

**Testimony before the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement
H.B. 6403 An Act Requiring Legislative Approval for the Merger or Closure of
Institutions within the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities
Submitted by Diba Khan-Bureau, Ph.D., Professor of Environmental Engineering
Technology, Three Rivers Community College**

March 9th 2021

Representative Elliott, Senator Haskell, and Distinguished Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement 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. I have been at TRCC for 20 years. Thank you for this opportunity today to speak with you about my concerns.

I am here today to give support to HB 6403 with recommended new language in the written testimony and HB5545 important bills that are in front of this Committee today:

HB 6403: An Act Requiring Legislative Approval for the Merger or Closing of Institutions Within the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities. On February 27th 2020 I testified for an equivalent bill, HB 5113.

The Connecticut Community College system was developed and implemented in the 1960's. The system was subject to legislative control requiring legislative approval for any actions taken, including mergers and closures. This is a sensible and pragmatic approach. The legislators were *elected* by their constituents and therefore would oversee the business of the Community College system. This is good business practice and good for the communities that the legislators serve. Until 2011 legislators had oversight and control on what happened with the Community Colleges and Universities. However, when the CSCU system and the BOR were created in that year, the legislature gave up that oversight.

There have been so many questions, concerns, accreditation concerns and controversy about the consolidation and Student First plans. The students are suffering the consequences of a bloated bureaucracy. Since 2016 the budget for BOR grew by 90% while community college expenditures increased by 4%! Non-experts are now making decisions on curriculum and shared governance, spending resources that could be used for students, and haphazardly harming our educational institutions. Disempowering and diminishing faculty and staff while the administration ignores our input and concerns on policy and curriculum. CSCU leaders have misrepresented faculty and staff support for Students First and consolidation while dismantling our educational system. This is not a corporation!

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We have essentially put our community colleges, our state universities, and our students at risk. We have roughly 85,000 students in our CSCU system.

The Community Colleges were once considered the gems of our communities. Our student population is still generally nontraditional, first generation, and underrepresented students. We provide a door to opportunity for these students, to open it as wide as they want. When more expensive educational institutions may not have accepted these students, we provide that pathway to that institution. I am a product of the Community College. I now have a Ph.D.

It is of great importance that HB 6403 is passed by our legislation to regain oversight and authority of our Community College system to ensure the future of our community colleges and universities.

Recommendations - Language for HB 6403.

The proposed bill states that if the legislature does not act within one year, a proposed merger or closure be deemed approved. I recommend changing that to not approved. Further, I recommend adding the clause, “that the BOR shall not seek regional accreditation for a merger that has not been approved by the general assembly.”

HB 5545: An Act Concerning the Budget of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities. I testified in 2020 for the equivalent HB 5112.

Simply put this bill makes sense. Just like our personal checking account we need to know where the money is and where it is going. What bills are we paying and why? So shouldn't that be true for the BOR? Shouldn't we have complete transparency to know where the BOR is spending its funding and why? We have seen hiring of Regional presidents and administrators at an exorbitant price instead of hiring teachers and counselors and support staff. We can hire several support staff for the price of one regional president. The regional presidents were hired a year ago while we are still separate colleges. What are the regional presidents doing if they aren't starting in their roles until the one college is up and running and functional in 2023? Don't get me wrong. ...we need skillful educated folks at the BOR. And quite frankly there are some well-intentioned people there. This bill will eliminate any question of where the money is going and help the BOR be more fiscally responsible. I urge your support of HB 5545.

Thank you.