

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-824

AN ACT REQUIRING TRAINING FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNING
Title: BOARDS OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE STATE.

Vote Date: 3/18/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/9/2021

File No.:

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

To require institutions of higher education to implement training for governing boards, change budgeting rules for Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU), and require legislative approval for the merger or closing of CSCUs.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

- Secs. 1 & 2: for private and public institutions, requires training only for new board members, not all; training must occur once within first year of service, rather than every four years
- Sec. 3-5: incorporates all of HB 5545, An Act Concerning the Budget of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities
- Sec. 6: incorporates all of HB 6403, An Act Requiring Legislative Approval for the Merger or Closing of Institutions within the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Dr. Alice Pritchard, Chief of Staff, Chief Operating Officer, and Board Secretary, Connecticut State Colleges & Universities \(CSCU\):](#)

Dr. Pritchard explains what the bill does and what subjects the existing orientation process covers. She says, " While the instruction and training requirements called for in this bill align with the topics Regents currently focus on as a collective, we would like to work with our colleagues at the University of Connecticut to craft language that can maintain the flexibility needed to determine what trainings should be offered, to whom and when."

University of Connecticut (UCONN):

UCONN explains the responsibilities of its Board of Trustees, as well as their typical orientation process. They say, "we are already providing our governing board with the necessary background and support needed to carry out their fiduciary and other responsibilities."

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Maureen Chalmers, President, Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges (4Cs):

Submitted written testimony in support. "This is a best practice for an organization to train its new leaders, so we support this bill, as we have done in the past."

Nikki McGary, PhD:

Submitted written testimony in support. Prof. McGary says this bill promotes accountability for the Board of Regents.

Colena Sesanker, PhD, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Gateway CC:

Submitted written testimony in support. Prof. Sesanker says that the assumption of expertise is implicit in higher education. Overwhelmingly, she says, our college and university experts have found "the projects of the BOR-- the most recent and most destructive of which is the Students First Consolidation—to be ill-conceived and poorly led." The plan is a non-sensical "investment in the reduction of quality" and "a departure from our mission" to aid students and our communities. This investment was never explicitly approved, she says, as costs have been obscured while immediate savings were promised; until the 2021 SF Finance report forced a concession that savings would not appear until 2023. The accreditor NECHE also questions the plan, she says, citing its August 2020 response. The flexibility that has been granted to this system, could have been a benefit, but it has been abused, and any savings claimed are through attrition alone.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Jennifer Widness, President Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges (CCIC):

Submitted written testimony in opposition. CCIC appreciates the intent of the bill as well as the modifications that have been made, "however, some of our member institutions strongly oppose this bill and view it as a complete overreach and unnecessary." Ms. Widness explains that all private, non-profit colleges in the state are accredited and regularly reevaluated by NECHE, and this process includes of governing boards. She says, "No other state in the country mandates training for board members of private colleges in this manner, other than Massachusetts," and Wisconsin has a statute against state intrusion. CCIC values the Committee's consistent support but is concerned about insulating institutional governance from political influence.

Reported by: Jeremy Salyer

Date: 03/26/2021