

**February 28, 2013**

**Testimony before the Higher Education Committee**

**SB 844**

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**St. Vincent's College - Bridgeport**

**Thank you for this opportunity to address you today to speak on behalf of St. Vincent's College in opposition to the provisions in SB 844 that would merge the college and universities financial aid programs and add annual fees and fees for program approval and licensure and accreditation of the Private Colleges and Universities in Connecticut.**

**My name is Martha Shouldis and I am the President/CEO of St. Vincent's College in Bridgeport. Let me tell you briefly about St. Vincent's and some of the impact that these proposed policies will have on our students:**

- **St. Vincent's College is focused on the preparation of nurses and allied health professions, programs of study important to the economy of the state.**
- **Fall 2012 enrollment was 824 students, nearly double that of five years ago and is still growing.**
- **The average age of St. Vincent's students is 31**
- **In fall 2012, 85% of the students enrolled as part-time students as they are working adults supporting families and attending College.**
- **More than 95% of our students receive one or more forms of financial aid.**
- **99% of the students are Connecticut residents**
- **94% reside in Fairfield and New Haven Counties**
- **50% reside in the greater Bridgeport area – one of the Connecticut cities with the lowest average family income and one with the lowest college completion rates in the state.**
- **More than 90% of St. Vincent's graduates begin their healthcare careers in Connecticut.**
- **St. Vincent's is the least expensive of the private colleges in Connecticut with annual tuition and fees of \$9,300 per semester for full-time students.**

**I will speak first about the impact of the proposed merger of the state financial aid programs. This proposal includes provisions to eliminate state grants to part-time students. I will remind you that 85% of St. Vincent's College students are working adults enrolled as part time students, part time because that is what they can manage as they**

typically are supporting families and earning a portion of their tuition dollars. This fact is supported by the exceptionally high percentage of them who receive financial aid. The provision that grants would only go to full time students would add even more financial burden to the poorest of our students who benefit from the state grants.

Thus far in academic year 2012-2013 St. Vincent's has awarded \$2,873,062 in financial aid. Of this number \$308,568 is state grants and I thank you for that state support for the poorest of our students. However, I will point out that this is \$90,000 less than was awarded five years ago when our enrollments were half what they are now. I think this is important to note as this proposal further includes provisions to merge the financial aid programs and provides for OHE to take portions of the dwindling state grant funds to administer this merged program-monies that could be allocated to students if the grants would continue to flow to the Colleges as has been the practice.

The problem with the aid programs is that they have been underfunded over the past two years....not that they are fundamentally flawed. So it is not clear what is being fixed by merging the programs. While I understand the tough position you as legislators are in to cut the state budget, I do not believe you intend for even less monies be provided to college students who will make up our future workforce.

Simple math would show that the proportion of funding will likely skew towards the public colleges as they have more students. Keep in mind however, that all public college students are already subsidized by all of us who are tax payers in this State - this will subsidize them even further. In fields like nursing almost one half of the nursing graduates in the state are educated in the private colleges of the state. In the case of St. Vincent's students they are not only educated here but have a record of gaining employment here in Connecticut – they are an important part of the state health care labor pool now and in the future when another even more significant shortage of health care professionals is projected as boomers, like myself, retire in record numbers.

As for the Program approval provision of this bill, you have already heard that Connecticut is one of few states that regulate academic program approval in the nonprofit college sector. I do not support adding additional costs through the imposition of fees including a \$2000 annual fee for every in-state private institution and \$500 for an academic program modification. This would hit the bottom line of all the private colleges and universities and draw away even more dollars designated to support our students. Furthermore it would also disproportionately impact a small college like St. Vincent's as we would pay the same rates as the other colleges that are many times larger than us and which charge far more than we do in tuition and fees. We have absorbed all the additional costs that we can related to compliance with state and federal laws so the addition of the types of costs included in this bill, plus the cost of other regional and federal mandates we have to meet force us to choose between raising tuition against eliminating programs designed to support student success.

There is much more that I could add but I am cognizant of your time. Again I recognize the huge task you have before you with balancing the budget. We are doing the same task

**on our own campuses. I encourage you not to do so by jeopardizing state support for the education of our future workforce.**