

June 1, 2020

New England Commission of Higher Education

3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100

Burlington, MA 01803

Monica Maldonado

37 Meadow Street

Ansonia, CT 06401

Students First, Connecticut State Community College

Dear President Brittingham,

Thank you for the opportunity to express my support of Students First for Connecticut State Community College. My name is Monica Maldonado, student leader at Gateway Community College, Student Regent, and Chair of the Student Advisory Committee to the Connecticut Board of Regents.

The Student Advisory Committee for academic year 2019-2020, presented our mission to illustrate the intent of Students First as being an effort to unify Connecticut's Community Colleges. As Chair, I promised to provide neutral information about the Students First initiative to consolidate our twelve community college institutions into a single accredited institution with twelve campuses. I led with the understanding that our job, as members of the committee, was not to voice our position on the matter, but rather bring about student concerns regarding Students First, to the attention of the Connecticut Board of Regents.

The Student Advisory Committee platform garnered student involvement from each of the Connecticut State Colleges & Universities (CSCU) seventeen institutions within the state, having representation from each institution for most meetings this academic year. The Committee had direct access to President Ojakian and received firsthand knowledge about the innerworkings of Students First. President Ojakian effectively delivered monthly informative updates with transparency on the process of seeking accreditation as a single community college.

As a committee we were able to observe the focus on student success with the goal to improve graduation and completion rates, advisement systems, and student learning outcomes. We were able to participate in the Students First Academic and Student Affairs Consolidation Committee, including the General Education, Shared Governance, and Curriculum Alignment Work Groups. We gained insight on the necessity for the system to pool our resources rather than stretching them thinly. We were able to communicate with our campuses on how Students First accomplishes this by deploying resources

centrally, and sharing non-student facing services regionally and locally, in order to save money and improve quality overall.

The Student Advisory Committee was able to engage on topics such as the Public Safety Task Force and its initiative to make policies consistent across all campuses including the appointment of a public safety director for each campus. We were first to learn about the strategic implementation of the LiveSafe App, an app commonly used at universities across the nation.

In late October, we saw the Connecticut State Branch of the NAACP pass a resolution officially endorsing the Students First plan, noting the attention on closing the equity gap for minority students. We learned about the promising Guided Pathways Advising Model and Case Management Model. We expressed our approval of and promoted the UPASS program.

Additionally, we had the privilege to hear from Presidential Fellow Dr. David Levinson, who patiently and intently addressed numerous questions regarding Students First. I believe this meeting was critical in building trust within the student body.

Lastly, I would like to point out the seamless transfer to online learning in the face of the recent COVID19 global pandemic, as evidence of the ability for all twelve Connecticut Community College institutions to work together to ensure student success. This level of teamwork, spearheaded by the CSCU office, is a prime example of how one unified institution can be achieved. And with that, as Chair to the Student Advisory Committee, I express my full and enthusiastic support of CSCU's Student First plan for Connecticut State Community College.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Monica Maldonado". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Monica Maldonado