

Good Afternoon Representative Elliot, Senator Haskell and members of the Higher Education and Employment advancement Committee,

My name is Eric Maroney, I live in New Haven, and I am an English Professor in the First-Year Studies department at Gateway Community College.

I am here in support of **HB6402**, a Study of Higher Education Issues in the State, and **HB 6404**, Funding of Debt Free College (PACT).

Enormous and untested structural changes are underway at Connecticut's community colleges and HB6402 is needed to put the brakes on these rapid changes in order to determine whether they are in the best interest of Connecticut's public college and university students and its taxpayers. As a result, I encourage the committee to prioritize the study bill with the recommended substitute language change (included with my written testimony).

No doubt, many of my colleagues will testify that the "Students First" college consolidation plan is ineffective at delivering services or saving money. Several opinion articles appearing in the Connecticut Mirror have detailed the [opaque spending](#) and [bloated administrative operations](#) of the "one college" model. My colleagues and these articles will do a better job than I can at detailing this. Instead, I would like to use my testimony to share the effects this merger will have on students.

One of the most disastrous outcomes of the consolidation project has been an over centralization of decision-making regarding curriculum and services. On paper, it may appear that the consolidation effort includes faculty voice and expertise; however, in reality this has not been the case. Most recently, the Board of Regents has introduced a policy that will eliminate developmental educational support at the community colleges. The policy, which has seen vocal opposition from faculty, seeks to place all students in college-level courses despite the student's level of preparedness.

As a faculty member in the First-Year Studies department, I work directly with those students whose educational background has not prepared them for college-level coursework. These are brilliant, talented, and creative students whose journey to higher education simply requires more time and support. To illustrate, two semesters ago I had the privilege of working with Ms. M. a mother of two and a refugee from Afghanistan. Ms. M. speaks five languages, was an interpreter for the U.N. and now provides interpretive services for a local school district. Nevertheless, as a person who arrived to the United States relatively recently, she had not yet acquired the English abilities necessary to succeed in a college-level composition course. Ms. M. enrolled in a six-credit transitional English course followed by a college-level composition course (ENG 101) with a 3-credit co-requisite of embedded support (ENG 099). The additional time and support provided by these developmental courses create the conditions for a student like Ms. M. to succeed. Without these supports, a college degree would remain out of reach. Non-traditional students, like Ms. M. benefit from the robust supports provided in developmental courses, but traditional students do as well.

Before coming to Gateway Community College, I spent just under a decade as a high school English Teacher with New Haven public schools. As a result, when students walk through Gateway's doors, I often know them personally or know their former teachers personally. This unique position has allowed me to witness and appreciate students' significant academic and social growth first-hand. It has also enabled me to identify the policies and practices that enable students to thrive. For example, Howard enrolled in Gateway Community College after graduating from New Haven Public Schools. He is a timid young man who had not experienced much success in high school. His SAT scores places him in only the 9th percentile for reading and writing. However, after completing a transitional developmental course followed by a college-level composition course with embedded support, Howard is on his way to earning his degree. He even earned an academic achievement award during his first year.

Those who defend the elimination of developmental support will argue that it is a question of equity. They will argue that preventing students from enrolling directly in college-level courses leads to lower degree completion statistics, increased dropout rates and increased student debt. These are very real issues, but eliminating support for developmental learners is not the solution. Instead, the BOR can offer college elective credit for developmental coursework and expand the PACT funding so part-time and non-traditional students can access higher education without having to choose between college and employment.

There are any number of anecdotes I can share to illustrate the merits of the developmental offerings at the community colleges. More to the point, eliminating these offerings is only one example of the ways unaccountable centralized decision making is harming Connecticut's students. An intensive study of Connecticut's higher education issues is necessary to identify the impact of the merger and other higher education policies in the state. A study bill is the first step in putting Connecticut's public higher education institutions back on the right track. That track must be one that centers the expertise of faculty and values the diversity of student need and experience. In practice, this means that policy decisions are made with transparently in collaboration with faculty, and institutions of public higher learning are fully funded.

Thank you for your time.

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.

APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY BY THE FACULTY ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE CT BOARD OF REGENTS FOR HIGHER ED. ON FEB 19, 2021

