



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Office of Higher Education

Testimony
by
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before the
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
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Senator Bye, Representative Haddad, Senator Linares, Representative Staneski, and distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of **H.B. 5037, An Act Establishing the Division of Postsecondary Education**. Similar to last year, the Governor's budget proposal and this bill seek to merge the Office of Higher Education into the State Department of Education. As I have previously testified, as more emphasis is placed on P-12 & Higher Education coordination to increase levels of college and career readiness and opportunities, it is imperative that Connecticut take advantage of every means to do so as well. The merger of the Office of Higher Education and the State Department of Education will largely facilitate such coordination through the use of shared resources to achieve these important goals and guide Connecticut's educational system into the future.

Over the last several years, as with most state agencies, funding for the Office of Higher Education has been cut quite significantly in order to meet the goals of a balanced budget, and as a result, the OHE has fewer resources to rely on in order to maintain its current programs and statutory obligations, let alone grow and expand the opportunities it offers to students and institutions alike. I am very proud to say that my staff has met these challenges head on by cross-training in many different job functions, taking on numerous additional responsibilities and finding ways to effectively and efficiently accomplish our core functions of providing

protections and opportunities for Connecticut's students and serving as a facilitator for institutions. Still, however, evolving and increasing programmatic demands have left us short of the most important of our resources – human resources.

The merger of the two agencies will provide the OHE with the opportunity to add the considerable talent of the SDE employees to our own in order to further our goals and objectives. Similarly, I believe SDE will benefit from involvement in the many outstanding programs administered by my office, some of which reach into the K-12 system. In fact, over the past year, with our move to 450 Columbus Boulevard, we have worked in close proximity to our colleagues at SDE and established informal working relationships which have begun to reap benefits for both agencies. SDE IT employees have been a tremendous help to our agency as it begins the process of converting our email and redesigning our website to be added to the state servers. They have also assisted in back office functions in areas such as human resources and payroll. Likewise, OHE employees have offered assistance to SDE's talent and legal offices.

However, these examples are just the beginning of what we can accomplish together. Similar functions carried out by both agencies can be combined, and existing resources shifted to not only create more efficient education and postsecondary agencies for the students and institutions of Connecticut, but allow us to focus our resources on longer term goals. For OHE, this includes shifting to a higher education research and policy resource for both the legislative and executive branch, establishing more meaningful partnerships with labor and economic development offices to help create forward thinking workforce development plans, and serving as a more supportive resource for our postsecondary career schools and institutions of higher education.

The utilization of shared resources would enhance each agency's respective mission and help shore up areas where support is lacking. Most importantly, however, I do want to emphasize that the Division of Postsecondary Education would remain a separate and distinct division which retains its own statutory authority. Our core mission and responsibilities will not be absorbed by SDE, but rather enhanced by the support and talent of their employees. We enjoy excellent relationships and robust support from our institutions, students and advocates alike. This merger is an attempt to increase our ability to support our core constituencies, and have a greater role in the discussion of Connecticut's future by providing meaningful research and programs in the postsecondary education arena. It will indeed heighten our presence and abilities, rather than dilute them.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this proposal. I welcome any questions you may have.