked fine cause I can contact, I can see the students so it's a pedagogical choice. They're great lecturers so it works for some of those people, but you're just pushing out content in the high-flex model, you're not actually interacting with students.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Helpful to know. Thank you. Thank you, Representative Turco.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Representative Arora.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Thank you. Can you hear me?

REP. TURCO (27TH): Yes.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Thank you, Professor Williams, for your testimony and thank you, Representative Turco, for putting this together and for the leadership. I really appreciate that. My question is what is, I hear you in terms of the difficulties coming and the new pedagogical methods which are emerging and I can see why it would be difficult, but do you think that the right way to go is to just not offer those and just have virtual Zoom-based class or is your recommendation or suggestion here

that the professors should be given the flexibility whether they want to choose the Zoom model versus the flex model? The point which I want you to consider or which comes to my mind is that sometimes when adoption of new technology comes, I was opposed to using Zoom for years until March, but now I'm a Zoom expert so as to say or I do many, many Zooms every single day so that's the other thing I want you to kind of keep in mind, it's a little bit of, a little of bit of averseness is always built into the system with new changes so I just want to see your, how, what you're thinking about in terms of flexibility as well as how much should be mandatory so as to say?

LOUISE WILLIAMS: I mean everyone wants to go back to the way it used to be. You know we're getting used to it but nobody really likes it. I think it should be flexible. We do have faculty members who like the high-flex model. They're so anxious to get back in the classroom and that's the way they teach. We have some wonderful lecturers who can really engage students with their lectures, but then there's other faculty and other disciplines, it also depends on your discipline, where the pedagogy works better different ways so I know they want students on ground. They want classes on ground for the residential students and I appreciate that and they should do that. Unfortunately, we only have about 4percent of these on-ground classes, 4percent of the students taking classes want to do these on-ground classes and the high-flex model and we should accommodate them so I'm asking for choice. That's all I'm asking for.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Thank you. Representative Haddad.

REP. HADDAD (54TH): Just a quick followup. So with the high, with that, I'm curious, with the high-flex model, you said that's predominantly happening at Central?

LOUISE WILLIAMS: Central Connecticut.

REP. HADDAD (54TH): Not at the other institutions so we think that is a local institutional decision [crosstalk] to use the high-flex model or is that coming from the system office?

LOUISE WILLIAMS: I think the system office wants us to have classes on-ground. I think exactly how we're gonna do it on-ground is up to the individual campus and I believe that because Central is so concerned about safety, they've done more about safety than the other campuses have, that they're trying to make it absolutely safe to be on-ground and what they've come up with is this model so you know I don't think it's anybody's fault and I think it may work in some cases. All I want is that the faculty to suit their, how they teach with their pedagogy and I think we'll get the number if you just let the faculty do it. But Board of Regents did specifically say to AUP, they disagree with our interpretation of the contract that the faculty have the freedom to run their courses and they say, and we have a grievance that's going to arbitration about this interpretation of the contract. But the Board of Regents specifically said they don't think faculty have a choice.

REP. HADDAD (54TH): Okay. That's, I think that might be the first time you said that and that's interesting. I guess I'm grateful at least that there's a forum that you can [crosstalk].

LOUISE WILLIAMS: Right. They say it's an interpretation of our contract and they disagree with our interpretation that we have choice so luckily at most of the schools, the local administration have virtually given people choice. They haven't tested this, but I know for a fact the Board of Regents does not think we should choose.

REP. HADDAD (54TH): Thank you. I appreciate that answer. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Any additional questions from Committee members? I don't see any. I would like to clarify, you mentioned 35percent. Was that 35percent of classes that are now being taught virtual or that's still what's left in person with this high-flex?

LOUISE WILLIAMS: 35percent on-ground.

REP. TURCO (27TH): 35percent are on-ground now using this high-flex [crosstalk] system and I'm an adjunct professor myself and that does sound like a very interesting way to be able to teach in person with some safety precautions while allowing some students to do virtual, but I do also hear you on the fact that it depends on the type of class and professors needing that flexibility and I want to explore that more with the system so thank you very much for sharing all that.

LOUISE WILLIAMS: Thanks.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Okay. Next up we have Sara Baker Bailey. Sara, are you here? All right. Sara, we'll come back to you if you're able to get on or if for some reason we can't hear you. Next up we have Patricia O'Neill? Jeannie, is Patricia here?

CLERK: I am not seeing her.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Okay. We'll come back to Patricia if she logs on after. Lisa Bigelow? Okay. Mary Ann Zabik? No Mary Ann? And nobody's waiting in the waiting room to get in huh, Jeannie?

CLERK: I don't see her out there waiting either.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Okay. We will keep going. Maybe they will join us later. We have Cynthia Stretch? Ah, Cynthia is here.

CYNTHIA STRETCH: Yeah! Hi. My name's Cynthia Stretch. I live in West Haven and this will be my 23rd year teaching English at Southern Connecticut State University. I appreciate the opportunity to address the committee, but school starts in 15 minutes and we're already exhausted. Like educators across the country, we have been operating on overdrive since March, often with incomplete information in a fluid and incredibly complex situation. President Ojakian has testified before this Committee, the faculty and staff have been involved in the reopening plans. While this is true that we have been asked to serve on extra committees and produce endless plans, at all levels our input has been disregarded especially what we have called for ensure safety, equity, and quality cost money. As a result, over 1100 CSU faculty members signed the petition you heard earlier expressing their concerns about work-related issues that the BOR has not addressed. One of those, professional discretion, which is what my colleague, Louise Williams, was just discussing asks that faculty and staff be afforded the option to work remotely or on-ground based on their assessment of their own responsibilities and goals with the idea to echo

Governor Lamont that those of us who can work remotely should because that makes it safer for those of us who can't.

Yet, in the midst of this pandemic, the CSCU Administration, unlike the UConn Administration which has stated publicly that faculty have the discretion to make their choices about modality based on their own assessment of their pedagogical and professional goals, our administration is taking on an aggressive position on assigning course modality by requiring faculty at Central as you heard to teach some of their courses high-flexed. They are thereby trying to reduce the actual conduct of the course to something akin to scheduling. They are trying -- aside from the fact that this position shows a willful misunderstanding of how teaching works, the administration's persistence has produced several absurdities including a faculty member who lives in Rhode Island who will technically be required by the state to quarantine for 14 days before each of his twice-a-week classes. You already heard about the person whose partner works in a hospital at Southern in order to populate a kind of Potemkin village where everything looks open for business. Librarians have been told that they can conduct research consultations virtually, but that they must do so from their offices on campus and therefore, have to come in and out of campus through buildings. Meanwhile, mental health counselors are being required to conduct in-person sessions with students whose masks will obscure therapeutically significant facial expressions. In case an econ professor needs a clear example of the principal of some costs this year, faculty at Central have been told that they must teach their

high-flex classes on ground, even if no students show up on ground to teach in the classroom. Meanwhile, the head of HR overseeing medical exemptions at Southern has said publicly, "There's no way I'm setting foot on campus this fall."

CLERK: Let's wind it up, three minutes.

CYNTHIA STRETCH: People are getting rich of students' debt in this state. The funding model is to continually push the cost of higher education off onto the backs of the working and middle class students of this state. If this pandemic doesn't help us find the political will to change the funding structure of public higher education in this state, then we are perpetually relegating our students to ride the back of the bus. Thank you.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Thank you so much for that testimony. I just want to quickly say if anyone does not have their mike muted, if you're not speaking, please mute that now. We had some feedback coming through. Questions from the Committee members? I do not see any. I will just ask, if you can tell me, we heard about Central, this high-flex system of teaching, what is Southern doing? Something similar or do they have their own strategy?

CYNTHIA STRETCH: So I, uh we currently are um at Central offering 36percent of our courses in some combination of on-ground or hybrid. We also have a few classrooms that were very quickly sort of outfitted to do the high-flex model that's happening at Central. I think another of our colleagues is gonna speak to the pedagogical challenges that that presents, but we also have what we're calling a hybrid model at Southern where some portion of the

class could be taught on-ground so for instance, and this has been typical for years with online education, that there might be, you know you come into to take your mid-term and your final exam in person, but your, most of the course is either synchronous or asynchronously online. So we have some full on on-ground courses, we have you know quite a few of our experiential learning sort of courses, for instance, nursing. There's all kind of clinicals that are scrambling to figure out how to be safe on-ground and so I echo Louse Williams's call for professional discretion, right? Left to our own professional judgement, teaching and non-teaching faculty at CSU's you know have agreed that there are things that have to be done on ground, right? So it's not a question of you know we just want to close the place down. We don't. You know we're, like it's painful to think that I'm not gonna see my students face-to-face every Monday, you know Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, but the non-teaching faculty the counselors and librarians at Southern especially are still being required for some significant portion of the workweek; the librarians for 50percent of their workweek even though they successfully conducted all of their professional responsibilities remotely in the spring semester and the same with the counselors. They're being required to do at least 20percent on the ground even though their own professional organizations, the certifying and standard setting organizations in their field have all moved to telehealth. I mean we know this, right? So much is happening over telehealth now and they've agreed that if a student is in distress and actually needs to be seen in person, they'll do it, right? It's just that they're now being told they have to go sit in their

offices no matter what and I think that's where -- and again, I just want to make it very clear, UConn's administration has taken a very different path on this and I just don't understand why CSU is getting you know, getting a real different story from the administration and frankly, being asked to put the health of our students at risk unnecessarily.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Thank you. Other questions from committee members? All right. I don't see any. Thank you so much for that testimony. [Crosstalk]. We appreciate everything you're doing to educate our students.

CYNTHIA STRETCH: Thank you.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Next we have John O'Connor.

JOHN O'CONNOR: Thank you, Representative Turco and members of the Committee. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is John O'Connor. I'm a professor in the Sociology Department at CCSU. I've been teaching at Central for almost 18 years. Teaching at Central is great. Students are engaged, they're eager to learn, they're racially and ethnically diverse, and many of them are first in their families to attend a college or a university.

In the last day or so, our system has received a lot of media attention with the retirement of President Mark Ojakian. The media has used a lot of words to describe him. He's associated with bringing stability to the system, leadership, he's a catalyst for change, but for many of us, the BOR has been the educational equivalent of North Korea. We've had to deal with a supreme leader and ever-growing system

office that absorbs more and more resources and we have all watched the forced collectivization of our state's community colleges.

What have the students of Connecticut gotten out of this in return for this failed entity? They've gotten cuts to programs, increased tuition and fees, and a reliance on part-time faculty who do not earn a living wage. The media doesn't mention it, but the CSCU system remains underfunded and neglected, which means our students are underfunded and neglected. All of this matters in the present circumstances as colleges and universities prepare to reopen in the midst of a global pandemic. I understand and acknowledge this is a difficult and stressful time for everyone, but we cannot allow COVID-19 to pick winners and losers within the State of Connecticut. And I'm sorry to say, this is happening under our very noses. The COVID crisis is bringing to light the inequality that defines our state and it is bringing to light an important failing of our state's educational policy, that students and faculty are treated differently from institution to institution.

For such a small state, Connecticut has paid a heavy price from this virus with over 50,000 cases, over 4,000 dead, and more than 26,000 jobs lost. So the question needs to be asked; why is it when we are about to reopen campuses, our faculty and students in the CSCU system are treated so differently than faculty and students at Yale or at UConn, especially when it comes to testing? For universities the state will only cover the testing cost of 5percent to 10percent of residential students after reopening. Beyond that, our resource starved institutions must pay their own way. Our state

universities simply don't have the money and those working and learning at our community colleges, well good luck to them. They're basically left to their own devices. Yes, I know the Ivy League is important, the state flagship university is wonderful and important. I get that. But I'm sorry, the students and workers of the CSCU system matter. As members of this committee, as political leaders, you should not allow this virus to pick winners and losers.

Just recently, as you've heard, 1,100 CSU members signed a petition expressing concerns about work-related issues and the BOR didn't even care enough to read it at its July 29th meeting. As President Ojakian rides off into the retirement sunset, he should note that students first is not a slogan to be proclaimed; it's something that you do in practice. Ojakian and the BOR may think that the workers and students of the CSCU system are second class Connecticut residents, but he and the Board are wrong. They are just as important as those at Yale and UConn. Thank you.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Thank you very much for your testimony. Any questions from Committee members? All right. Seeing, thank you so much, Professor O'Connor. We appreciate everything you're doing. Next, we have Catherine Baratta. Catherine, are you hear? Oh, Catherine, I think you have to unmute yourself there. There you go.

CATHERINE BARATTA: Thank you. Thank you for allowing me to speak with you today to share my own perspective. I'm a 21-year CCSU tenured associate professor in the Department of Social Work. What I would like to comment on is the impact of the Board

of Regents members' continuing disregard to the point of belittling CSU faculty and the impact on the classroom. The Board is ignoring faculty experience, institutional knowledge and expertise in our respective fields. This is not new. It began at the onset of students first. What is new, however, is how the pandemic has magnified it and I would argue, brought to the service how many of my students and their classroom experiences have been negatively impacted.

As we prepare for the fall, I find it ironic that so many decisions that are supposed to be for the benefit of our students are not. As a faculty member, I'm the front line and thus, the accessible target for blame whether warranted or not, which in turn reinforces the Board's perspective that faculty are not important stakeholders.

Despite the pandemic and what it has brought, I am shocked regarding the angst I feel and how exhausted I am, and I put it squarely on the shoulders of Board. We are devalued, hence, I am devalued. I take so much pride in my work and now all I see are obstacles. It's both absurd and unnecessary. The only consolation is that so many of my colleagues feel the same way. As a result, my students who have suffered all along because of the pandemic will feel the impact during the fall semester adding to their list of worries including their loss of the college experience as they know it.

I have provided you with written testimony with a detailed illustration, but briefly, the timing of the rollout of Blackboard collaborate on August 5, classes begin August 26 the selection of the features that are activated and those that are not.

For example, only four students can be seen on screen and the lack of instructional material for both faculty and students renders it useless for my social work students. This impacts my ability to prepare my students in the classroom and as of today, I'm scrambling to figure out an alternative. Meaningful participation by faculty who want to use it in the classroom would've eliminated a lot of stress that has resulted. I take very seriously my responsibility to educate future social workers. I have an obligation that we will graduate students who will engage in ethical practice throughout our communities including some of our most vulnerable populations. I am accountable to every future client our social workers will encounter. It my responsibility to be certain that ethical social workers are prepared for the world to work. I fear my ability to do so has been unnecessarily stagnated and here's an illustration.

Upon graduation, a student with a bachelor's degree could be hired to be the only social worker --

CLERK: That's three minutes.

CATHERINE BARATTA: For example, at the 80-bed nursing home facility, a social worker's principal responsibility is to coordinate the care of each of them. I am concerned my lack of preparation for the fall will compromise the future abilities of our current students as they enter the workforce. People have said just enough is good enough. Not in social work.

CLERK: That's three minutes.

CATHERINE BARATTA: No one wants a nursing home social worker to tell a family member that we're

doing just enough to help your parent. I wouldn't want it for my father. If it's good enough for my family, why shouldn't it be good enough for yours? Thank you.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Thank you so much for your testimony. Questions from Committee members? Representative Arora, the floor is yours.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Professor Baratta for your testimony. I just wanted to ask a question which kind of perhaps transcends some of the team of what we're hearing. Is there an opposition to the fact that there was no preparation because the virtual trend or the virtual change as I remarked early, you know I was no fan of Zoom and now you know I've gotten used to it and I'm kind of liking it. You know I don't have to travel and we all have to make the transition whether we do it over three months, over six months with supporting each other, right? Encouraging each other, sometimes even pushing each other and administration, teachers, professors, students are all alike and the funny thing is that the students and even the 10-year-olds are the best at it. That's what I find a little bit ironic [crosstalk] that you know my 10-year-old is just saying dad, that's not a problem and I'm like no, no, maybe it's not the right pedagogy so what my question here is, can we hear more constructive ideas because we need to make all of these changes because a vaccine may come a year from now and this is going to be a part of our lives. Better when the new, when the solution is found. I think the world has changed. The virtual brand has accelerated beyond anything we ever thought it would and that's something that has

to be taken, I think we need to leverage it. So my question to you is, what is it that you're asking? Because you know yeah, there will be teething problems and some of these technologies are intuitive. I don't know about Blackboard, I've not used it ever or experienced it. So what is your specific concern with this process?

CATHERINE BARATTA: My concern is with regard to the social work students the following: At Central we can use Webex and we can use Teams and now we have Blackboard Collaborate and we were promised that Blackboard Collaborate is coming down the road and if you look at the millions and millions of dollars that have been invested by the system for Blackboard and my experience with Webex during the spring pivot, it didn't work. I find myself obligated to give Blackboard the old college try. Look at the amount of money. That's tuition dollars and many of our social work students already have some familiarity with Blackboard. However, it's August 5. I wish they didn't do it. Seriously. Wait. Because all we got, the IT person didn't even know how to use it. 10:00 August 5, IT had its first workshop and she could only show us what she figured out, that the features didn't work.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Just for me, for my benefit, so your real concern is with the platform which the school is kind of encouraging or even mandating to you so you would not be here very upset if they said well, use Zoom if you want or use Webex or Teams or Meets. What you're saying is the system or the school is asking you to use a specific platform for which the training has not been provided, whereas other platforms are better? Maybe you would like to Zoom or is there a preference? Should there be a

phase-in period that listen, you know, hey, you know everybody needs time so Blackboard should be used six months from now but now, in the meantime, you have flexibility? Is that what you'd like?

CATHERINE BARATTA: At CCSU, the university-supported software is Blackboard, Webex, and Teams. Zoom is not an option unless, of course, you're a professor who personally purchases it and then you in turn have to be the help desk. I have social work students. They love people. They didn't sign up for technology. This is a nightmare for them. I'm teaching a course all spring and Webex is going out and it's like Dr. Baratta, use Zoom. Everyone's using that, right? It's so easy. I know it's easy but now in the fall, you're gonna have to purchase it personally. It's not supported. I'm the help desk now. IT can't help them and again, I know my students when we were cut out. I don't understand how loading Blackboard on August because I've been waiting since the day after the end of last spring about my marching orders. And we wait, and we wait, and we wait. Under other conditions, all the other years, everything I needed to do was done by June 15. I don't know and the students look to me to have the answers and if I don't, Dr. Baratta, she's not prepared. How are we supposed to use this technology when she can't even do it? It has -- look, the lack of our ability to be meaningful participants in the decisions they make means nothing. If we have faculty who -- talking about Blackboard Collaborate, we would've said oh my God, you can only see four students and this is what we were told. That feature to see more is coming down the road. The road? And are we gonna see eight? I have 26. I don't know, I'll tell how our social

work students feel. If I'm only looking at four students, the other 22 students are feeling like they don't matter. What the heck? Why should I bother? Because I'm not part of this. You know and how do I, how do I as an instructor say yeah, but you do matter. Yeah, I matter that much. Let's look at --

REP. ARORA (151ST): If you approach, I'm sorry to interrupt, but if you approached the Board to, or your you know the --

CATHERINE BARATTA: Yeah, our union? Yes.

REP. ARORA (151ST): No, the school system to say well I want to teach via Zoom, can you support it or Webex? You're saying that's not acceptable at this point? And that's --

CATHERINE BARATTA: No, not at our, no. It's not. It's not acceptable and it's gonna cause a schism between students because there are faculty who personally bought it and they're gonna use it and then they come to my class and I'm not using it because we're, I'm a social worker. And even a social work professor doesn't make enough to be able to add that in you know and it's like how come these professors make it easy and you have to make it hard?

REP. ARORA (151ST): No, I thank you very much. I really appreciate your testimony because I think in this time of change, I do think the flexibility, some degree of flexibility because at the end of the day, Zoom and Google Meets, now that we have used, most of us have used all of them, are quite interchangeable. Some prefer some and you know for professors getting used to it, I think it's a good

idea to offer flexibility, but at the same time, I'm sure the Central system might have some reasoning, but at the same time, these are very inexpensive. You know in the scheme of things we talk about, are we talking about \$60 dollars per class or per month or even less if you know a school negotiates so we're talking about really small numbers. I do hope that you know management will consider more flexibility, but I appreciate you for bringing that point up here. Thank you so much, Professor Baratta and Thank you, Mr. Chair, for giving me this opportunity.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Thank you, Representative. Do we have any additional questions from Committee members? I don't see any. Thank you, Professor, for everything you're doing and for testifying today.

CATHERINE BARATTA: Thank you.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Okay. Next, we have Meredith Sinclair. I see you're here. You can go ahead.

MEREDITH SINCLAIR: All right. Y'all can hear me I guess. So I am Dr. Meredith Sinclair and I'm an associate professor of secondary English education at Southern and I live in New Haven. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I'd like to echo a concern shared by many of my colleagues that our campuses are being forced to make decisions based on economics and not on the wellbeing of students or the quality of their education when it comes to the reopening of the CSU's this fall.

This body has the ability to change this by recommitting to fully funding the CSU system now and in the coming difficult economic times. Due to

chronic underfunding by the state, the CSU's depend overmuch on revenue from enrollment including student housing fees, revenue that is threatened in the current crisis. In an effort to encourage students to enroll and live on campus to prevent this loss of revenue, the CSU's have encouraged on-ground instruction at the expense of both safety and quality of instruction.

Current guidelines for campus reopening logically mandate mask wearing and reduce class capacity for social distancing. These minimal safety precautions mean that no class can operate normally. These are extraordinary times. Following Governor Lamont's guidelines that those who can work from home should be working from home, many faculty began to prepare for online instruction as early as this spring. While this is not the preferred modality for many faculty or students, it is the best option in the middle of a global pandemic. Instead of fully supporting faculty in this and trusting faculty judgement about the best way to teach their courses in extraordinary circumstances, CSU administrators have invested time and money in preparing for high-flex instruction in an effort to keep bodies on campus and so you heard a little bit about that earlier, and I would just echo the statistic that 36percent of Southern's courses are currently scheduled in form of on-ground or high-flex instruction.

In the high-flex model, the professor and a subset of the class meet on-ground while other students tune in via livestream so there's very little interaction between professor and students. This might sound appealing in that it allows for some students to be on-ground, but it really isn't pedagogically sound. Even if you were just

lecturing, it's very important to be able to interact with those in the room, to read faces, to read body language, and that's really not possible in this livestreaming model.

Online instruction, while less than ideal in many circumstances, does allow faculty to preserve as much as possible effective instructional strategies including small group interactions and class discussions that would be impossible on the ground during the pandemic due to masking and social distancing requirements. Moving many classes online also makes campus safer for courses that require on-ground instruction and for students who need quiet work spaces and access to computers and internet to participate in online courses. Student access to work space and internet was a problem in the spring, and it is a matter of equity that we prioritize providing this for students who need it.

This pandemic reveals a greater truth about the way students at the CSU's are valued by the state. If as it seems, the desire to have on-ground classes is driven largely by a concern over enrollments and therefore, revenue needed to keep the CSU's running, it is important for this body to consider why the CSU's continue to be underfunded and undervalued.

CLERK: Three minutes.

MEREDITH SINCLAIR: Why do our students [crosstalk] our students of color, first-generation college students and from less economically privileged circumstances deserve less than students at other universities in the state.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Thank you very much for that testimony. Do we have any questions from Committee

members? Okay. Not seeing any, thank you again for everything you're doing and I appreciate you being here today. Thank you. Next, we have Lyndsey Lanagan-Letzel. Was I a close call on that one?

LYNDSEY LANAGAN-LEITZEL: Yes. Can everyone hear me?

REP. TURCO (27TH): Yes. Go ahead.

LYNDSEY LANAGAN-LEITZEL: All right. Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today. I'm Dr. Lyndsey Lanagan-Leitzel, a Professor of Psychological Science at Eastern Connecticut State University. I'm a cognitive psychologist. My field studies help people think, pay attention and remember information. Mental health, notably worry and anxiety, has a significant impact on our ability to think clearly and thus, has a significant impact on student academic success. The American College Health Association found that almost 26percent of college students report anxiety. COVID-19 is still new so only a handful of studies have made it through the scientific process of peer review and publication, but research by Dr. Huckins at Dartmouth shows that the outbreak made college students more anxious than previous years. *Inside Higher Ed* is reporting that a survey of incoming freshman showed that 3 out of 4 freshmen are very or somewhat worried they will contract Coronavirus and that students of color are much more likely to be very worried about it, 34percent compared to 21percent of white, non-Hispanic students. If anxiety and worry in general has a negative impact on our ability to learn, what can we do to help our students? COVID is an invisible threat and the testing plans provided by the individual campuses

and the Board of Regions are simply inadequate to alleviate those worries.

At the Board of Regions meeting on July 29, Alice Prichard reported that only 5-10percent of residential students would be tested routinely after initial entry and that there are no plans to test commuters, faculty or staff except for resident hall directors. At that same meeting, Dr. Deidre Gifford, Commissioner of the Department of Public Health reported that testing is not a strategy for containment of spread. Meanwhile, the CDC estimates that 40percent of people who are infected with the Coronavirus do not have symptoms. Without routine testing, our campuses run the risk of being exposure sites for many people.

It is notable that other universities in our state including UConn, a mere 8 miles away from my university, are providing no-cost testing to commuter students, faculty, and staff. Purportedly, the reason we can't have that in our university system is cost. Routine testing of everybody in our system including commuters, faculty and staff would cost a lot of money; however, it is precisely these people who should be tested because of how many people they encounter every day. This focus on cost at the expense of public health communicates a very simple message; money is more important than the health of our people. The Board of Regions and our universities consistently tell us that there is no money. Is this not worth the investment? Our students, faculty, and staff are not second-class citizens. Thank you.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Thank you very much for your testimony. You bring up something that I'm very

concerned about in regard to anxiety of students and mental health concerns of our students and that's related to the possibility of contracting COVID and all the complications around that, but just everything that they're struggling with and their entire higher education systems sort of being you know interfered with because of what, the pandemic we're going through. I held a youth forum here in Newington yesterday, the town I represent and heard from a lot of college students, those that were incoming freshmen, supposed to have a residential experience at UConn or Central or other places that are no longer having that or going to remote or in the middle of their college experience and now having to stay home and take classes virtually and some anxiety over that and those that are going to be taking some classes in person, the anxiety of wearing masks and how that's going to happen. We had a bill this past legislative session to help address mental health issues on college campuses that unfortunately didn't go forward with, but now with this pandemic, it's something we're going to even have more attention and focus on so thank you so much for those comments. Any questions from our Committee members? All right. I don't see any hands raised. Thank you so much for your testimony and joining with us today.

LYNDSEY LANAGAN-LEITZEL: Thank you.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Let's see. Next speaker is Fiona Pearson.

A. FIONA PEARSON: Hello. Thank you members of the Higher Education Committee. I'm Fiona Pearson, Chair of the Department of Sociology at CCSU. Our spring term, once our spring term ended in May 2020,

we began the process of preparing for fall. I watched as the California State University System made the decision to move online May 12, 2020. Chancellor Timothy P. White made that decision swiftly saying, "This approach to virtual planning is necessary for many reasons. First and foremost is the health, safety and welfare of our students, faculty and staff and the evolving data surrounding the progression of COVID-19, current and as forecast throughout the 2021 academic year. This virtual planning approach preserved as many options for as many students as possible."

Faculty in the CSU system who are dealing with a diverse a student body as we are in Connecticut in our CSCU System have been preparing high quality online classes for their students for the past three months. Faculty in the CSU system who are dealing with as a diverse a student body as we are in Connecticut in our CSCU system have been preparing, I've already said that. In Connecticut, the picture is much more bleak. CSCU President Mark Ojakian provided one directive; ensure that 40percent of classes are on-ground. Faculty and students must be on campus even though unlike UConn, we have no plan for testing, no plan for quarantining, and no plan for when a professor gets sick or worse. Further, we faculty have had no time for planning. In late July, many faculty who preferred and had planned to teach online were informed by administrators that to meet President Ojakian's directive, they must instead teach using a modality called high-flex on campus. Only yesterday on August 12, did faculty receive notice about formal training for using the high-flex modality. In another example, on August 5, faculty received notice that the CSCU system

office purchased Blackboard Collaborate, a conferencing system that has been used successfully in the past by UConn. In sum, faculty have been introduced to two technologies before classes begin in 13 days on August 26.

I am frustrated. I am demoralized. I'm am fearful. I do not want to go on campus, though I will have to without temperature checks, without testing, without quarantine. How can I successfully learn new technologies less than two weeks before classes begin? We did not have to be in this situation. The CSU system in California shows us that quite clearly. I understand these are difficult times, we can't change what's been done at this point, but I do ask the following: If you cannot assure safe classroom environments for our faculty, staff and students, then I request you do not require students nor faculty nor staff to put themselves in physical danger. Keep our faculty safe while allowing them the freedom to teach using the modalities that are best for their students and are not imposed from administrators. And I thank you for considering our requests.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Thank you very much for your testimony. Any questions from our Committee members? Okay. I do not see any. Thank you very much again. I appreciate you sharing that with us.

A. FIONA PEARSON: I thank you.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Okay. Next, we have William Faraclas. Go ahead, sir. Thank you.

WILLIAM FARACLAS: Thank you. I am Dr. Bill Faraclas, a Professor of Public Health at Southern Connecticut State University with 46 years of

faculty service. I thank you for seeking the input on responsible reopening of colleges and universities in Connecticut and I bring you the perspective of my field. As you know, science is the basis of making sound policy decisions. Among other things, here is what science is telling us about Coronavirus. It is highly contagious, even when symptoms are mild. Despite their beliefs to the contrary, college students are susceptible and can suffer severe illness and death. It is airborne. It lingers in the air and can travel 16 feet in indoor spaces, challenging the sufficiency of the six-foot radius as a protective bubble. Minority populations prominently represented in our state universities and community colleges suffer disproportionately from the disease. A sound framework for reopening requires faithful wearing of masks, screening, a well-defined program of testing, and effective contact tracing. Those in their 60s and above are at heightened risk for infection, severe illness and death.

In Connecticut, we are about to embark on a natural experiment with students, faculty and staff in a sense as human research participants. You are in a sense the human investigations committee with responsibility to determine if risks have been minimized and made known to participants, if participants have given informed consent, and if the system's financial incentives like opening residence halls present a conflict of interest. Other speakers have identified areas where we have fallen short on guaranteeing the safety of students and employees; insufficient testing at the universities, no testing at the 12 community colleges, no plan to screen students, staff and faculty members as they

enter academic buildings, no acknowledgement of age as a risk factor. The lower level of those protective strategies at institutions with the most vulnerable students including minority populations that are most diversely affected by Coronavirus is less like a natural experiment and more like Russian roulette. Can any of us justify such a disparity of protection as fair? Is it not ironic that if this hearing were taking place at the LOB, we all would have been screened at the door? Why? Because we believe in safety and because we take appropriate actions when we recognize risks. And here's another glaring deficit. There is no plan to make sure that information on cases among students, faculty and staff will be --

CLERK: That's three minutes.

WILLIAM FARACLAS: Readily available. I believe this calls for an executive order from the Governor, a mandate to make sure --

CLERK: That's three minutes.

WILLIAM FARACLAS: That there is complete transparency in real time in the form of daily reporting of the cases that occur on our campuses and if I just may --

REP. TURCO (27TH): Go ahead.

WILLIAM FARACLAS: Respectfully conclude, I would say this. The SARS-CoV-2 virus has not changed. It is as virulent now as it was last March. Connecticut's currently favorable numbers are not the result of changes in -- are rather the result of changes in human behavior guided by public health experts and elected officials. By contrast, we have seen that premature and poorly planned reopening's

have been disastrous. Let us not be the next example on the evening news of a revisited outbreak resulting from neglecting to do those things that are so plainly necessary. Thank you for hearing me out.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Thank you very much for sharing those concerns with us. Questions from the Committee members? All right. Thank you so much again for sharing that with us and testifying today.

WILLIAM FARACLAS: Thank you.

REP. TURCO (27TH): All right. We now have Rotua Lam, boy, I had it in my head, I practiced it a few times, how I was gonna say it and now I'm worried I'm gonna butcher it so badly so why don't you do me the honors, please? I think you're on mute. Jeannie, can you unmute her?

ROTUA LUMBANTOBING: Sorry about that.

REP. TURCO (27TH): There you go.

ROTUA LUMBANTOBING: Okay. Good afternoon, Committee members, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Rotua Lumbantobing and I am an Economics Professor at Western Connecticut State University. With the economy in a deep recession partly necessitated by the pandemic, many high-education institutions are scrambling to attract students back to campus reasoning officially that students need that college experience while worrying inside about the potential loss of tuition and dorm revenues if this doesn't happen. Now, one would think that public universities are sheltered from this potential calamity because of state support. Alas, this is not the case for those in Connecticut.

The University of Connecticut is going forward with their plans to discuss in-person classes this fall and so are the four universities in the Connecticut State University System despite an increasing amount of evidence suggesting that the SARS-COVID-2 virus is an airborne virus and spreads most effectively in poorly ventilated indoor settings which is exactly what most college classes are held in. The State of Connecticut so far has refused to improve classroom conditions and make testing widely available as part of public safety based on the most updated research, relying instead on the minimum standards from the State Department of Public Health and the CDC Guidelines.

The reason for the need to attract students by providing the so-called college experience while refusing to ensure the safety of faculty, staff and students is obvious; it's financial. Between 2008 and 2018, the State of Connecticut has cut public funding for state universities by 21percent, an average of \$3311 dollars. This resulted in an increase of 37percent in tuition or about \$3382 dollars. In addition, students have to think about the increase in other costs of attending college such as room and boarding, books and supplies, and cost of transportation. The defunding of public colleges and universities in Connecticut came at a time when they enrolled more and more students of color, who disproportionately come from low-income households and count on college education as an important component of upward mobility. The fact that the CSU's are operating on the absolutely minimum standards for fall reopening compared to the University of Connecticut which plans to have random weekly testing on their residential students

highlights the disparity among these public universities, not to mention compared to private universities such as Yale and Wesleyan. More specifically, the plans underscore the unequal treatment of students of color who are more likely to enroll at the CSU's than the other universities.

This is unacceptable. Our students deserve much more than this. They deserve nothing less than affordable, quality college education offered by universities that care about the safety of everyone involved. Thank you.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Thank you very much for your testimony today. Senator Haskell?

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you so much for your testimony. I just wanted to follow up because you put it in such clear terms and I wanted to take a moment to recognize this dynamic. When the legislature cuts funding or reduces funding for higher ed institutions, that cost is passed down onto students. It's not as though, I mean while the academic programs may make some difficult cuts, ultimately it is students who bear that cost and as Representative Haddad knows well, increasing, you know in recent years, Connecticut students have more and more and more of that cost. Can you tell us from the perspective of your students what this might look like given the incredibly challenging financial shape that we currently see our institutions of higher education in going forward? You talk a little bit about the impact on students of color and how it's disproportionate and unequal, but can you tell us a little bit more about perhaps some students on the grounds that you work with

might not decide to pursue a degree at all if it becomes more expensive?

ROTUA LUMBANTOBING: Yes. So I have asked students. I've been here for almost six years now at Western Connecticut State University and I've had students who did not come back or waited until the very last second to finally register for classes or they had to register for fewer classes because they could not afford to pay for tuition for a full semester of classes and this is, obviously this is very devastating for students especially you know students from low-income households and students of color because it really is their, college education is as we all know is really a chance to get upward mobility and many times, of course, even if they were able to register for classes, they were not able to buy the books necessary. I had a student, so I use an online homework system that was included with the textbook in my class and this one student did not buy it, and I tried to find an affordable one, did not buy it simply because he had no money and it was just devastating. It was heartbreaking so I've started using, the last two years or so, I've started using the open educational resource textbooks, but you know, as you know it's not, they're not always good. There are several of them and luckily in economics, Principles of Economics, there is at least one good textbook so which I've been using for the last couple of years. But still it's not, they still have to pay for so many other things and this has really resulted in the delay of their, you know getting their college degree also and that's really hard for our students and as I'm sure you know, Western Connecticut State Universities is one of the colleges in the State of

Connecticut with really high cost of tuition of students of color and really low graduation rate and we're talking about six-year graduate rate so that's a really bad combo and that is not because of our faculty and our administrators who actually do work hard to make college education affordable at Western, but because of the defunding of Western Connecticut State University and other CSU's in general.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you for that answer. Your comments bring to mind that on an unrelated note, this committee had a bill to encourage the use of open source textbooks and unfortunately, the bill didn't pass but it's something that you know personally I'm very interested in continuing to work on so thank you so much for your comments. I learned a lot and appreciate your patience. I think you were the very last on our list so thank you so much for sharing your thoughts.

ROTUA LUMBANTOBING: Thank you.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair.
Representative Haddad.

REP. HADDAD (54TH): Yes. Thank you very much and thank you for your testimony. I'd also like to personally thank you for using open educational resources. It seems to me even though it's challenging sometimes to find the quality that you're searching for in an open sort of environment that can vary quite wildly, yet we know that sort of low-hanging fruit in terms of you know an action that can be taken by individual faculty members. That really does make an impact on students for a cost that frequently comes out of people's pockets rather than from their financial aid package or

other places so thank you for your commitment to that. I did just want to take the opportunity as well to, again to thank the leaders of the committee for putting this program together, this opportunity to hear from folks, and also to just sort of clarify one thing and that is you know I appreciate that the University of Connecticut has probably more than anybody else since I live only a mile from the University, that they have found and committed the resources to do some things that have yet to be decided to do at the State University System. I think that you know we would, I hope that we could all agree that we should try to do what we can to make sure that the testing and the other procedures, the practices that might be in place at one of our State Universities can be put into place at all of our State Universities and colleges. That being said, I would also say that it's not a perfect system in Storrs either. They plan to do random testing of you know 5 or 10 percent of their residential students on campus, but they don't plan on doing that same random testing at this point of their commuter students and so you know the resources question is real and it's one that I think that we need to wrestle with in state government and that we can use our voices collectively to make sure that we're heard at the federal level where I think a lot of this, you know the resources need to come from given our current state situation as well. But we need to make sure that we're doing everything we can to make sure that we have an even distribution of practices across all of our State Universities and I thank you for highlighting that for us in your testimony. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Representative Hall, the floor is yours.

REP. HALL (59TH): First, I'm gonna apologize if I lose everybody. My internet has been coming and going through this whole meeting so I do apologize for that. I'm literally watching the Cox cable trucks go by my house so hopefully that'll improve. So here's my concern with some of the opening issues that were raised here today. There is from what I understand CARE dollars that have come to the state and I personally would love us to put together a formal request to the Governor's office to kind of get an idea of how much of those CARE dollars are still available and perhaps can be used towards the testing that's been brought up there today that seems to be lacking, especially for our CSCU colleges. From what I understood, there were a lot of CARE dollars that haven't even been spent yet so I'm not really sure why we couldn't make a formal request to the Governor's office for how much is left or available to be used by our state colleges for more testing.

The other thing that confuses me a little bit too, and maybe this question can go to the BOR, it seems like a pretty simple thing to be able to take people's temperatures as they enter the building and I say simple, not simple in the context that it's not gonna be cumbersome, but it seems like so many institutions are doing that to ensure that we're having people kind of healthy that are entering the building so I guess I would pose that question to the BOR. Is there a reason they chose not to do that? I'd like to kind of understand why that would be and then I just want thank everybody for sharing their concerns today. Obviously, this committee

shares a lot of your same concerns and want to ensure that everybody goes back in the fall that is attending in a safe and you know protected manner as best as possible. So those are my two questions and certainly would like to submit those questions as a collective group of the chairs would so agree, but -
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REP. TURCO (27TH): It looks like we lost you, Representative Hall, but I'm glad you were able to make all those comments before we lost you and I hope we can talk additionally after this meeting on some of those ideas you have because I agree with you on that. Did we have any other speakers that were on the list previously that I called and were not here? Are they here now, Jeannie?

CLERK: Some people just didn't show up. I'm not sure why, but that was the last speaker.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Okay. So that concludes the speaker portion of the meeting. Representative Haddad, I see you have your hand up.

REP. HADDAD (54TH): Yes, thank you very much. Just one quick comment. You know I agree with Representative Hall that the question being posed to someone about temperature taking is probably important and relevant. I would note that UConn also does not plan to screen for temperatures for their students and both UConn and the CSU system have been told, or are working off of guidance is the way I'll put it, working off of guidance from the Department of Public Health. I think that question is probably more appropriately posed to the Department of Public Health than to the institutions cause for whatever reason, and I know when I drop my daughter off at day camp that you know she's

screened for temperature, but for whatever reason, that screening seems to be losing favor amongst the public health folks and that's the question I think that we should ask and where we should ask that question. And I would also, you know I think that we can add one additional question and I've actually already texted this to the folks at the ConnSCU thing, but I know that UConn, we didn't mention this earlier, but UConn plans on doing some relatively innovative testing of sewage effluent that oftentimes picks up the presence of the virus much more quickly on campus than other forms of testing and you know it's an interesting way cause it's a way of testing essentially everybody at once rather than you know random testing of individuals which I know that they are also planning on doing, but I'd be interested in knowing whether or not the State University System at least for their residential buildings also plans or has the capability to do that sort of testing as well. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Sure and before I turn it over to Chairman Haskell, I just wanted to thank everyone that testified today for all of their input, sharing their concerns with us and letting us know what's happening on the ground with individual colleges and universities. It's good to hear from their experiences. I learned a lot and I plan on discussing things with my colleagues to see how we can address some of these concerns with the system office, with the Governor's office and hopefully we can resolve some of those concerns as well before the reopening so thank you everybody for participating. I'll turn it over to Chairman Haskell.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thanks so much for chairing today, Representative Turco, and for all of your efforts to bring us together, members of the committee as well as faculty members and others. Like you said, I learned a ton from this conversation. Representative Hall, I think you put forward a great suggestion. Your internet cut out very slightly, but I think I understood the gist of what you were saying and we can chat offline after about how the Committee leadership can work together to get additional answers about our next steps so I absolutely take your suggestion. I hope that we can work together on that and I look forward to getting answers to some of the questions that were posed today because I think some very valid concerns were brought up and we certainly do want to look after the students in this state and the faculty as well for their safety here in this really trying time. One other shout out is, thank you to Jeannie because it is never easy to organize a virtual listening session so we really appreciate all of your effort to bring us together.

CLERK: You're very welcome. I'm going to thank the village that was behind me to help me get this together, in particular Deb and Susan who are in here helping co-host and Cheryl Smith in ITS.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Wonderful. Thank you all and enjoy the rest of your Thursday.