

March 31, 2015



The Honorable Don Gaetz  
420 Senate Office Building  
404 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100

Dear Senator Gaetz,

The Manatee Chamber of Commerce with over 2,000 members representing 76,000 employees in our area opposes Senate Bill 1252 relating to the name change of State College of Florida.

The Chamber is very concerned about the impacts of Senate Bill 1252 on our community's college, the State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota, and we urge you to not support this bill. The State College of Florida plays a central role in the higher education of our community. The college provides a low-cost start for many students who move on to the State's University system after earning their Associate of Arts degree and provides workforce education and training that directly benefits our economy. State College of Florida provides the educational opportunities that keep members of our community home and allow them to pursue low-cost higher education opportunities without disrupting their jobs and families.

State College of Florida's baccalaureate programs are very important to our community. These programs were developed in partnership with the business communities of Manatee and Sarasota Counties and address critical community needs not met by other local higher education institutions. The individuals seeking these degrees are typically working professionals who are trying to expand their education to advance their skills in the workplace without disrupting their jobs and families or acquiring education debt. Lengthening the time it takes for State College of Florida to offer a degree program that the community requests or to cap the allowed enrollment in these programs only serves to punish the students who could benefit from the programs and inhibits the college's ability to quickly respond to community needs.

Forcing State College of Florida to change its name now will confuse people in a very crowded higher education market. In 2009, words changed when Manatee Community College became State College of Florida, but the local commitment did not change. State College of Florida is as much this community's college today as it was as Manatee Community College or Manatee Junior College. There is no confusion in Manatee and Sarasota Counties on State College of Florida's role in the community or its mission. Using the word "state" in the name clarifies that the college is a public, open access institution, not a college seeking a state-wide presence.

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Ninety-two percent of State College of Florida's enrollment is from Manatee and Sarasota Counties.

Clearly, the college understands its service area, is deeply committed to its students and is dedicated to being responsive to community needs.

A name change also results in an unnecessary expense for the college, and in turn, the taxpayers who fund the college. The money State College of Florida would be forced to spend on changing signs, logos and documents could be much better spent on developing and enhancing academic programs for our area students.

Further, we are opposed to the expansion of the timeline for a college to receive approval for a proposed baccalaureate program, creating nearly a two year process and we encourage flexibility on the baccalaureate enrollment cap of five percent.

The Manatee Chamber encourages you to not support this bill. It is not only damaging to the State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota, but to Manatee and Sarasota Counties as well. As an alternative to opposing this bill we recommend an exemption for State College of Florida.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Trudy Moon

*Chairman-Elect of the Board*

*cc: Carol Probstfeld, President, State College of Florida*