

# Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** 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

**Title:** REGIONAL COMMUNITY-TECHNICAL COLLEGES.

**Vote Date:** 3/17/2022

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 3/8/2022

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

To allow the Connecticut General Assembly to vote on the merger or closure of an institution of higher education, and to prohibit the consolidation of Connecticut's community colleges.

Substitute language:

- Sec. 2:
  - Adds language specifying that BOR may not pursue merger, closure, or consolidation, of the community colleges into one college, rather than forbidding merger of any number of colleges.
  - Adds "notwithstanding" language to preserve the Sec. 1 option for BOR to seek legislative approval for closures and mergers.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

[Sean Bradbury, Senior Director of Government Relations and External Affairs, Connecticut State Colleges & Universities \(CSCU\)](#): Mr. Bradbury of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities system "urge[s] the committee to take no action on" [H.B. 5300](#) because this legislation "fundamentally undermines the ability of the BOR to govern the institutions under its authority." According to Mr. Bradbury, "It is vital that approvals of mergers or closure continue to be governed by the BOR and NECHE, rather than creating a political process," so that solutions to these crucial issues are "not based on what is the popular or politically expeditious solution." While Connecticut's community colleges are "facing unprecedented

enrollment and fiscal challenges," CSCU is working to merge the twelve community colleges together into "one accredited institution, known as Connecticut State Community College," and has "received word that [NECHE] has accepted the substantive change proposal." Finally, Section 2 of [H.B. 5300](#) "would not only undermine the BOR's authority, but would as well undermine and override the actions and approvals of our accrediting body" by "significantly erod[ing] the BOR's independence and ability to effectively govern the institutions under its authority."

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

[Representative Holly Cheeseman, 37<sup>th</sup> Assembly District, Connecticut General Assembly:](#) [H.B. 5300](#) represents a "significant step" for Connecticut's colleges and universities and is "not to be undertaken lightly." While the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the financial and enrollment problems that are facing Connecticut's community colleges, [H.B. 5300](#) would help to alleviate some of these issues. Therefore, not only does Representative Cheeseman support [H.B. 5300](#), but "there are still significant questions that need to be answered and therefore I urge that the legislature be required to approve any change of this magnitude that will have such an affect on the community college system."

[James Czikowsky, Student and President of the Health Minds Club, Tunxis Community College:](#) Mr. Czikowsky supports [H.B. 5300](#) because the consolidation of Connecticut's community colleges would "eliminate support systems that have served me in the three years I have been enrolled at Tunxis," and institutions of higher education like Tunxis "have to cope with understaffing, divestment, and blatant disrespect from The Board of Regents who refuse to have any discourse with them about how to better serve their students." The passage of [H.B. 5300](#) would mean that the Connecticut General Assembly won't tolerate "disrespect of students and staff," and "It will signal that people are more important than a profiteering bureaucracy." Finally, [H.B. 5300](#) would mean that the legislature is committed to the "protection and preservation," as well as the "integrity," of Connecticut's community colleges.

[Kathy Fischer, President, University of Connecticut Professional Employees Association \(UCPEA\):](#) [H.B. 5300](#) would provide "necessary legislative oversight of any merger within the CSCU system," and Ms. Fischer supports the legislation because "Transparency and accountability are critical." In the past, the BOR and CSCU has "hire[d] upper-level management to support a consolidation while student services are understaffed and underfunded," which has meant that new administrators are being hired while faculty and staff "that works directly with students" have been cut. At Connecticut's community colleges, departments are already understaffed in areas "that directly serve students and money is being diverted to dozens of positions far removed from where teaching and learning happen." As for the decision to merge Connecticut's community colleges into one institution, "Community colleges should be just that—institutions that serve the individual needs of their diverse communities," and many of the "benefits from the consolidation...can be done without merging the twelve colleges." Students at Connecticut's community colleges are "majority black and brown, working class and qualify for Pell grants," and will "stay in Connecticut to live and work." According to Ms. Fischer, "consolidation, by its very nature, is not in line with the demands of equity or antiracism," as "Real equity would be giving these students every opportunity to succeed by investing more in their education." Finally, these institutions of higher education must be kept "strong for the state's most underprivileged students by protecting the jobs that directly serve them."

[Seth Freeman, President, Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges \(4Cs\)](#): The merger of Connecticut's community colleges is "akin to a downsizing," and "was never designed to either (a) improve our colleges, or (b) advance equity," but instead is about "creating a simpler, cheaper system." Financially, this merger "is simply a diversion of state resources and funding away from community college campuses to system managers in Hartford and New Britain," which results in "gross layers of redundant and wasteful system management." While Connecticut's community colleges are facing "severe challenges" and something must be done, "CT State Community College, is not the answer." Changes outlined in the merger like "seamless transfer, and better resources and improved advising through the Guided Pathways model," could be implemented "without moving our colleges to a single accreditation." In conclusion, Connecticut's community colleges should be "independent, diverse, full-functional," but are "tired of the mismanagement, deception and obfuscation of CSCU managers," and therefore, Mr. Freeman supports [H.B. 5300](#).

[Carl Guerriere, Interim Director of the Center for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, Capital Community College](#): Mr. Guerriere supports [H.B. 5300](#) so that "some sense of democracy can prevail and the people can have an opportunity to voice their opinion on the merger of the community colleges," and to allow legislators to correct "this enormously misguided attempt that has been a sham." The consolidation of Connecticut's community colleges "has wreaked havoc on our system," as Mr. Guerriere has never witnessed "morale so low as this expensive, top-down approach dismantles efficiencies and adds expensive administrators, yet purports to put students first." Every aspect of Connecticut's community colleges "is being changed," and "Purported best practices are being implemented too fast and inconsistently often with disastrous results." Therefore, Mr. Guerriere is asking the Committee to "Help protect the Community Colleges" with the passage of [H.B. 5300](#), and that while administrators "frequently state the consolidation is to achieve equity, the reality cannot be further from the truth."

[Ed Hawthorne, President, Connecticut AFL-CIO](#): The merger of Connecticut's community colleges was "proposed to save money" by consolidating all twelve institutions "into one single accredited institution with twelve branches," but it has instead meant "staff reduction by attrition, which also adversely impacts services for students." While the BOR is "building an administrative layer to oversee college operations separate from the CSCU system office," employees and faculty have "experienced problems getting paid and basic human resource questions have been left unanswered." The money spent "on these new administrators reduces the investments we make in our students," and is in "direct contradiction to cost saving measures enacted by Governor Malloy." Decisions like the closures or mergers of colleges and universities "should not be made exclusively by politically appointed officials who operate in a myopic bubble with little or no accountability to taxpayers." [H.B. 5300](#) would allow the Connecticut General Assembly to "have oversight of mergers and closures of higher education institutions" as the state's legislators "have the context to understand how a proposed merger or closure will impact the state overall, not just the Board of Regents' balance sheet."

[Thomas Jackson, Professor and Chair of the Business Department, Norwalk Community College](#): As an attorney, Mr. Jackson finds the merger to be "greatly flawed" and doesn't believe that the "legislation establishing the Board of Regents" gives the BOR the "authority to take this action of consolidation without legislative approval." Therefore, not only does Mr.

Jackson support [H.B. 5300](#), but "I believe it is imperative the Board's authority be clarified." This legislation "would clear any ambiguity in the interpretation of the Board of Regent's authority to take this consolidation action" by making it clear that the BOR "does not have the authority to consolidate twelve community colleges without legislative approval."

[Zak Leavy, Legislative and Political Associate Director, AFSCME Council 4](#): Mr. Leavy of Council 4 supports [H.B. 5300](#) because it "would prevent the Board of Regents from unilaterally closing institutions" and allow the Connecticut General Assembly to "retain oversight of any closures so the impact can be fully vetted by elected officials." Council 4 also opposes the "continuation of the consolidation of the regional-community colleges" and believes that "It is time that we invest and protect our higher education institutions so we can continue providing top-level services to students in our state."

[Maura O'Connor, Professor and Program Coordinator of Graphic Design and Director of the Hans Weiss Newspace Gallery, Manchester Community College](#): [H.B. 5300](#) would allow the state legislature to have "oversight of any merger within the CSCU System, a power that the Legislature used to hold." According to Ms. O'Connor, "Oversight is needed" because "the System is cutting from the bottom level of staff while adding to the top layer of management, creating a staffing crisis at the colleges." The passage of [H.B. 5300](#) would send a "powerful message that Connecticut is willing to keep the community colleges strong for our neediest students by protecting the jobs that directly serve our students." In IT, for example, "Understaffing and early retirements without replacements have made addressing student needs in digital technology courses extremely difficult." The consolidation is "nothing but a restructuring that adds many new administrators while cutting staff that works directly with students." Therefore, Ms. O'Connor supports [H.B. 5300](#) because it will help to protect Connecticut's community colleges and its students by giving them "every opportunity to succeed by investing more in their education."

[Stacey Zimmerman, Representative, Service Employees International Union Connecticut State Council \(SEIU CT\)](#): Ms. Zimmerman supports [H.B. 5300](#) because the "haphazard and top-heavy consolidation has demoralized both staff and students," as students are witnessing "their tuition going up and the frontline staff reduced," while faculty members are seeing "vital parts of their departments left empty while the administration offices grow." [H.B. 5300](#) would allow the legislature to work with Connecticut's community colleges to avoid a "faster, cheaper...education model" without "destroying what has built...success."

An additional [34 written testimonies](#) were submitted in support of [H.B. 5300](#):

- [Stephen Adair, Professor of Sociology, Central Connecticut State University \(CCSU\)](#)
- [Lois Aimé, Director of Educational Technology and Adjunct Professor, Norwalk Community College](#)
- [Sara Berry, Adjunct Professor, Manchester Community College](#)
- [Andre Blaszczyński, Professor of Business and Economics, Tunxis Community College](#)
- [David Blitz, Chair of the Faculty Advisory Committee, Board of Regents \(BOR\)](#)
- [Patty Burke, Adjunct Faculty, Manchester Community College](#)
- [Michael Butcaris](#)
- [Francis Coan, Professor of History, Tunxis Community College](#)
- [Lauren Doninger, Professor of Psychology, Gateway Community College](#)

- [Krystaline Gregory, Student, Tunxis Community College](#)
- [Kathleen Herron, Professor of Mathematics, Capital Community College](#)
- [Rebecca Hussey, Professor of English, Norwalk Community College](#)
- [Christine Japely, Professor of English, Norwalk Community College](#)
- [Diba Khan-Bureau, Professor and PC of the Environmental Engineering Technology Program, TRCC](#)
- [Steve Krevisky, Professor of Mathematics, Middlesex Community College](#)
- [Kevin Lamkins, Professor of English, Capital Community College](#)
- [Marcus Lawson, Professor of History, Capital Community College](#)
- [Susan Lounsbury, Professor of Mathematics and Discipline Coordinator, Tunxis Community College](#)
- [Rotua Lumbantobing, Economist, Western Connecticut State University](#)
- [Margaret Malaspina, Director of Financial Aid, Capital Community College](#)
- [John McNamara, Member, Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges \(4Cs\)](#)
- [Bill Meyerson, Professor of History, Housatonic Community College](#)
- [Catherine Milton, Professor of English, Norwalk Community College](#)
- [Conor Perreault, Librarian, Gateway Community College](#)
- [Laurel Peterson, Professor of English, Norwalk Community College](#)
- [Ira Rubenzahl, Resident, West Hartford](#)
- [Michelle Saindon, Professor of Mathematics, Tunxis Community College](#)
- [Colena Sesanker, Associate Professor, Gateway Community College](#)
- [Patrick Sullivan, English Department, Manchester Community College](#)
- [Kathy Taylor, Professor of Legal Studies, Naugatuck Valley Community College](#)
- [Sally Terrell, Humanities Department, Tunxis Community College](#)
- [Elle Van Dermark, Professor of History and Political Science, Asnuntuck Community College](#)
- [Jessica Waterhouse, Criminal Justice Program Coordinator and Faculty Member, Tunxis Community College](#)
- [Carmen Yiamouyiannis, Professor of Biology, Capital Community College](#)

An additional [10 verbal testimonies](#) were offered in support of [H.B. 5300](#):

- [Alina Wheeler, Student, Gateway Community College](#)
- [Cinthia Zuniga, Student, Capital Community College](#)
- [Dennis Bogusky, President, FTCT 1942](#)
- [John O'Connor, Professor, Central Connecticut State University \(CSCU\)](#)
- [Sandra Couture, Educational Technology, Middlesex Community College](#)
- [Umesh Vig, Staff, Manchester Community College](#)
- [Rob Lavin, Information Technology, Tunxis Community College](#)
- [Joe Selvaggio](#)
- [Oluwole Owoye, Faculty, Western Connecticut State University](#)
- [Patty O'Neill, President, CSU-AAUP](#)

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

See agency response.

**Reported by: Austin Hyatt**

**Date: 3/28/2022**

