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Testimony by Dr. George A. Pruitt Before the Assembly
Higher Education and Regulated Professions Committee
on Assembly Bill No. 1951 (The "University of New Jersey Act")

Chairperson Doria, Vice Chairperson Garvin, and distinguished members of the Committee. The legislation here under consideration in essence memorializes into law the Report of the Commission on the Future of State Colleges. I share an appreciation with the sponsors of this legislation for the outstanding work done by the public-spirited citizens who worked so conscientiously to bring forward meaningful improvements to enhance the state colleges of New Jersey.

Since the Commission issued its report in February, there have been wide-ranging discussions at each of our nine state colleges, statewide hearings held by Chancellor Hollander, hours of deliberation and numerous recommendations by the Council of State Colleges, and at least two pieces of legislation introduced before this body in response to the Commission's report. I am providing you, for the record, copies of a statement issued by my office responding to the Commission's report in February as well as my testimony before the Chancellor in May.

The outcome of all of this discussion has resulted in a rather broad-based consensus around two points. First, that the descriptions of both affliction and remedies suggested by the Commission were astute, accurate, and

correct; and secondly, that the methodology for achieving these remedies, namely the creation of a cosmetic entity called the University of New Jersey, while well-intentioned was misguided and inappropriate - a view as you know I share.

There are discussions that will conclude in the coming weeks in what I believe and expect to be an unprecedented consensus between the nine heterogeneous and diverse state colleges, the Department of Higher Education, and the Board of Higher Education, on an initiative which, if successful, will implement the spirit and substance of the Commission's recommendations but under a more appropriate and meaningful governance structure. It is my hope, it is my testimony, it is my request that the sponsors of this bill and the members of this Committee will defer action on this bill until the higher education community comes forward with its initiative and alternative which is consistent in spirit and intent with the legislation currently before you. We have a rare and unique opportunity in New Jersey to bring about a meaningful and long-lasting reform in the delivery of public collegiate education in this state. The significance of the proposed reforms are important and meaningful for the future of the education of our citizens and our state colleges. It is my earnest hope that this Committee, the Legislature, and the Executive will support the state college consensus and the Board of Higher Education in the initiative that I expect to follow shortly.

Thank you very much, and I am available for your questions.