Senator Slap, Representative Elliott, and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee,

My name is Sara Berry and I am an adjunct professor at Manchester Community College.

I am here today to testify in support of HB 5300, *An Act Requiring Legislative Approval For the Merger or Closing of Institutions Within the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities and Prohibiting the Consolidation of the Regional-Technical Colleges.* This bill provides necessary legislative oversight of any merger within the CSCU System. This oversight is crucial as the Board of Regents and System Office pursue a consolidation of the 12 community colleges into a single entity. Under the guise of putting Students First, the system is eliminating not only "back office" positions, but essential student-facing positions while hiring more high-level administrators that will never interact with a student on a campus. This cutting of campus staff directly impacts the essential services and functions of the colleges while adding to the top layer of management, creating a staffing crisis at our colleges.

There are countless examples of how lack of staff on campus has negatively impacted remaining staff as well as students. A number of employees are doing multiple jobs as positions remain unfilled, impacting the effectiveness of many departments. Human Resources is one example. As an adjunct faculty member, my contracts used to be issued well in advance of the start of the semester. Now they are received just before, if not after, the start of classes. Countless employees have been paid incorrectly, or not paid at all. When contacting HR to ask about not getting paid, it has taken me a week to get an answer. As an adjunct who does not get paid year-round, I plan my finances based on getting paid properly once the semester starts. Not getting paid can mean the difference between buying groceries or not, and it is not acceptable to have to wait a week for an answer because the one person who handles adjunct payments is on vacation. This Fall several of my colleagues that hire work-study students were unable to get their students' paperwork processed so the students could start working before mid-October. These students receive work study assistance because they need the financial help, and the inefficiency of HR prevented them from working for the first month and a half of the semester.

But the negative effects surrounding consolidation and the related understaffing are even more pronounced for our students, as professionals such as mental health counselors, financial aid and IT staff are not being replaced. Our campus currently has 1 mental health counselor available. We were recently told that there would not be enough positions in Financial Aid for our existing staff- which is going to mean a decrease in the number of staff available to give students the help they desperately need to fund their education. The majority of our students are first-generation college students from minority and/or working class backgrounds who need the supports that are being stripped away from our campuses. Our campus IT department is so short-staffed, students were not able to walk in for tech assistance. Especially at the beginning of a semester, new students often need assistance setting up accounts and passwords and accessing various parts of the website. Rather than having IT staff available to assist students (and staff) with IT-related issues, the System has instituted an online portal for help requests. A student in need of a NetID or password reset cannot log into campus computers, sign into campus Wi-Fi on their mobile devices, or log into their email that the response from the portal would go to- so, if they can't get walk-in tech assistance, how are they going to access the portal to submit an incident report and get assistance? Access to student email and course management systems is essential for students to be successful, and I wonder how many

students gave up this semester simply because they couldn't get access. This is not a good way to increase our enrollment and retention numbers.

Perhaps it is the neediest students on our campuses who have the most to lose as consolidation proceeds unchecked. At MCC we have a program for students who come to the College and place in very remedial levels of English and Math, and I teach a College Success course as part of that program. When I started teaching in this program, there was a coordinator for that program who met with qualifying students, explained the program and the supports available, and connected with the students on a regular basis to check in. There was also a tutor dedicated to the students in this program, who attended their classes and had plenty of time available outside of class for one-on-one appointments. Those two functions were then combined into one part-time position. Last summer, that person left to pursue full-time employment, and both jobs were added on to the existing job of a full-time advisor. There was no longer a dedicated tutor to students in this program, and communication with the students was significantly lacking. Pass rates and retention of these students were the lowest I have ever seen, despite the efforts of myself and others teaching in the program to communicate with each other and the students. In January the advisor running the program retired, and was not replaced. Contracts for faculty in the program came out just before classes started, and one of the English adjuncts in the program had accepted another position prior to contracts finally being issued. With a week before classes starting, there was no one to teach the English course within the program, and it did not run. There was no one to pay attention to contracts or what was going on with instructors due to the lack of filling that position. As a result, these students- the most underprepared, underserved, vulnerable students on our campus have lost their program coordinator, their embedded tutor, and now their English class. This means that these students can make no progress in their reading and writing skills this semester, and will not be able to move forward in advancing to college-level classes. While the system is touting "Students First" and claiming to advance equity and inclusion and access for all, their refusal to fill positions directly negatively impacts those students- underprepared, working class students primarily of color, that they claim to be putting first.

System officials first discussed the consolidation as a plan to save. When there was pushback, then and only then did they begin to say that it would also help students. However, any positive benefits from the consolidation, such as seamless transfer, can be done without merging the twelve colleges. This is nothing but a restructuring that adds many new highly- paid administrators while cutting staff that works directly with students.

Help protect the Community Colleges. The students who attend are overwhelmingly from Connecticut and will stay in Connecticut to live and work. Community College students are majority black and brown, working class students. Real equity would be giving these students every opportunity to succeed by investing more in their education, not trying to save money by cutting the staff and resources that directly serve them.

Thank you.