

Dear Hiring Search Committee,

I am writing to express my interest in the position of Chief Executive Officer at Norwalk Community College (NCC). The position fits well with my education, professional experience, and most importantly, with my commitment to advancing equity and excellence for community college students, faculty, staff and our surrounding communities.

I have a Juris Doctorate degree, and I bring over 15 years of experience providing counsel and direction to local and state government agencies, including providing oversight of internal audits and evaluations of institutional policies and performance, with the goal of improving the delivery of public resources and services.

My legal training and professional experiences have enabled me to successfully manage many of the complex issues facing Connecticut community colleges – including managing institutional transitions, improving institutional efficiencies and responding to significant fiscal constraints.

Over the last year and a half, I have had the privilege to serve as Interim CEO of NCC, and have provided consistent, engaging and strategic leadership. As Interim CEO, I have strengthened the relationships between college administration and officers of the College Senate, Student Government Association and the NCC Foundation. I have revitalized the college's relationships with district superintendents, local business and community leaders. Having the opportunity to work closely with these key stakeholders, I have gained a broader perspective of the challenges and potential opportunities ahead.

As a current member of the local college community, I am well positioned to immediately and without disruption, utilize the strength of these relationships to serve as an advocate and champion for community college students, faculty and staff. If given the opportunity, I would be poised to build upon the accomplishments of the last six years, which are outlined in my resume and highlighted below.

Prior to my 2019 interim CEO appointment, I served as a vital member of the executive leadership team under multiple titles. Within my first 90 days at NCC, after an unanticipated departure of the Dean of Student Affairs, I assumed responsibility over Student Services.

During my temporary appointment, I successfully advocated for funding to support Symplicity Accommodate, which streamlined the academic adjustment process. This also provided greater access to data to track institutional trends related to student accessibility services.

Building on this success, and in partnership with Human Resources Administration services, I initiated the College's transition to Symplicity advising software. This allowed the college counseling department to monitor academic progress of students and provided the foundation for the college's early alert system and case management advising model. I attribute the

achievement of this institutional goal to my understanding of the need for greater collaboration across functional lines. I also credit the accomplishments achieved during those five months, to my ability to quickly identify opportunities to improve organizational efficiency, develop cross-functional relationships and my commitment to inclusive and people-centered leadership.

Collaborative and shared leadership have enabled me to increase participation and engagement by faculty and staff, and allowed me to successfully advance NCC's, and CSCU system priorities. I am especially proud of my success in implementing a college-wide system of advising, one of the college's strategic priorities.

Over the years, NCC has taken significant steps to increase graduation rates and improve student success. In the college's January 2017 NEASC progress report, the college outlined its goal to implement a comprehensive advising model by Fall 2017.

While some progress was made, the college community struggled to overcome loss of momentum, due to numerous leadership transitions. Specifically, between 2017 and 2018, 4 of the 6 critical members of the senior leadership team transitioned out of the college, followed by the retirement of the College President in 2019.

During this time period, I prioritized the recruitment and development of a strong leadership team and embraced a "boots-on the ground" leadership style. This approach fostered the sharing of institutional history and knowledge and affirmed to NCC faculty and staff the importance, and urgency of collaborative contributions to our student success initiatives.

Having served as a member of the college's management council and College Senate, I have demonstrated the ability to engage and mobilize the college community, for the purpose of, implementing procedures and practices that increase operational efficiencies, reduce expenses, and support improved student outcomes.

In 2019 I restructured the college's management council. Under my leadership, the council is responsible for initiating review and assessment of institutional practices/procedures that created barriers to student's success. Based on student survey data, the council identified opportunities to increase access to institutional aid and expand institutional payment plan options to credit and non-credit students. Several recommendations were adopted for January 2020.

I believe the ability to effectively engage and mobilize stakeholders across the campus is critical to the advancement of our shared goals of student success, academic excellence and community engagement. Given the opportunity, I welcome the opportunity to further discuss my qualifications, share additional insights and learn more about your vision for NCCs leadership.

Sincerely,

Cheryl C. De Vonish, J.D.

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**Executive Profile-** Purpose driven executive with demonstrated ability to transform institutional culture and climate through cultivating relationships across a broad range of institutional constituencies and community stakeholders. I have 15 years of public service experience, and a track record of improving institutional efficiency and outcomes through large scale initiative design, implementation, workforce planning and development. I am a collaborative leader and creative problem solver with demonstrated ability to identify institutional opportunities and resources to support success of students, faculty, staff, and advance institutional equity. Professional areas of expertise include:

- **College Administration & Management**
- **Strategic & Operational Planning**
- **Employee / Labor Relations**
- **Relationship & Resource Cultivation**
- **Student Affairs**
- **Diversity, Inclusion & Equity**
- **Community/Civic Engagement**
- **Internal Communication Strategies**

## Professional Experience

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### **Interim Chief Executive Officer - Norwalk Community College,**

Norwalk, Ct July 2019-Present

Serving as College's Chief Administrator. Responsible for the management and administration of college operations, annual budget, and strategic plan implementation. Lead and provide oversight of College's Executive Cabinet and management council-in establishing and advancing College's priorities.

Serve as Ex Officio Director of NCC Foundation board, support college advancement and fundraising efforts.

#### Notable Contributions and Accomplishments:

- NCC/Quinnipiac University Transfer Agreement
- Initiated assessment of institutional practices/policies that created barriers to student success. As a result, college expanded access of institutional aid to students
- NCC chosen as 1 of 11, minority serving institutions in the nation to implement NASA's Community College Scholars Program
- \$250,000 Foundation Award to expand NCC Child Development Lab School with future plans to solidify community partner to expand childcare service with revenue generating potential
- Uplift@NCC- Student Success Initiative in support of male students of color, identifying and addressing student outcomes and key organizational equity gaps Secured \$55,000 initial funding grant
- Equity Data Walk- Community Convening of community partners/foundations, NCC & k-12 educators and administrators to examine gaps in student outcomes based on gender, race & ethnicity
- College-wide Implementation of Case-management Advising Model
- \$ 1 Million award for the expansion of NCC Makerspace & provide technological upgrades to NCC Film & TV Studio
- Initiated college marketing retreat, resulting in redesign of enrollment guides and creation of Meta-Major student guides
- Assessed NCC's Winter Session offerings and set goal to increase online offering for Winter 2019. This resulted in a Winter Session enrollment increase of 31%; the highest ever

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#### COVID-19- College Response, Continuity of Operations, & Related Accomplishments

- Secured \$200,000 federal COVID-relief grant
- Initiated student survey to determine impact/needs surrounding COVID- Survey covered financial hardships, food insecurity, mental health and technology needs. Results supported fundraising efforts which generated \$100,000 for student emergency needs grants and 1 year commitment of \$1,000 a month to support the colleges food pantry.
- Increase availability of mental health counseling to NCC students
- \$3,000 grant to expand Signal Vine Texting capacity

#### **Chief Operating Officer - Norwalk Community College- Norwalk, Connecticut May 2018-July 2019**

Responsible for the coordination and administration of College's day-to day operations. Provided direct oversight of College's Information Technology, Campus Security, Budget & Finance, Facilities, Public Relations & Marketing, Human Resources and Payroll services. Managed College's Capital Projects

#### Notable Accomplishments:

- Ten Year Campus Master Planning Study
- Comprehensive review, update and implementation of College's Campus Safety Protocols and Procedures

#### **Chief Diversity & Equity Officer - Norwalk Community College (concurrently served as Special Advisor to President) Norwalk, Connecticut March 2015-May 2018**

Provided oversight and direction over College's hiring and recruitment procedures and identify opportunities to advance College's priority of recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce. Developed and facilitated institutional programming and training to support College's diversity, inclusion, and equity efforts. Oversaw and provided leadership for the implementation, administration and monitoring of College's Affirmative Action Program. College's Diversity & Equity initiatives and compliance programs, including Title VII, Title IX, and ADA programs. Prepare agency's response to EEOC, CHRO and DOJ filings

#### Notable Accomplishments:

- Established sustainability of Minority Fellowship Program
- Developed and implemented recruitment procedures that advance college diverse hiring goals
- Presentation to Executive Cabinet & Mgt Council Presentation on Succession Planning: Developing Future leaders of NCC
- STRIVE@NCC- established College committee which provides professional development and networking opportunities to emerging leaders within the institution. Secured \$3000 grant for workshops

#### **Special Advisor to President - Norwalk Community College**

Oversaw College's Public Relations & Marketing Office

Provided guidance and support to College President and executive leadership team in coordination implementation of strategic initiatives and special project. Facilitated annual Executive Cabinet retreat. Advised executive leadership team on variety of issues, including, labor relations, student affairs, risk management, and community relations

#### Notable Accomplishments:

- June 2015-October 2015- provided oversight and management of Student Affairs offices
- Implemented Symplicity Advising Software in Academic Counseling Office and Symplicity Accommodate in Accessibility Services
- Spearheaded development and implementation of public relations online requests system
- College transition from paper to electronic catalog. Developed and implemented annual process to ensure accuracy

**City of New York, Director of Institutional Diversity & Equal Employment Opportunities  
New York, N.Y 2012-2015**

**City of New York, Deputy Director of Internal Affairs & Employee Discipline  
New York, N.Y. 2009-2012**

**City of New York, Senior Counsel,  
New York, N. Y 2006-2009**

### **Teaching Experience**

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Adjunct Lecturer, Norwalk Community College 2016, 2018

### **Education & Bar Admission**

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Albany Law School - J.D. May 2003

Binghamton University - Bachelor of Arts, Psychology -May 2000

Spelman College 1996-1997

New York State Bar Admission 2004

Connecticut Bar Admission 2011

### **Community Engagement & Professional Affiliations**

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Family & Children's Agency, Board of Directors	October 2017-Present
Norwalk Chamber of Commerce, Board of Directors	2019-Present
NorwalkActs, Board of Directors	2019-Present
Horizons@NCC, Board of Directors	2019-Present
Stamford Cradle to Career- Transition from High School Workgroup	2016-2019
National Association of Student Affairs Professionals (NASPA)	2018-Present
Connecticut Association of Diversity & EEO Professionals, Member	2015-Present
George Crawford Black Bar Association Member	2012-Present
Connecticut College Access & Success Mentor	2017
National Association of College and University Attorneys (NACUA), Member	April 2015-2018
Connecticut Veterans Legal Center, Volunteer	2014-2016
Norwalk Chamber of Commerce Leadership Institute Graduate	October 2015
National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education Member	2016- 2019
Urban Assembly Academy of Government & Law, Mentor	2010-2014
Youth & Community Development Advisory Board	2009- 2012

### **Presentations, Lectures & Awards**

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Emerging Trends in Education, Norwalk Chamber of Commerce Leadership Institute	2020, 2021
A Conversation with Kweisi Mfume, The Relevance of Community Colleges Today	2015
NCC Women of Distinction Ceremony, Keynote Address	April 2015
NCC Student Government Association- Campus Community Award Recipient	May 2017
YWCA of Greenwich Panelist: Eliminating Racism- A 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Approach	March 2015
Manhattanville College Panelist: Women of Culture and Their Profession	February 2009