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June 2, 2021

Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education  
Board of Governors  
Dixon University Center  
2986 North Second Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17110-1201

To Whom It May Concern:

I write to you today to voice my opposition to the proposed "integration" plan for PASSHE universities. The April 28 plan presented to the Board of Governors does not identify a single option that makes PASSHE financially sustainable. While it is important to implement new ideas to address the needs of Pennsylvania college students and our Commonwealth, this plan raises more questions than it answers, and fails students, employees, PASSHE towns across Pennsylvania, and ultimately, taxpayers.

Access to post-secondary education is more important than ever, as Chancellor Greenstein noted in his comments on April 28 that while 60% of Pennsylvania jobs require a high-quality certificate, an associate's or bachelor's degree, currently only about 47% of Pennsylvanians have one of these credentials. We must continue to offer affordable options across the state for Pennsylvanians to receive the training and education needed for our 21st century jobs.

PASSHE universities have long been economic drivers of upward economic mobility for Pennsylvania students, and the economic engines that are vital to their host communities, especially in rural areas. Our PASSHE schools not only provide a high-quality education to their students, but also provide excellent jobs to community members, keep local businesses going and provide cultural opportunities.

We need a plan that stimulates PASSHE universities, not one that pushes them in a race to the bottom, paring back jobs, academic programs, athletic programs, and student services – all moves that will make PASSHE schools less desirable to students, not more.

I have many concerns regarding this plan, including the forced hybrid model, which will require PASSHE students to take an unknown number of college courses virtually. This approach also creates equity issues, where less-advantaged students will struggle to find internet access, computers, and quiet spaces to learn. Depending on University Foundations to fund these initiatives long-term, which seemed to be the Chancellor's suggested approach at the April 28 hearing, is not acceptable, and indeed, only exacerbates the gulf between Universities with robust sources of private dollars at their disposal and those without.

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The plan contains several unanswered questions that should be red flags for Pennsylvanians, including the question of who ultimately will control the branch campuses proposed by the plan, little consideration of the consolidation plan's impact on students, and no guarantee that the universities will be able to keep their athletic programs.

Most importantly, the plan contains no cost savings. As outlined, the consolidation plan does not save money, and will not decrease tuition. The proposed long-term costs of the plan will ultimately cost more than investing in the system to stabilize it.

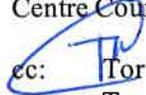
It is critical that we preserve Pennsylvanian's access to State System schools and preserve the opportunities and jobs that our Universities provide. We welcome a discussion of options that will actually create a sustainable, affordable, high-quality PASSHE. The consolidation plan does none of these things.

I ask that you vote "NO" on this plan or any other that will not save taxpayer dollars, preserve Pennsylvanians' access to Universities, and only worsen the existing inequities among PASSHE universities. Pennsylvanians deserve a plan that would demand adequate funding for our PASSHE schools and lift our state funding out of the basement. Pennsylvania's ability to educate college students in the years to come depends on a plan that puts students first.

Sincerely,



Scott Conklin  
Centre County State Representative

cc:  Tor Michaels, Chief of Staff  
Tom Wolf, Governor, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Daniel Greenstein, Chancellor, PASSHE  
Dr. Janet Irons