

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing on the Governor's FY 2022-2023 Proposed Budget
for Higher Education Agencies

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Testimony of Rachael Schettenhelm
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My name is Rachael Schettenhelm and I am a full-time developmental mathematics faculty member at Gateway Community College, with CT higher education experience spanning two institutions and 30 years. What my colleagues and I have done for our students over the past year is extraordinary. We have continued to meet students where they are in their varied educational journeys and improve their skills, bolster their confidence in their own abilities, and help them navigate the new online reality. All of this has been done over the internet from home. I urge you to fully fund the needs of these committed community college faculty, staff and students as they continue to pursue their dreams in this most challenging time. Every day, every class, I strive to improve the way I connect with my students and I need your support. I am still spending far more time preparing instruction than is contractually compensated, because it is the time I feel I must spend to effectively teach my students. Please give me the resources I need to be part of the dream come true for my students.

While doing this extraordinary work, I have been hampered with a relentless series of disruptive technology failures since mid-fall 2020. The ongoing failures in technology have impeded students, faculty, and staff from achieving educational, instructional, and institutional goals. I urge you to look at the layers of bureaucracy which have been placed between students and reliable access to functional technology and I ask how spending more on highly paid managers for technology that does not meet the needs of students, is "Students First." These technology failures are directly related to the consolidation of all IT departments in preparation for one-college.

The other department which has already been centralized is Human Resources. Missteps are occurring in HR with regionalized managers and generalists leaving employees with no specific place to turn for help. My last paycheck was a week late. I have a colleague who is still waiting for an uncontested paycheck from this summer. Worse still, student workers have had missed paychecks. Faculty and staff recently received an email indicating impending retirements will overwhelm the HR system. I feel our community colleges are being taken away from our local communities and given to bureaucrats in Hartford. These situations do little to inspire confidence in the work of the "Students First" consolidation.

Each of us want improvements made to the community college system. It is vital, however, that people doing the work be supported with adequate resources. Currently, subject matter experts are being asked to volunteer their time to synthesize courses between colleges and even create new program pathways. This is especially harmful at a time when faculty are already spending available extra time delivering material to our students. When content experts are asked to do curricular work required by the system, taking time away from instructional preparation and delivery, then they should receive compensation. Instead, money has been spent adding bureaucratic layers, often with those new managers drawn from individual colleges. These new managers are being paid to oversee a conceptual college which has no students, leaving fewer of us on campus to assist the students we are charged to serve or to do the curriculum work requested of us.

I urge you to fully fund the important work of the community colleges. Please, ensure money spent on system-wide standardization happens thoughtfully, with more resources going to those making transfer and student success in the system a reality and less money spent in bureaucratic overseers.