

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
Submitted by Eileen M Russo, MA, LADC
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Senator Haskell, Representative Elliot, Senator Witkos, Representative Haines, and Members of the committee - my name is Eileen Russo, I am a professor and program coordinator of the Drug and Alcohol Recovery Program

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

Despite the consistent efforts of faculty to have a voice in shaping the proposed one college, these efforts have been defeated. For example, it is not possible to have a voice in a large committee, all of whom have been appointed by the Board of Regents (BOR) or to have a voice with no voting rights, just advisory capacity. The study bill must be passed so that this Board of Regents model which has created a bureaucracy that has already spent close to 100 million dollars with multiple layers of administration at the same time the colleges are drained of resources, can be evaluated. There are other ways to create a smoother system without destroying the individual colleges who provide unique educational opportunities to the unique communities.

The initial plan for the consolidated college has been wrought with problems since the beginning, including problems pointed out by the accrediting body, NECHE, persistent turnover in leaderships and the lack of a faculty voice in governance. There are policies being developed that will harm, not help students. For example, the plan right now is to eliminate all developmental education, essentially no longer helping students who were not college prepared in the K-12 system. This will set up students for failure from day 1. In addition, there is a new message beginning to emerge which is "water down your courses". Students may end up with a degree, but will not have an education.

There have already been dismal failures in consolidation. One stark example is the consolidation of IT services. This resulted in failed upgrades during peak course times, advising times, registration, and students/faculty not being able to access courses remotely (11 days or more into the semester), delayed response times to IT requests and no real resolution, only some suggested time consuming and confusing work-arounds.

Regarding HB6404, a debt-free community college is something hopeful. While continued funding for this is faced with uncertainty, offering free college to only those students who can attend full-time, excludes the students who need it the most. Most of the students in the DARC program are part-time, non-traditional age students who need to work full-time, care for children and stand in line for food. They are seeking additional education in order to pursue a career that will improve their quality of life. They are not able to take the full course load required by PACT. They will not have the opportunity to graduate debt-free. I hope you will work with faculty groups to identify ways for debt-free college to lift all students.

Thank you.
Eileen M. Russo

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.