

ASSEMBLY DEMOCRATS NEWS RELEASE



www.assemblydems.com

FOR RELEASE:

Jan. 15, 2009

Derek Roseman
(609) 292-7065

CONTACT:

Assemblyman Diegnan
(908) 757-1677
Assemblyman Cryan
(908) 624-0880

DIEGNAN/CRYAN BILL TO OVERHAUL HIGHER ED STRUCTURE, FISCAL MANAGEMENT ADVANCES

Measure Would Implement Many Recommendations of 2007 SCI Report

(TRENTON) – The Assembly Higher Education Committee today released legislation committee Chairman Patrick J. Diegnan and Assemblyman Joseph Cryan sponsored to improve the structure, financing and fiscal management of New Jersey’s system of higher education.

The bill (A-3245) aims to implement many of the recommendations contained in the October 2007 State Commission of Investigation (SCI) report “Vulnerable to Abuse: The Importance of Restoring Accountability, Transparency and Oversight to Public Higher Education Governance.” The report noted multiple instances where public funds were “vulnerable to waste, abuse and violations of the public trust.”

“The SCI report painted an unflattering picture of colleges and universities with little to no oversight and that had become bloated and inefficient,” said Diegnan (D-Middlesex) “The time has come for a radical change in the way the state provides for and manages its system of higher education. The state, its taxpayers and, most importantly, students deserve accountability and transparency.”

“New Jersey students who attend our public colleges and universities deserve the absolute best governance,” said Cryan (D-Union). “It’s the students who ultimately pay for the lack of oversight at our state schools.”

To implement the SCI’s recommendations for effective state oversight of public higher education, the measure would reestablish a cabinet-level position responsible for the oversight the state’s public higher education network, the first such post since the former state Department of Higher Education was disbanded in 1994. The new Secretary of Higher Education also would serve as executive director of the Commission on Higher Education, which would see its own membership increase from 11 to 15.

(MORE)

“For the past 15 years, state colleges and universities have been operating under a system of lax oversight and with the ability to spend tax dollars free of any real accountability,” said Diegnan. “The state’s hands-off approach created a higher education system that is not following any real cohesive or strategic path. We need to turn the Commission on Higher Education into a real force with a real mandate to direct higher education policy.”

In response to other recommendations contained in the SCI report, the Diegnan/Cryan measure would implement Sarbanes-Oxley-style fiscal reporting standards to improve accountability and would enact controls on higher education lobbying activities.

“Students deserve to know exactly how each penny they are spending on their education is being invested to benefit them and their classmates,” said Cryan. “Too often over the past decade-and-a-half we learned after-the-fact that administrators abused the trust they were given when the Department of Higher Education was eliminated. Those practices must stop.”

The bill also would expand the power of the New Jersey Educational Facilities Authority to issue bonds on behalf of a public or private college or university to allow for some forms of public/private partnerships, including the development of student housing and other revenue-generating projects.

The measure was released 8-2. It now goes to the Assembly Appropriations Committee for further consideration.

On the Net:

www.assemblydems.com

www.youtube.com/user/njassemblydems

[New Jersey Assembly Democrats on Facebook](#)