

**Testimony before the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement
H.B. 6402 An Act Concerning Higher Education
Submitted by Diba Khan-Bureau, Ph.D., Professor of Environmental Engineering
Technology, Three Rivers Community College**

March 4th 2021

Dear Senator Haskell, Representative Elliott, Senator Witkos, Representative Haines and members of the committee, my name is Diba Khan-Bureau. I am a full-time professor at Three Rivers Community College. I am the Program Coordinator of the Environmental Engineering Technology program and the Environmental Health and Safety Certificate program. I have been at TRCC for 20 years. Thank you for this opportunity today to speak with you about my concerns.

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

Over the last decade there have been many complications and disruptions in our Community College system. Starting with the merger of the community colleges and the state universities, the continuing swinging pendulum of ideas and perspectives of the many CSCU presidents over the years. How we make the community colleges and universities work is always in flux and according to whomever the new leader was, the millions of wasted dollars spent on all the new shiny programs that would be put in place but would take several years to implement or never be implemented because we kept losing presidents and hiring new ones or the millions spent on consultant fees. Since 2016 the budget for 61 Woodland Street (BOR) grew by 90% while community college expenditures increased by 4%! Then there was the new buzz word Students' First, which was originally about saving money, but then the BOR recognized that there was no actual savings, so the BOR made it about students and then they branded it an equity initiative. We lack clarity, we lack inclusive decision-making, smart choices weren't and aren't being made; resources were and continue to be wasted while these resources could have been used to truly help our students. We have essentially put our community colleges and our state universities, and most importantly, put our students at risk. We have roughly 85,000 students in our CSCU system.

Over time these issues created confusion, misinterpretation, and mistrust, which lead to a damaged system. Over 1400 faculty, staff, students, and even the past presidents and chancellors signed a petition to stop the misguided Student First and consolidation plan. Last year there was a vote of no confidence in the Board and the president.

There once was a better system in place, prior to the merger and the creation of the BOR, where there were good open communication and discussions. There were vibrant conversations between faculty, staff, and administration and our Board of Trustees regarding curriculum and shared governance. These ideas and perspectives lead to a better and affordable education for our students. There were more resources and support. This is no longer the case. Non-experts are now making decisions on curriculum, spending resources that could be used for students, and haphazardly harming our educational institutions.

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The Community Colleges were once considered the gems of our communities. Our student population was and is still commonly nontraditional, first generation, and underrepresented students. We provide a path to a door of opportunity for these students, to open it as wide as they want. When more expensive institutions may not have accepted these students, we provide that path.

There are many ways to develop our educational institutions in Connecticut but this is not one of them. Let the faculty and staff; the experts help.

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 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.