



CONNECTICUT STATE
COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES
BOARD OF REGENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

**Testimony by Philip E. Austin, Ph.D.
Interim President**

Board of Regents for Higher Education
Connecticut State Colleges & Universities
Higher Education and Employment
Advancement Committee
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Good afternoon Senators Bye and Boucher, and Representatives Willis and LeGeyt. My name is Philip E. Austin and I am, as you know, the Interim President of the Board of Regents for Higher Education. The Board of Regents governs Connecticut's four state universities, 12 community colleges, and Charter Oak State College, the state's only public, fully-online institution. I am here to offer testimony on components of the Governor's proposed bill regarding higher education, as well as two other bills on your agenda, and I am happy to take any questions you may have.

As you know, the search for the next President of the Board of Regents for Higher Education is currently underway. The Regents' Search Committee (RSC), chaired by Lewis J. Robinson, is working to produce a position profile, solicit applications, review candidates, and, ultimately, recommend a final candidate to Governor Malloy for appointment. Throughout the search process, the Regents' Search Committee has been assisted by the Systemwide Advisory Committee (SAC), composed of faculty, staff and students from across our 17 campuses, as well as representation from the private sector.

The Regents are working toward recommending a candidate to the Governor during the month of April, and the successful candidate will begin his or her tenure sometime during the summer. Understanding the impact that a large-scale reorganization can have on an organization, the Regents Search Committee is seeking to identify dynamic, proactive, and energetic individuals who will be able to provide steady leadership and move the Connecticut State Colleges & Universities forward over a long period of time.

The Board of Regents for Higher Education is supportive of a change in the statutory term of the president. Currently, the president's term is coterminous with that of the governor. The president of the Board of Regents should work closely with the governor and his or her commissioners, particularly on issues of workforce development, the alignment of our programmatic offerings to private sector needs, P-12 matters, and other critical issues that necessitate higher education and government partnerships. However, the leader of the Connecticut State Colleges & Universities, much like the leader of the University of Connecticut, should have his or her term set by the recommending authority, in this case, the Board of Regents for Higher Education.

In light of the current search for a new President of the Board of Regents for Higher Education, this statutory change will better enable the Regents' Search Committee to attract and retain a highly-qualified leader, whose term as the president of the Board of Regents, under current law, may expire only 18 months after he/she arrives.

Secondly, and of key concern to leaders on our campuses, is the Governor's Scholarship Program. The staff at the Board of Regents for Higher Education's system office has been involved in productive and ongoing conversations with the Governor's Office regarding this proposal. We have several concerns about the proposal as it is currently drafted, and how it will impact a large number of our students, particularly at the community colleges.

Almost 11,000 community college students received awards from the Connecticut Aid to Public College Students (CAPCS) program during the 2011-12 academic year, equating to over \$11.4 million in funding. The legislation as currently drafted would reduce this number almost three times, to less than 1,500 community college recipients who would receive about \$3.7 million collectively.

We understand and support the goal of the proposal – to attract and retain high-quality students into undergraduate programs at Connecticut public and independent higher education institutions – but believe it must also be balanced with the equally critical goal of increasing attainment among nontraditional students and students between the ages of 25-44 who predominantly enroll part-time.

As currently drafted, the Governor's Scholarship Program would restrict eligibility to first-time, full-time students. To support state efforts to ease credit transferability and to support completion among returning students and those students between the ages of 25-44 who typically attend part-time, we believe eligibility should be extended to part-time and transfer students. In addition, the proposal limits eligibility to students who are working toward their first associate's or first bachelor's degree, which indirectly works against an agenda that promotes a way to seamlessly transfer between our 17 institutions. To address this, we believe eligibility should be capped at the equivalent of eight full-time undergraduate semesters of 120 attempted credits. Students attending part-time who receive the Governor's Scholarship should have their attendance prorated to provide the same access to the state's financial aid dollars.

Another key concern we have is the cost of textbooks, which is currently excluded in the eligible award amount under the proposal. By adding the cost of textbooks, the aid program will better support completion goals rather than simply access goals.

Provisions involving campus employment, which supports student engagement and promotes a sense of accomplishment from earning money to pursue personal educational goals, have been struck from this proposal. Community colleges use 25-50% of current CAPCS funds to support campus employment, and we believe this should be allowed to continue.

Lastly, under the recently-awarded GEAR-UP grant, which will help to significantly increase the number of low-income students prepared to enter and succeed in post-secondary education, and provide scholarships for eligible high school seniors, students would receive priority access to existing state financial aid dollars. We believe this priority access, for some of the state's neediest students, must continue under this new proposal.

We remain willing and eager to work with the Governor and the Legislature to fine-tune this proposal to ensure it does not inadvertently negatively impact some of our state's neediest – and most promising – students.

I would also like to note that we are continuing to have conversations with the Office of Policy and Management about the proposal to include fringe benefit costs in the total block grant amount. We understand the need to be responsible for our spending, and furthermore, do not oppose the idea of including fringe benefit costs in the total block grant amount for the Connecticut State Colleges & Universities, but we have some concerns about the way this proposal is structured which we are currently discussing with the administration.

Before I answer any questions you may have, I did want to mention two other bills that are on your agenda today. The first is Senate Bill 868, "An Act Targeting State Financial Aid to Support Technical Training." The Board of Regents system office staff has been working with outside groups on this concept, and believes that offering the opportunity for students to receive financial aid for specific, targeted, technical training resulting in industry-recognized certificates or credentials in the high-demand fields of health care, manufacturing, transportation and energy is a step in the right direction. However, given the current proposed restructuring of the Governor's Scholarship, we could only support this proposal if it were in the form of an additional appropriation provided for community college students on top of the funding allocated for the Governor's Scholarship.

Lastly, I would like to provide comment on Senate Bill 476, "An Act Requiring Input From Local Manufacturers in Developing Manufacturing Technology Programs at the Regional Community- Technical Colleges," and suggest that the intent of the bill – to ensure industry participation and involvement in the curriculum and programmatic offerings at the manufacturing centers – is already happening. As you know, the 2011 Jobs Bill provided funding for the creation of three new manufacturing centers, modeled after the successful Asnuntuck model, at Housatonic, Naugatuck Valley and Quinebaug Valley Community Colleges. Soon after the Jobs Bill passed, the Board of Regents created a Statewide Advanced Manufacturing Advisory Committee, chaired by industry partners, and composed of Board of Regents leadership, local industry leaders, the Workforce Investment Boards, and representatives from the four manufacturing centers. This committee must also review any and all curricular changes, refinements or enhancements prior to review and approval by the Board of Regents. In addition, each of the new manufacturing centers also created a Regional Manufacturing Advisory Council to support their work, and help provide funding and facilitate the hiring of new graduates of the program. The Board of Regents recognizes and values local industry involvement and believes strongly that these centers would not have moved forward under such an aggressive timeline without intense industry involvement.

Thank you again for your time on these important matters, and I am happy to take any questions you may have.