Higher Ed Coalition Advocates For Legislation To Rein In Board of Regents

Amid consolidation chaos, college and university unions call on legislature to advance bills that increase transparency, accountability at the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU).

HARTFORD, Conn. – Faculty and staff from the state’s community colleges and regional universities are joining forces at the Legislative Office Building today to urge leaders and members in the Connecticut House and Senate to move forward bills that increase financial transparency and accountability at the CSCU system office and Board of Regents (BOR).

The move comes amid increasing concern and frustration as the BOR funnels ever more money to the system office and diverts more money away from the institutions that directly work with and teach students. Since consolidation plans were announced in 2017, expenditures for the 12 community colleges have been mostly stagnant while the system office budget has increased by 54 percent. Such legislation is in dire need, according to labor coalition members who see a consolidation plan based on fantastical thinking where deep cuts to what are already austerity budgets somehow will result in improved student outcomes, higher graduation rates, and reductions in the achievement gap by way of a giant, top-down, bureaucratic model.

WHO: Faculty, staff, students from Connecticut’s community colleges and regional universities.

WHAT: A press conference urging legislative leaders to move forward bills that would increase accountability and transparency at the Connecticut Board of Regents.

WHERE: Room 1C of the Legislative Office Building, located at 300 Capitol Avenue in Hartford, Conn.

WHEN: Friday, March 6, 2020, at 10:30 a.m.

In a unanimous vote of the Higher Education Committee last week, SB104, "An Act Requiring Financial Transparency of the Students First Plan" and HB 5112, "An Act Concerning The Budget of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities" were moved out of committee and onto the House and Senate. Other bills also heard in the Higher Education Committee include HB5114 that would require training for new regents and HB5113 that would require legislative approval for any closures of a public higher education institution. The higher education labor coalition is also calling for these two bills to be voted out of committee and moved to the floor.
President of the Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges (the 4Cs) Maureen Chalmers echoes exasperation of union leaders and members across public higher education: "this plan, called 'Students First,' has already steered tens of millions of dollars into a central office that does not educate anyone, while starving the campuses of needed resources. The system office budget has increased from $30.3 million in 2017 to $46.7 million for fiscal year 2020 – a 54 percent increase."

Dennis Bogusky, president of the Federation of Technical College Teachers (FTCT), AFT Local 1942, said, "the only things we have seen so far in the implementation of 'Students First' is a sharp reduction in the number of faculty and staff working at the colleges and the hiring of more high-priced administrators. Replacing professional educators with more bureaucrats and administrators is not a recipe for success."

Patty O’Neill, president of CSU-AAUP, stated, "while the community college consolidation does not affect the universities directly, our members also are opposed to this plan. Many of our students who graduate from our universities have earned at least some of their credits at a community college. We have a responsibility to speak up for those students and for the institutions that serve some of the most economically challenged young people and adults in the state."

"The American Association of Community Colleges issued a report in 2014 that states for every $1 in taxes invested in community colleges there is a $6.80 return on investment for the taxpayer and students earn back $4.80 for every dollar spent on their education," said Lois Aime, director of educational technology at Norwalk Community College and Faculty Senate President. "Why isn't Connecticut willing to commit to the future of the state by funding public higher education so that it can support the education of all of the students who attend our public higher education institutions? These are the individuals who will stay in our state after graduation."

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