



June 3, 2020

New England Commission on Higher Education (NECHE)
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100
Burlington, MA 01803

Dear NECHE Commission members:

On behalf of the Connecticut Workforce Development Council (CWDC) – the association of Connecticut’s five workforce development boards – I want to express the conceptual support of Connecticut’s public workforce system for the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities’ (CSCU) proposed One College/Students First initiative. This initiative aligns with several CWDC priorities and seeks changes intended to generate improved outcomes for students, employers, and the state economy. The CWDC specifically supports the following One College/Students First priorities:

- **Increase graduation rates.** Current graduation and program completion rates for all CSCU students are too low. Many One College/Students First strategies (see subsequent bullets) aim to increase graduation and completion rates by providing the supports necessary for students to graduate. Increasing graduation and completion rates promises to improve employment outcomes for students and to strengthen the workforce pipeline for employers.
- **Reduce disparities.** Connecticut needs to upgrade every segment of its workforce to drive economic recovery and growth, yet Connecticut’s equity gap has persistently remained among the highest in the nation. The One-College/Students First initiative aims to remove persistent barriers to historically underserved students to improve academic outcomes for racial and ethnic minorities and strengthen Connecticut’s workforce.
- **More demand-driven.** Connecticut workforce boards have increasingly been collaborating with their community college partners to design and deliver demand-driven programming through workforce pipeline programs and other initiatives. These demand-driven collaborations have produced tremendous benefit for CSCU students and for employers. We therefore support One College/Students First efforts to deeply engage employers in program design and delivery to ensure that CSCU programs prepare students to step into jobs immediately following graduation or completion.
- **Regional focus.** Connecticut’s public workforce system is organized regionally to maximize and align resources, engage industries and individual companies through regional sector partnerships, and support potential and current workers who live and work in communities across the state. Each workforce board partners with the community college Regional Presidents who serve on our Boards of Directors and who foster relationships across schools and regions to implement training strategies. We support the One College/Students First regional institutional organization, which aligns with the public workforce system structure and has eased engagement in working with the community colleges.
- **More advising capacity.** The public workforce system faces similar advising and case management capacity constraints as the CSCU. We have seen that efforts to increase advising capacity and streamline advising and case management processes make a real difference for our customers. We therefore support the One College/Students First emphasis on reducing student-to-advisor ratios and providing each student with a dedicated advisor.
- **More resources to address barriers.** Many community college students and public workforce system customers face specific barriers to completing their education, securing a job, and retaining a job. We have



seen the impact of resources dedicated to helping our customers address barriers such as transportation and child care, among others. We are heartened by the One College/Students First initiative's acknowledgment of the importance of non-academic barriers, and we support CSCU efforts to deliver the wrap-around services each student needs to achieve their goals.

- **Easier transfer/articulation.** Despite CSCU efforts to facilitate transfer and articulation, we believe it is currently too challenging for CSCU students to transfer from one community college to another or from a two-year college to a four-year institution. We therefore support One College/Students First efforts to align curriculum across the campuses so that students at all colleges have access to similar high-quality programs and can transfer seamlessly between schools. We believe this will promote graduation and inspire employer confidence in the value of a CSCU degree, regardless of the awarding institution.
- **Streamline administrative processes.** We support One College/Students First efforts to streamline and standardize enrollment and financial aid processes across all CSCU institutions, and to facilitate students taking classes at CSCU institutions other than their "home" campus. These efforts promise to re-direct some of the time, effort, and resources spent on administrative processes to activities that support student success.
- **Focus resources on student success.** One College/Students First promises to save the CSCU money while increasing resources for student advising, wrap-around services, and other investments in student success. In an increasingly challenging budget environment, we believe that focusing limited resources on student success will yield the best outcomes for students, employers, and the state economy.
- **Scale effective practices.** Connecticut's public workforce system has – facilitated by the Workforce Development Council – increased efforts to bring effective practices such as the workforce pipeline model to scale statewide. We therefore support the One College/Students First emphasis on facilitating the scaling of effective practices across the CSCU system.

On behalf of Connecticut's five workforce development boards, the Connecticut Workforce Development Council is pleased to offer its conceptual support for your One College/Students First initiative. We are confident these reforms will improve our collective efforts to lift up Connecticut's students, workers, businesses, and economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bill Villano". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Bill Villano
Chair, Connecticut Workforce Development Council