

Testimony before the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement
On HB 6402 An Act Concerning Higher Education and
HB 6404 An Act Funding The Debt-Free Community College Program
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Good afternoon Senator Haskell, Representative Elliot, Senator Witkos, Representative Haines, and Members of the committee - my name is Lauren Doninger, I am a professor at Gateway Community College and faculty chair of the Faculty/Staff Council.

I urge you to pass HB 6402 with the substitute language provided below.

It has been 10 years since former Governor Malloy and Mr. Ojakian launched the merger of the Connecticut State Universities with the community colleges and created the Board of Regents for Higher Education. It has been 10 years of a revolving door of leadership and one failed initiative after the next, with escalating isolation of the Board from the actual institutions that they are supposed to lead. It has been 10 years of an information vacuum and growing tension as faculty have become more and more marginalized while millions are wasted on consultants and faculty time is spent in meetings rather than with students.

It was in 2017 that Mr. Ojakian became the interim President of the CSCU and launched the reckless and ill-considered idea of risking the accreditation of the 12 community colleges in pursuit of a single accreditation for one massive college. Despite the fervent efforts of faculty to have a voice in shaping the proposed one college, we have been marginalized and silenced as one policy after the next has been presented to and codified by, the BOR with Regents asking few to no questions. The study bill must be passed so that this Board of Regents model which has created an information echo chamber, a bloated administration, and out-of-control spending on a centralized bureaucracy while the actual colleges with the actual students are drained of resources, can be evaluated.

The initial plan for the consolidated college was deemed unrealistic by NECHE in part because of the speed with which it was meant to be implemented. That haste continues to result in policies that risk serious harm to our most vulnerable students. Despite faculty pointing out the failures in scholarship used to support the plan to eliminate developmental education, the system office is pushing forward. This will undoubtedly have the effect of either leaving some students feeling like they are drowning from day 1 or so eroding the curriculum that we will have graduation without education. This plan will harm students and threaten the Connecticut economy for years to come.

Regarding HB6404, I applaud your commitment to debt-free community college. I hope that you will secure a stable source of funding and consider how the current model that requires full-time enrollment disadvantages some students. I will tell you about one student I met with last semester, Tanisha. Her story is representative of many students. When I met with Tanisha for advising she reported concern about her progress in some classes. I learned that like many of our students in New Haven, Tanisha has two young children, works full-time, juggles homeschooling and unstable child care, all while taking a full course load. Tanisha was taking a full load because it was required for PACT. By trying to access PACT Tanisha and many students like her are set up to fail. Students who attend full-time have better graduation rates because they have the luxury and privilege of attending full-time. I hope that you will work with faculty groups to identify ways for debt-free college to lift all students.

Thank you.

HB 6402

AN ACT CONCERNING HIGHER EDUCATION

(Recommended Substitute Language)

Within available appropriations, the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee shall conduct a study concerning the efficacy of the Board of Regents (BOR) for Higher Education and the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities system of governance from its inception in 2011 to the present with a particular emphasis on the consolidation plan referred to as "Students First," which was initiated in 2017.

The study shall include consideration of measures of student success, the relative cost of administration, and the effectiveness of communication, governance, and the setting of budgetary priorities between the Board of Regents and the 17 educational institutions.

The study may include a review of the efficacy of alternative governance structures for public, higher education in other states.

The study will be conducted by a committee that shall consist of: six members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee (three appointed by the Committee Co-Chairs and three appointed by the Ranking Members); two current members of the Board of Regents or designees appointed by the Chair of the BOR; one university President and one CEO or President of the a Community College appointed by the Co-Chairs; the Chair and Vice Chair of the Faculty Advisory Committee to the BOR, two faculty or staff at the CSUs appointed by CSU-AAUP, and two faculty or staff at the Community Colleges one appointed by the 4Cs, and one appointed by AFT.

The committee shall elect a chairperson from among its members. A majority of the members shall constitute a quorum.

In their report, the committee may include recommendations for reforms in the governance and/or budgeting structure of the Board of Regents and CSCU system or propose alternative structures of governance.

The committee shall report the results of the study to the committees of cognizance by January 1, 2022.