

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5545

AN ACT CONCERNING THE BUDGET OF THE CONNECTICUT STATE

Title: COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES.

Vote Date: 3/11/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/9/2021

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

REP. HADDAD, 54th Dist.

SEN. FLEXER, 29th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

To require the Board of Regents to include the central office of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities in the itemization of its budget request.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Sean Bradbury, Senior Director of Government Relations and External Affairs, Connecticut State Colleges & Universities \(CSCU\):](#)

Submitted written testimony. CSCU is committed to transparency and routinely provides detailed spending plans to OPM and the legislature. While the bill will require some adjustment to implement, CSCU does not believe it will affect the budgetary authority of the Regents. CSCU has limited enrollment data prior to their February census, but understands the need to give its best projection to meet the schedule of government.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Stephen Adair, Professor of Sociology, CCSU:](#)

Submitted written testimony in support. Prof. Adair believes that community colleges are public assets that belong to and are for the benefit of CT's citizens, and that they need to be held accountable. He says the Student First plan's promise to save \$24 million by cutting budgets already designed for austerity are "too good to be true." To Prof. Adair, it is clear that the plan does not fund students first, but administration first, and that the state's investment is obscured by the system office's funding structure. Were this a regular school in the state, it

would have had to come before the Higher Education and Appropriations committees for approval. Since the announcement of the plan in 2017, costs have increased from \$30.3m to \$69.1m, with modest decreases in office expenditures.

David Blitz, Faculty, CCSU:

Submitted written testimony in support. Prof. Blitz says the current breakdown of CSCU's budget does not reflect the significantly increased allocations controlled by the system office. Reading the line items as is, he says, gives the impression that all of the \$307.2m of the total \$321.5m budget goes directly to the governed institutions, while the remaining \$408,000 is "presumably to cover the costs of its secretary and assistants, as well as coffee and muffins when it met in person." After joining the Finance Committee he learned that the sums allocated to the System Office are much larger (\$69.1m) and in fact have more than doubled over the last few years.

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

Submitted written testimony in support. "The CSCU budget is extremely difficult to follow and understand. While budgets show how much money is distributed to each college and university, they do not show how much money will be assessed by the central office and for what purpose. In short, the budget statements are not an accurate representation of how much each college and university actually receives because a good portion of money goes directly back to the System Office. We support any legislation that shines more transparency onto the finances of the CSCU System Office."

Francis Coan, Professor of History, Tunxis Community College:

Submitted written testimony in support. Prof. Coan believes the bill will bring clarity to and delineate the budgets of the CSCU system. Explaining that the System Office has absorbed the budgets of other schools, Prof. Coan says their budget now exceeds many schools in the state, and is largely spent on CSCC, yet there is no program with accreditation or even students.

Kathleen Herron, Professor of Mathematics, Capital Community College:

Submitted written testimony in support. Prof. Herron is concerned about the System Office's budget, the student first plan, and accountability for the Board of Regents. It is important, she continues, "that the limited resources allocated to the state colleges and universities by the state be used in the best manner possible."

John McNamara, Capital Community College:

Submitted written testimony in support. Mr. McNamara believes that the budget needs a provision for Board of Regents oversight of the CSCU System Office. This oversight should ensure that tax dollars are serving students and campuses, "and not diverted to a build-up of a new educational bureaucracy that is risky and unproven..." While restructuring is necessary, he says, it should be from the bottom up, not the top down, "and, above all, not add unnecessary expenditures that will never reach classrooms."

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.

Carmen Yiamouyiannis Ph.D., Professor of Biology, Capital Community College:

Submitted written testimony in support. In the 10 years since the merger of the state colleges and universities, "well over \$400 million has been spent for the system office administration. Those millions have not put teachers in classrooms, have not provided direct student services, and have not lowered the cost of tuition for students ... Over the many years, we have been denied permission to replace faculty who have retired due to lack of funding." She says over 1400 faculty, staff, students, and past presidents and chancellors, signed a petition against Student First, and the Board of Regents, "has been remiss in not questioning and failing to investigate the numerous concerns brought up by faculty and staff." While 72% of her school's students come from some of the poorest neighborhoods in the country, Student First plans to eliminate developmental courses for students who need them the most. "A onesize fits all model developed by non-academic, political appointees doesn't help our students."

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Jeremy Salyer

Date: 03/19/2021