

**Testimony before the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement  
H.B. 6402 An Act Concerning Higher Education  
Submitted by Seth Freeman, Professor of Computer Information Systems  
Capital Community College**

March 4<sup>th</sup> 2021

Dear Senator Haskell, Representative Elliott, Senator Witkos, Representative Haines and members of the committee,

My name is Seth Freeman and I am a Professor of Computer Information Systems at Capital Community College and Vice President of Faculty for the Congress of CT Community Colleges.

Thank you for this opportunity today to address you with my concerns.

H.B. 6402 asks for a study of the public higher education. I request and recommend that the study be focused explicitly on the CSCUs and the Board of Regents. Recommended substitute language for this bill is included in my written testimony.

The Board of Regents (BOR) and the CSCU Leadership have a history of repeated ineffectiveness since the inception of the BOR in 2011. It is time for the legislature to investigate the structure and composition of the BOR and determine how the structure needs to change to make it a functional body that effectively serves our students.

While there have been many failures, the current consolidation of our community colleges is the most pressing matter related to this study. The BOR and CSCU Leadership are actively hurting our students and weakening our community colleges through this consolidation. Their plan underway will cause long-term damage to our community college system and will hurt the low-income, Black and Latino students who predominately attend our community colleges. Their plan has been a consistent series of missteps, miscalculations, and failures, and portends only more failures to come.

Initially described as a plan to save money, when it became clear the plan would not save money, CSCU leadership pivoted to baselessly and fraudulently claim that the consolidation will solve persistent equity gaps in the community college system.

Community college educators like myself recognize that consolidating our colleges into a massive one size-fits-all "Master College" will do nothing to improve student outcomes. Improving student outcomes requires recognizing the different backgrounds and prior-learning experiences of our students and developing flexible, adaptable curriculum and services to best serve our diverse student populations. Improving outcomes requires investing in community college campuses, investing into services and resources for students who need them, and investing into the public K-12 education system where

our students come from. More broadly, improving outcomes requires fixing persistent equity gaps in our state – like ending school segregation, systemic racism and systemic poverty.

But – we are to believe that rather than making any of these investments, we can simply consolidate our colleges into the One College.

Educators like myself know this simply is untrue.

We also know sadly, that once the BOR and CSU leadership finish building their massive administrative structure, the only way this consolidation will ever save money, is if our community colleges are hollowed out from the inside, so the massive, bloated, wasteful centralized administration can feed.

Community college faculty, staff, and local administrators need the legislators hold the BOR and CSU leadership accountable.

I implore you adopt H.B. 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 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 CSU 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.