

Testimony before the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement

RE: HB 6402 An Act Concerning Higher Education

Submitted by Stephen Adair, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology, Central Connecticut State University

March 4, 2021

Senator Haskell, Representative Elliot, Senator Witkos, Representative Haines and Members of the committee, my name is Stephen Adair. I am a Professor of Sociology at Central Connecticut State University. I recently completed 8 years of service on the Faculty Advisory Committee to the BOR, which included 5 five years as a non-voting member on the Board.

House Bill 6402 calls for a study of public higher education. I recommend that the study be focused specially on the structure of the system office for the CSCUs and the BOR. Recommended substitute language for this bill is included in my written testimony.

It has been 10 years since the merger of the community colleges and the state universities. Since 2011, well over \$400 million has been spent for the system office administration. Those millions have not put teachers in classrooms, have not provided direct student services, and have not lowered the cost of tuition for students.

I also do not think I need to recount for you the missteps, the millions wasted on outside consultants, and the problems of leadership that have plagued and continue to plague the system administration since the merger. In 2019, faculty and staff across the system voted no confidence in the Board and its President. A vast majority of experienced educators in the system do not believe the current plan to consolidate the community colleges and centralize control over key functions will result in successful student outcomes.

The repeated waste of resources, time, and effort no longer appears as a coincidence of misjudgments, but suggests a structural problem.

Under the BOR, the relationship and communication between the Board and the 17 institutions that educate students has been broken. With 17 institutions, the Board relies on the system office to mediate the relationship, such that all information flows from a single source. Institution presidents no longer have a direct channel of communication with the Board. At the Community Colleges, 10 of the 12 college Presidents have left since the announcement of the consolidation.

Having exclusive access, the system President is seemingly empowered to direct all change, however that person is not well positioned to direct faculty and staff whose daily routines are oriented toward meeting the instructional and functional requirements of their home institutions. The disjunction between these competing spheres of authority is the structural condition that has contributed to the repeated missteps.

Prior to the merger, this was not the case. The members of the Board of Trustees for the Connecticut State University, for example, rigorously evaluated each of the University Presidents every year. Trustees would organize forums on campuses once or twice a year to hear directly from faculty and staff. Lines of communication were more open and overlapped.

There are many examples in other states of differing forms of higher education administration. The BOR could be expanded with dedicated subcommittees given direct responsibilities for overseeing four or five institutions. Regional boards could also be created for individual institutions or groups of institutions that then report to a statewide Board with delineated responsibilities.

Under such arrangements, regional service serving could be designed under consortia arrangements led by institution presidents to realize efficiencies, and the state could forego much of the cost of the system office.

Empowering a system president who does not preside over the direct functioning of institutions and severs the relationship between the Board and those institutions may not be a structure prone toward realizing successful change. The state has an interest in getting this right. I urge adoption of HB 6402, with the substitute language below.

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 (CSCU) 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.