

Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties
Testimony Before the House State Government Committee
August 15, 2012

Hello, Chairman Metcalfe, Chairwoman Josephs, and members of the House State Government Committee. My name is Kenneth Mash, Ph.D., and I am proud to be a professor of political science at East Stroudsburg University. However, today I speak to you in my capacity as the Vice President of APSCUF, the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties. APSCUF represents the 6,000 faculty members and coaches at the fourteen state-owned institutions. Thank you for affording me the opportunity to testify today about these four pieces of legislation affecting the State System of Higher Education (PASSHE).

Our organization staunchly opposes all four bills before the committee - House Bills 2442, 2443, 2444, and 2446 - because they will have a detrimental impact on the fourteen state-owned universities. These four bills are part of a larger 10-bill package of legislation, erroneously titled the "Keep Tuition Affordable" package, that includes changes to faculty workload and institutional funding at the state-owned universities.

Collectively and individually, these bills illustrate the sponsor's clear misunderstanding of academia, the operations of the State System of Higher Education, and the work of the faculty. Undoubtedly, if enacted, these bills will erode the quality and prestige of our universities and ultimately hurt our students.

According to its founding legislation, Act 188 of 1982, PASSHE has a state-mandated mission to provide a "quality education at the lowest possible cost to students." APSCUF faculty and coaches take pride in this mission and aim to make PASSHE a respected leader of public education in the nation. While the sponsor of this legislation calls his legislation the "Keep Tuition Affordable" package, in reality the bills do little to keep tuition rates down. Instead, these bills would leave our Commonwealth's universities a shell of their former selves.

I'd like to start with House Bill 2442, which eliminates mandatory student activity fees assessed by the universities. Under this legislation, students would be allowed to opt out of paying the student activity fees, which are assessed by the individual universities and vary by institution.

On its face, this bill seems rational, especially for nontraditional students who do not spend a lot of time on campus, but eliminating the mandatory activity fee hurts all students. Activity fees play a significant role in supporting the entire campus community by providing a diverse range of services. More importantly, through their Student Government Associations, the students themselves determine how the funds are allocated. Activity fees are used to pay for athletics, clubs and organizations, music and theatre groups, student newspapers, television and radio stations, community service projects, and leadership and career development

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programs, all services and extracurricular activities that students expect to have when they go to college. At some campuses, part of the activity fee goes to pay for the transportation needs of students. Many Student Government Associations use some of the funds to sponsor lectures, concerts, and other events that are open to the public.

For the 2011-12 academic year, the average student activity fee at a PASSHE university was \$189 per semester.

The services provided by the activity fee enhance student engagement and create a robust campus environment, and they help to promote the prestige of the university. Allowing students to opt-out of the activity fee and enabling the free-rider problem will effectively eliminate hundreds of university services that enhance the educational environment for students and benefit the community. Eliminating the modest fee means that students will not get the services they expect and deserve, and our universities will cease to be full universities.

Extra curricular activities are extremely important for student engagement and success, but APSCUF's primary concern is the classroom experience. Having a strong reputation for high quality academics mean attracting and retaining high quality faculty and staff. APSCUF is extremely concerned about the effects that House Bill 2443 and House Bill 2446 will have on retaining quality professors and staff members.

House Bill 2443 eliminates free or reduced tuition to spouses, children, partners, or relatives of State System employees. Reduced tuition is a tool used by universities across the country to attract and retain gifted faculty and staff. Eliminating the benefit will hurt the State System's ability to remain competitive and attract high-quality professors, administrators, and other employees.

Tuition benefits are provided by the PASSHE/APSCUF collective bargaining agreement, but are not unique to State System universities. All four state-related institutions provide some type of tuition benefit, and approximately 80 percent of private colleges and universities offer tuition incentives to attract highly qualified employees.

House Bill 2443 only applies to the fourteen PASSHE schools. If passed, it would put the state-owned universities at a disadvantage when attracting and retaining quality faculty and staff.

It is worth noting that within the State System, the largest users of the tuition benefits are members of AFSCME, who are certainly not the highest paid employees on campus. In 2010-11, of the 4,792 total tuition benefits granted, 2,100 went to AFSCME, 1,500 of which were used by children of AFSCME employees. 1,500 went to APSCUF; over 1,000 of those were used by children of faculty members.

Additionally, a March 25th Patriot News article quotes Director of Public Policy and Research for the national American Association of University Professors as saying that these tuition benefits do not “add any real cost, or it adds very minimal actual cost to the college or university actually offering it because they are not admitting students who wouldn’t otherwise qualify to attend...In many cases, they are probably adding space to an admission class.” Curtis also stated that tuition benefits attract students who would have gone to other colleges. Anecdotally, I would add that my personal experience indicates that students who have parents working at the university perform above the average, and they improve the overall classroom experience for all of the students.

The second bill that directly impacts academic quality is House Bill 2446, which eliminates paid sabbaticals to all PASSHE employees. As is the case with the tuition benefit legislation, this bill will make it nearly impossible for PASSHE universities to remain competitive with the state-related universities and private colleges.

Since the 1880s, the sabbatical has been recognized worldwide as a critical tool to enhance the quality of faculty, instruction, and curriculum at universities. Sabbaticals are not exclusive to the State System. Today, nearly every college in the United States offers some form of sabbatical leave. Public universities, private colleges, community colleges, trade schools, and even businesses use sabbaticals to remain relevant in a competitive environment. Our universities run national searches for faculty. This legislation would make it difficult to attract the best faculty.

PASSHE universities have a stringent sabbatical review process. Faculty members must work at least seven years in the State System with five-years at a specific university before they can request sabbatical leave. There is a comprehensive application and review process that includes identifying objectives and goals for the sabbatical and how it will benefit the institution. University presidents, who approve the leave, may attach any regulation they deem necessary to make sure a faculty member uses sabbatical time for its intended purpose.

If granted, sabbaticals are used by faculty to improve professional knowledge and skills, develop new methods of teaching, and conduct intensive research in their field—all benefits they bring back to the classroom. If professors are denied the opportunity to enrich their abilities, the relevancy of the curriculum will diminish. Ultimately, the students will suffer.

Because of the judicious approach used by PASSHE universities in granting sabbaticals, the actual number of PASSHE professors on sabbatical is currently around 2 percent; much lower than the 7 percent maximum allowed by contract. During the 2011-12 academic year, fewer than 150 of our 6,000 faculty members took sabbatical leave.

So far I have talked about legislation that detrimentally impacts student academics, instruction, and extracurricular needs. The last bill on the committee's hearing agenda affects student safety and the physical learning environment.

House Bill 2444 prohibits the State System from entering into contracts for any construction, maintenance, repair, or renovations on any campus after June 30, 2014. Starting July 1, 2014, PASSHE must submit a written request to the Department of General Services, which must provide written certification that an emergency condition exists and that it jeopardizes health and safety of students, employees, or the public.

Because of increasingly limited budgets, PASSHE universities are already far behind in building repairs and maintenance. In fact, its building maintenance backlog totals \$2 billion. Sixty percent of PASSHE's buildings have not been renovated in 25 years. According to Sightlines, a national firm specializing in benchmarking higher education facilities, PASSHE is not adequately investing in building maintenance. Instead of saving money, this bill would create situations where the health, welfare, and safety of students and the public would be put at risk.

These four bills, coupled with the rest of the so-called "Keep Tuition Affordable" package single out the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education and cripple its ability to provide a quality education. If these bills are passed, they will change the very nature of the State System. Enrollment will decrease at all fourteen universities, faculty members, coaches, and staff will leave for better jobs, buildings will become useless, and ultimately, our students will suffer. There is no benefit to any of these bills, and I don't think anyone on this panel wants Pennsylvania to be known for inferior state-owned universities.

Thank you for your time.

