

Systemwide response to the federal “Dear Colleague” letter

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CSCU Community Message from Chancellor Cheng

Dear CSCU Community,

No matter where you are in your journey, whether you’re teaching in our classrooms, supporting student success behind the scenes, pursuing your education online at Charter Oak, cheering for the Blue Devils at Central, the Owls at Southern, the Warriors at Eastern, the Wolves at WestConn, or bringing your unique talents to one of our vibrant CT State community college campuses, you are an essential part of the CSCU family.

Our community thrives on the dedication, dreams, and achievements of our students, faculty, and staff from every corner of Connecticut and beyond. Together, we share a powerful mission: to provide accessible, innovative, and high-quality education that transforms lives and strengthens our communities.

As part of our commitment to this mission, our leadership team is closely monitoring recent federal directives issued by the new presidential administration. The Department of Education recently published a “Dear Colleague” letter addressed to all K-12 schools, colleges, and universities nationwide. This letter outlines how the administration interprets Supreme Court case law on race conscious admissions and its intention to enforce federal nondiscrimination laws in educational settings based upon a very broad application of that decision, emphasizing that compliance is essential to maintaining federal funding.

It is important to communicate that the “Dear Colleague” letter (DCL) is information as to the direction we can expect the federal government and the education department to move, but what the communication does not do is change the law. Our federal civil rights law and the statutory framework that governs non-discrimination (Title IX, Title VII, Title VI and ADA) have not been repealed and are still enforceable. In addition, we are also governed by state law which still provides robust protections here in Connecticut. Further, we do not interpret the DCL to require policy changes because CSCU institutions already have strong policies prohibiting discrimination, harassment, and retaliation.

At CSCU, we are firmly committed to upholding all state and federal law and are sensitive to the fact that federal funding plays a crucial role in supporting the success and well-being of all our students, faculty, and staff. We will continue to take necessary steps to ensure that we are following the law. We understand that these outlined changes may bring uncertainty and concern for some members of our community. Many of you may be looking for immediate answers to your questions, and while we are actively seeking clarity, it is important to remain patient and calm as the situation unfolds. We will do our due diligence, conduct necessary reviews to ensure continued compliance and best practices, and assess what if any potential impacts there are to our

institutions and those we serve. Rest assured, we are dedicated to supporting you and keeping you informed as more information becomes available.

To foster open dialogue and support our community, the System Office's Legal and Compliance team will be hosting six virtual town halls (one for each institution) in the coming weeks. These forums will provide faculty and staff with the opportunity to ask questions and receive updates directly from System Office leadership, including General Counsel Karen Buffkin and Chief Compliance Officer Cameron Liston. To ensure all questions are addressed, we will provide a form where questions can be submitted in advance. Additional details, including dates, times, and participation instructions, will be shared soon.

We are all in this together, and our strength as a community lies in our support for one another. If you need assistance or someone to talk to, please take advantage of the many resources available on your campus. During this time, it is more important than ever to support one another with compassion, respect, and understanding.

As we navigate this unprecedented environment together, remember that the strength of CSCU lies in our shared purpose and our commitment to lifting each other up. You are part of a community that values your contributions, supports your growth, and stands united in its mission to create opportunities and inspire success for everyone.

Together, we will continue to thrive, no matter the challenges or changes we face.

Terrence Cheng

CSCU Chancellor