

Pennsylvania Senate Democratic Policy Committee
PASSHE Redesign
Ross Brumagin (Edinboro) and Shawn O'Dell (Lock Haven)
May 17, 2021

Ross Brumagin, President, AFSCME Local 2329, Edinboro University

Members of the Committee, my name is Ross Brumagin, and I am the President of AFSCME Local 2329, which represents workers at Edinboro University. Thank you for your time today.

I am a High Voltage Electrician at Edinboro and have worked there for 24 years. Our union represents custodians, groundskeepers, maintenance workers, equipment operators, laborers, clerical employees, administrative assistants, management techs, and IT staff at the university.

These are hardworking people who keep the campus operating safely and efficiently – even throughout a pandemic. Now their jobs are at risk. And we've been steadily losing AFSCME-represented positions for a decade now. We had 231 positions in 2011, 217 in 2015, and now we have just 125.

We just went through layoffs in November 2020 because of PASSHE's so-called "financial sustainability" policy. Then on top of that, they are proposing to integrate Edinboro with the Universities of Clarion and California under the umbrella of one accredited university – and eliminate even more jobs.

One of my biggest issues with PASSHE's integration plan is that it's not really much of a plan at all. There's conjecture. There are ideas. There are proposals. But I don't see much of a plan. It seems like they just want to ram this thing through and figure it out later. It leaves a lot of uncertainty in a time when we have more than enough of that. It also does not give us the opportunity to present alternatives prior to the integration, because we don't even know what exactly integration is going to look like.

Not only will the proposed job cuts harm the furloughed workers and their families; it spells trouble for the campuses' surrounding communities. A recent report shows that the consolidation of six universities into two, and job cuts at all 14 of the campuses, will hurt local economies in a way similar to the ongoing experiences in Pennsylvania with factory closures and job losses. Our

commonwealth simply cannot afford the economic strain this proposal would bring.

And while much has been said about stakeholder input, I have seen nothing come of our meetings with the chancellor and other PASSHE officials. The people I represent are once again suffering the consequences of decisions they had no input in.

When I had the opportunity to speak with Chancellor Greenstein, I pointed out to him that the State System used to receive about 75 percent of its funding from appropriations by the state government. Now, it's only about 20 to 25 percent, leaving the burden on tuition and fees, which is a real problem with dwindling enrollments.

It seems to me that the chancellor needs to do more to avoid layoffs and fight for adequate funding of the State System rather than proposing these drastic cuts. He is supposed to be our voice. Instead, he is proposing to eliminate some of the lowest paid jobs in the system while degrading the quality of education and service on our campuses. On top of that, he threatened to dissolve the entire system if he didn't get his way. The students, faculty, and staff at our state universities deserve better.

I urge you to please stand with us in this fight to save jobs and the quality of higher education in Pennsylvania. Again, thank you for your time, and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have to the best of my ability.

Shawn O'Dell, President, AFSCME Local 2360, Lock Haven University

Members of the Committee, my name is Shawn O'Dell, and I am the President of AFSCME Local 2360, representing more than 150 employees at Lock Haven University. Thank you for your attention to this important issue today.

Local 2360 represents custodians, groundskeepers, secretaries, carpenters, electricians, locksmiths, mechanics, and a wide array of support staff at the university.

I work as a Clerk Typist 3 at LHU in our Center for Global Engagement, as well as our Global Honors Program. Not only am I an 18-year employee of LHU; I am an alum. I started college at age 35 and earned my BA in English. I also have two children who are LHU graduates. We have degrees with the name of a university that may one day be unaccredited because of PASSHE's consolidation plan.

Through my experiences, not only as a student but also as a member of the staff, I have seen firsthand the dedication of both faculty and staff on our campus, as well as the lasting positive impact they have on students. That is why it is so painful to now see PASSHE attempt to eliminate the jobs of so many of those faculty and staff – especially when it is clear that not nearly enough effort was made to avoid layoffs.

Thankfully, we have a good working relationship with campus-level management at LHU. When they actually took a step back and looked at the numbers, they realized the proposal to outsource our custodial jobs brought miniscule savings, and it was simply not worth it to uproot the lives of these employees. I firmly believe that would be the case at other universities, as well, if they took some time to really look into it. While we are extremely happy to have saved our 40 or so custodial jobs, 30 percent of faculty are still in jeopardy, and that is equally unacceptable.

What is also unacceptable is what I am seeing directly through my job in the Center for Global Engagement. The proposal to consolidate our universities will hurt our already-struggling programs for international degree seeking students and exchange students. If we consolidate, that is going to make it difficult for international students to fulfill educational requirements that are mandated by immigration law. International students require on-site, face-to-face interaction

and are limited to only a certain percentage of online instruction, which PASSHE's proposal relies on heavily. This will affect whether these students can stay at Lock Haven and complete their degrees. And as I said, these programs are already struggling due to lack of recruitment efforts. We've had as many as 125 matriculating international students in the past. We now have 16. And by the way, international students pay a premium price to come to school here, and now it will be even more difficult, if not impossible, to do so.

And I am already hearing from our Admissions office that students who paid their deposit for the fall semester are being contacted and told their major of Recreation Management is no longer available. I have no idea how PASSHE intends to increase enrollment at LHU while eliminating majors and hurting the ability for international students to come here for their education.

I believe in Lock Haven University, and now I feel like I am watching it be destroyed before my very eyes. No matter how much the purveyors of consolidation assure us that our campus will maintain its identity while being a subsidiary of a three-campus university, it is clear that the current proposal poses serious harm to our universities as we know them.

I echo my Edinboro brother's sentiments, and I urge you to please help us protect our state universities. Thank you for your time, and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have to the best of my ability.