



State of Connecticut
CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY
STATE CAPITOL
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

January 11, 2024

Interim President Dwayne Smith
Southern Connecticut State University
501 Crescent Street
Engleman Hall A211
New Haven, CT 06515

Dear Interim President Smith,

Since you were in attendance, you must be aware of the situation that occurred yesterday morning at the Greater New Haven Chamber Annual Legislative Forum, where the Governor, legislative leaders, senators, and state representatives spoke about legislative priorities. We were all disturbed by the spontaneous protest that emerged from various corners of the room by attendees. It seemed clear that this protest was an orchestrated event by several people. But we were especially disturbed by the grossly inadequate response from campus police, and the administration's failure to address this issue and de-escalate the situation. The Governor was left on stage in a very vulnerable position, as protesters were closing the doors to secure us all into one room. I did not observe a single action to take appropriate measures to secure the crowd and guarantee the safety of the attendees. If an attendee had begun to physically assault one of the protestors, the event could have spiraled into something that no one would have ever wanted.

Additionally, these protestors were allowed to continue chanting outside into the hallway. Was any attempt made by campus police to identify whether these individuals were students and if so, what action will be taken to address their conduct? The bottom line is that we felt unsafe as elected officials, and were especially concerned about the position that our Governor was placed in. We therefore request that you begin to evaluate the protocols you should have in place to address and de-escalate these types of situations. As an elected official, I have never felt so unsafe at an event, and I am very disappointed by the lack of security, and the failure of college administrators to react promptly. The right to protest certainly has its place on college campuses, but under no circumstances, should a group of individuals be allowed to close people into a room, and hijack a program without any type of response, especially when our Governor is on the stage. We would hope you, as well as other colleges and universities in our higher education system, evaluate how best to address these situations, in order to make sure that physical harm does not fall on innocent attendees and elected officials.

Sincerely,

Vincent Candelora
House Republican Leader
86th House District

Kathy Kennedy
State Representative
119th House District

David Yaccarino
State Representative
87th House District

Craig Fishbein
State Representative
90th House District

Paul Cicarella
State Senator
34th Senate District

CC:

Terrence Cheng- Chancellor of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities
Garrett Sheehan- President & CEO Greater New Haven Chamber