



March 21, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

Last week the two legislative groups most focused on the merger proposal had considerable conversation and heard again from both systems. A sense of urgency is being driven by USNH 's financial projections, but I have also continued to caution policy-makers about the risks I see in moving too quickly.

A House Education subcommittee was charged with providing policy recommendations to House Finance Division 2, which ultimately will vote on the proposal as part of the budget in HB2. On Friday the Education group discussed all the input it received and developed a recommendation for an alternative to the HB2 proposal, which would essentially slow things down and build in a time for exploration and planning. This would include the creation of a coordinating council that would address a range of questions involved in a potential merger, work with stakeholders and develop plans to meet the various objectives. The subcommittee developed a list of key questions/considerations it would like this proposed council to address. These cover a range of issues including mission, transfer, funding, regional impact, student success, duplication, potential for cost savings in the long-term vs. short-term, co-location, accreditation, bargaining units, financial aid and student debt, enrollment and demographics, and more – a very comprehensive list that further illustrates the many unknowns and key considerations of changing the structure of public higher education.

House Finance Division 2 will assess Education's input and will vote on this section of House Bill 2 on Tuesday of this week.

From there, HB2 goes to the full House Finance committee and then to the full House as part of the State budget. "Crossover" April 8 marks the point at which legislation moves from one chamber to the next, so the conversations will repeat in the Senate.

I continue to speak with legislators about this matter and hope I am appropriately reflecting what I am hearing from employees and other stakeholders, which is an openness to consider change but a desire to do so responsibly and in a way that honors the community college mission, demographics, and stakeholder needs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan D. Huard".

Susan D. Huard
Interim Chancellor
Community College System of NH