

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-997

AN ACT CONCERNING AN EXPANSION OF THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT AND THE VOTING RIGHTS OF THE FACULTY MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF

Title: REGENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION.

Vote Date: 3/11/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/9/2021

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

To add members to the Board of Regents (BOR) and University of Connecticut Board of Trustees (BOT).

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

- Lines 4-6, 51-92: adds two additional UConn BOT voting alumni trustees elected by the students, bringing the total to four
- Lines 155-160: adds two additional voting student advisory committee members to BOR, bringing the total to four: one Connecticut State University System or Charter Oak State College student, and one regional community-technical college student, each elected by consensus vote of the advisory committee
- Makes other technical and conforming changes

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

University of Connecticut:

Submitted written testimony in opposition. UCONN believes that its board is already among the largest in the nation and that larger boards make it more difficult to govern and creating

two-tiers of voters further complicates governance. In addition, the bill as written would allow them to vote on personnel issues without the ability to participate in discussion and allow participation on collective bargaining discussions without the power to vote. This results in an "untenable" situation that prevents board members from exercising their fiduciary duties and impacts their decision-making. Governing boards are not constructed to represent campus populations but composed of independent trustees that act in the best interest of the university.

Giving faculty or staff a vote on a variety of issues when there is a potential for a conflict of interest could create doubt for their impartiality, "even if they are not ultimately voting on them." Faculty have "ample opportunities for their voices to be heard" through the existing process and University Senate, "which is by design the venue that allows for essential shared governance at UConn and is primarily composed of faculty." UCONN argues that faculty already have the ability to set curricula and determine institutional mission which "[is] not reserved to the Board of Trustees, to the administration, to the Graduate Faculty Council or to the several faculties." Since members of the University Senate already attend and weigh in on Board meetings and Committees, and faculty and employees are able to directly address the Board during the public comment portion of meetings, UCONN argues, extending voting power to faculty is unnecessary.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Michael Bailey, Executive Director, University of Connecticut American Association of University Professors \(UConn-AAUP\):](#)

Submitted written testimony in support. UConn-AAUP represents over 2400 faculty and coaches in collective bargaining. They explain that academic institutions become less autonomous, that outside oversight is expected, and that universities, faculty, and government must present a united front when advocating for students. Overall institutional welfare remains important even with high turnover, they say, and when all policy makers are aware of their interdependence and communicate effectively, they can better solve educational problems. They support inclusion of faculty members on governing boards, and explain this is not unusual.

[John Board:](#)

Submitted written testimony in support with substitute language. John believes, "it should not be a surprise that I am in favor of this bill, specifically the section 2 provisions. He asks the committee to add the student representation bill as an amendment.

[Maureen Chalmers, President, Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges \(4Cs\):](#)

Submitted written testimony in support. "The faculty voice in shared governance of institutions of higher learning is critical. We support UConn's efforts to add more faculty voices to its Board and for the BOR to allow faculty members to vote, as it does for the students."

[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.

Michael Shea, Professor of English, Southern Connecticut State University:

Submitted written testimony in support. Prof. Shea believes the value of this bill is self-evident, and that providing a vote is to strengthen a voice. While faculty may have a voice in the discussion and a seat at the table, they are not fully represented, and the process is not fully democratic, without the opportunity to vote. He believes the BOR intends to do what is best, but that they cannot do what is best without being fully informed. Giving faculty the vote will result in better informed, accurate, and more efficacious policy.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Henry Stoeber, President and CEO, Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges:

Submitted written testimony in opposition. Regarding SB 997 specifically, he "urges rejection of this bill because voting faculty representation can be contradictory to the values and best practices of citizen trusteeship" and would "significantly undermine effective governance." He states that citizen governing boards should be "unencumbered by any allegiance to internal or external stakeholders."

Reported by: Jeremy Salyer

Date: 03/18/2021