

Colena Sesanker
March 15, 2021
Testimony in support of
HB 6187 An Act Concerning the Restructuring of Certain Taxes and Equity
SB 821 An Act Concerning the Reformation of Certain Taxes and Tax Equity

Good afternoon Senator Fonfara, Representative Scanlon, Senator Martin, Representative Cheeseman, and the distinguished members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee. My name is Colena Sesanker, I live in West Hartford and I teach at Gateway Community College in New Haven. I am a member of the 4Cs, SEIU Local 1973, part of the Recovery for All coalition. I am testifying in strong support of HB 6187 and SB 821.

Some of you have seen me quite a few times over the past few weeks. I am also the current chair of the Faculty Advisory Committee to the Board of Regents for our State colleges and Universities. We are in a fight for survival. Literally. If all goes as planned, my college will cease to exist in 2023. It will be replaced with something that faculty and staff have warned will not serve the community. Inevitably, it is people of color and poorer people who will fall through the cracks.

The faculty and administration are in a bit of standoff but, in the larger picture, our differences are simply an effect of the same root cause: Quality education isn't cheap. We've left leadership with nothing they can do except destroy the system- there's just nothing left to cut. The frantic scramble to turn less into more has led to overspending and increasing levels of administrators in an effort to do the impossible. Faculty and staff cannot bring themselves to pretend that what we will provide, if consolidated, can be legitimately called a college education.

Everybody loses in this scenario. Our state colleges and universities are such a benefit to working folks of all kinds. People who like to regard themselves as middle class also benefit from the quality affordable education we provide. There has been a lot of conversation about economic growth and high skill, high paying jobs. Well, **you need to hold on to your public education system if you want to support that. We provide the workforce to fill those positions without simultaneously crippling their participation in our economy for decades by saddling them with enormous debt.**

The pandemic has brought to light for us all struggles that community college educators have always seen clearly: Among our students are essential workers trying to achieve the safety that college degrees afford. Many of our students relied on our foodbanks even before this pandemic, they are likely to be among those hit hardest by the eviction crisis, they attend our classes from the parking lots of fast-food restaurants to grab some WiFi while juggling work and school. Meanwhile, I've been sitting safely right here, in front of my bookshelves, fully employed. Our society is harshly stratified. While people like me have merely maintained our status through the pandemic, the most wealthy of us have actually benefitted. What's the value of community if not to share in each other's fates?

The bridge from precarity to security must be maintained. I want to offer my students a path to safety through quality education but I also want to contribute to building a society that makes possible the dignity and advancement of workers at every level of society.

Early this year, on the steps of the Capitol, Senator Anwar used a metaphor that stuck with me: he said that when a patient has been very ill, you don't put them on a restrictive diet. You feed them to make them strong. That's where we are.

HB 6187 and SB 821 propose that we invest in places where we need it and, for once, takes the money from the right places-- It has to come from somewhere. If not this progressive route, then it will come from those who need the most, as it has in the past.

I also want to address something that currently sidelines the crucial issue that the bills attempt to address. The issue that we're talking about here is this: how do we get the revenue we need to recover and make Connecticut a place people thrive, and how do we do it in an ethical way?

Often, this conversation takes a detour into the question of whether the rich will simply leave to avoid these taxes and then stalls in that dead end. **The [evidence shows that the revenue lost when one or two ultra-wealthy folks leave will not undo the benefit of these reforms and that, given our single sales factor status, the corporate tax rate will not be the primary driver of corporations' migration out of the state.](#)**

That's what the research shows. More than one expert has testified today to bring focus to the evidence but the conversation returns, very often, to anecdote.

Why do those *particular* anecdotes take precedence? Why does grief over the theoretical somebody who will waltz out of the state to dock his theoretical yacht elsewhere take precedence over responsibility to the very real suffering and obstacles to opportunity of those who bear the brunt of the conditions our society constructed?

Please understand how that migration narrative strikes people like me: Given that the scholarship demonstrates that those worries are unwarranted, it rings of simply signaling allegiance to an unjust status quo and those who benefit from it while ignoring the urgent need for resources that will ultimately benefit *all* of us.

Between Mr. Yacht and the suffering essential worker, one of them is statistically more likely to look like me, like my son, and like the majority of my students. The salience of one image over the other is more a product of the commitments of our society than any personal failings. We have become so desensitized to the suffering of some of us that the inconvenience of others causes more alarm.

Is it avoiding taxes or is it quality schools (funded by taxes) that have the strongest effect on migration from state to state?

I urge you to focus on the empirical studies and not on perceptions that may or may not represent the actual effects of these bills. This is a moment to be seized and I applaud you for considering them. I hope you adopt them. So many of us are ready to bring this place back to life with you.