



Testimony of Dr. Jamie Martin
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(APSCUF)
Before the Senate Democratic Policy Committee
Policy Hearing on Public Higher Education
Monday, May 17, 2021 – 10am – 1pm

Chairwoman Muth, Chairwoman Williams, and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the State System plan to consolidate six universities into two trios. My name is Dr. Jamie Martin, and I am the president of the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties (APSCUF). APSCUF represents about 5,000 faculty and coaches who work at Pennsylvania's fourteen state-owned universities.

After attending the Special Board of Governors meeting on April 28, 2021 and watching [House](#) and [Senate](#) hearings about consolidation, I still have a multitude of questions regarding the consolidation plans for the [western region](#) (California, Clarion and Edinboro) and the [northeastern region](#) (Bloomsburg, Lock Haven and Mansfield). I will focus the questions on three issues or areas: concerns for our students and the impact of consolidation on their educational and athletic experiences; the impact of the consolidation and the significant loss of jobs prior to the consolidation, and the subsequent impacts on our communities; and the costs versus savings of these plans.

The concerns we have for our students range from questions regarding course availability, especially opportunities for face-to-face classes, and the way in which the 25% price reductions described in the plans will be achieved. We have heard about expanded opportunities for our students that will result from the consolidation, but these can only occur if students choose to take a significant number of courses online OR transfer to the university that is offering face-to-face courses in their desired major. One example that has been offered to highlight expanded opportunities is that the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accredited business courses at Bloomsburg will be available to Mansfield and Lock Haven students after the merger. However, in looking at the proposed program array, nearly all business courses are set to be offered in a face-to-face delivery mode at the Bloomsburg campus, so the students at Mansfield and Lock Haven will have to take the required business courses remotely. These types of realities need to be communicated to our students. Our members have questions about accredited programs more generally, and have further questions with regard to one campus in the trio being identified as the main campus (even if only for administrative purposes) while the other two are incorporated as other teaching locations. We recognize that closing a university requires the action of the state legislature, but could a 'main' campus reduce course offerings and the degrees offered at another teaching location?

We all are interested in reducing the cost of attendance for students, and the plan notes that the goal is to reduce **student** by 25%. I believe that many would interpret this as reductions in tuition, fees, or housing costs – the kinds of things that would keep money in the pockets of our students. However, according to the plan (as found in a footnote on page 62 of the Northeast plan): "Price reduction will occur as a result of increases in retention, progression through gatekeeper courses, and participation in accelerated programming, in addition to reductions in performance gaps,



student fees, and operational costs.” Suggesting that the cost of attendance is reduced by improved retention rates, etc., seems misleading to our students.

Thus, I fail to see how price reductions will result from consolidation — and shouldn’t we strive to improve retention rates, provide opportunities for accelerated programming and the like for students at all 14 of our universities, not just those who are part of the consolidation? Senator Lindsey Williams asked the Chancellor on April 29 if the student savings outlined in the plan could already occur without consolidation and the answer was “it can be, but isn’t”. This leads us to a larger question of why the System is not focusing efforts on helping students and their families navigate these already available paths instead of assuming that consolidation will lead to more students taking advantage of these options.

We have ongoing concerns about our student-athletes and the availability of the athletic teams on which they play — or are being recruited for — on the campus that they attend. We understand that this is the intent outlined in the plan, and in fact, maintaining athletic teams is identified as being important to reducing community impact. Guaranteeing the maintenance of all athletic teams at each of the six campuses is problematic given that the NCAA has not rendered a decision on this, and if they do it would be an exception to their rules.

The impacts on the community are identified on page 21 of the Northeast plan and page 22 of the West plan. The plan suggests that community effects will be minimal because, primarily, the three existing campuses in each region will remain. The implication is that consolidation will not negatively impact the community. However, there will be changes that could negatively affect the community: the loss of jobs. [A 2015 PASSHE report](#) detailed the economic impacts of the 14 universities on the communities in which they reside, and on the Commonwealth. That report indicates that the combined economic and employment impact is \$6.7 billion, with student, faculty and staff spending constituting 56% of the total. The plan presented on April 28 details the ongoing effort to “align operating expenses with annual revenue as well as achieve specified **student to faculty ratios**,” and to do so prior to the consolidation. In short, the purge of faculty and staff that began this year will continue into the next and will be mostly completed prior to the consolidation. While the State System does not classify these layoffs as part of consolidation and does not address them in the report, these losses will have wide-ranging community impacts. Those facts should be more clearly stated in this plan.

We had hoped to see the cost savings that would be realized by the consolidation. In my [remarks during the Board of Governors quarterly meeting](#), I expressed the concern that the costs would outpace the savings. According to information presented in the report, there is an estimated \$18.4 million in cost savings from executive leadership, management, and administrative support staff savings **phased in over five years**. The plan outlines the costs for the consolidation over the same time: \$29.6 million. This includes \$14 million for the western consolidation, \$8.6 million in the northeastern consolidation, and additional startup costs for both integrations of \$6.8 million. In 2021–22 alone, the estimated costs are \$18.3 million. Thus, the 2021–22 costs for the consolidation are the equivalent of the five-year savings.

We appreciate the time and effort of the many individuals who developed the plan being considered. We also understand the concerns expressed by the Board of Governors about the need to do something to deal with the financial difficulties facing the State System, but we ask: Does this plan address those concerns? We hope this plan will be carefully and critically reviewed prior to the Board of Governors voting on it. We hope that you will hear what the public views are, and we suggest that — given the ramifications of this consolidation — there should be more than two public hearings. We believe that 180 minutes of public Zoom comments and the submission of a web form on the PASSHE website are the bare minimum.



Do we really think that our Commonwealth and its student and families deserve the minimum when it comes to the future of our State System?

We do not understand the haste in this process. The planning began in October 2020, during a pandemic, the Board of Governors voted to move it forward six months later, with a final vote in two months. If this plan is approved in July, we hope that there will be a mechanism put in place that will allow for course correction, if needed, but one does not currently exist. The consolidation of six of our universities into two represents the most dramatic change to our system since its inception, and it will involve six universities that each have existed for more than 150 years. We need to be certain that this is the right thing to do – not just the most expedient one.