



**To: The Honorable Mary Ann Handley, Senate Chair
The Honorable Roberta Willis, House Chair
The Honorable Anthony Musto, Senate Vice Chair
The Honorable Juan Candelaria, House Vice Chair
The Honorable Dan Debicella, Senate Ranking Member
The Honorable Pamela Sawyer, House Ranking Member
Members of the Higher Education & Employment Advancement Committee**

**From: Marc S. Herzog, Chancellor
Connecticut Community Colleges**

**Re: Public Hearing Testimony re HB 5368
An Act Concerning No Worker Left Behind**

Date: March 4, 2010

The concept included in HB 5368 to provide tuition waivers for unemployed individuals entering college is one which the Connecticut Community Colleges support in order to expand access for more students to pursue higher education. However we have concerns related to the funding mechanism proposed through reimbursement of waivers. The current statute that requires reimbursement for statutorily mandated waivers has a threshold of 5%. Despite waivers exceeding that limit by over \$2 million annually, the requested reimbursement has not been realized. The goals of expanding access to higher education and assisting unemployed individuals to obtain the knowledge and skills needed to reenter and advance in the Connecticut's Knowledge economy are laudable and an integral part of the Community College mission. However, Connecticut's Community Colleges are currently serving one third more credit students today than they were a decade ago. This fact, in combination with a biennial budget held below 2008 levels when headcount enrollments were 14 percent lower, threatens both access and success for students and could undermine efforts to improve the retention, persistence, and completion rates of all students. We are most interested in considering further how this proposal might be implemented to allow for the desired expansion of services and the inclusion of more students, but we clearly must consider the resources needed to adequately support the education of these students. Given the state's economic outlook for the coming biennium, it appears unlikely the appropriations suggested could realistically compensate for the additional revenues lost to tuition waivers.

In addition, we are currently expanding access to more adult learners under guidelines recently issued by the US DOE which allow student who are unemployed to qualify for a Federal Pell Grant. The impact of a tuition waiver on this eligibility for student aid is unknown and also needs further discussion.

Background:

Since 1998, Connecticut's Community Colleges have grown by over one-third with enrollments reaching record highs in each of the last five years. Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 have seen double digit increases in headcount and FTE enrollments system wide. There has been a 30.6 percent increase

in full-time enrollment since 2005, yet the majority of students still study part-time (61.2%) while also working to support themselves and their families while attending college. Forty-nine percent of students are between the ages of 22 and 50 indicating the significant role played by community colleges in educating Connecticut's adult learners. As the point of entry into higher education for over 50% of Connecticut's undergraduates in public higher education, including two thirds of the State's minority undergraduates, the community colleges consistently serve a non-traditional student population.

In order to achieve their academic goals, many of these students must overcome myriad obstacles including socioeconomic disadvantages, financial and family obligations, and a lack of the academic skills needed to be successful in college-level work. Often these disadvantaged students are low income students, students of color, disabled students or non-English speaking students, and all can be considered at risk of failing to persist and complete the programs needed to provide them with the skills required for economic self sufficiency. Each of these students needs academic and support services to help them succeed, and each community college strives to meet these needs through a variety of admissions and assessment, advising and academic services.

Another significant obstacle faced by many of these students is the burden of financing their educations. The Board of Trustees is committed to maintaining tuition and fees at the lowest possible level and to providing financial assistance to students predominantly through grants and scholarships. Fifteen percent of student tuition is set aside for student financial aid and a nationally recognized, on-line application and award process has succeeded in increasing aid applications by 19% since 2008-09 and by 67% since 04-05. Over a ten year period, applications for financial aid have increased by 110% and the total amount of awards has increased by 102%. In Fall 2009, over 15% of independent students applying for financial aid were either unemployed themselves or had a spouse who was unemployed – a statistic that provides a glimpse into the impact of the state's economy on students attending a community colleges.