



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
Office of Higher Education

Testimony
by
Jane A. Ciarleglio
Executive Director
Office of Higher Education
before the
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
March 19, 2013

Senator Bye, Representative Willis, Senator Boucher, Representative LeGeyst and distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bill 1139 - AN ACT CONCERNING CHANGES TO PROGRAM APPROVAL FOR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES.

I had hoped to come before you today with a compromise proposal regarding the program approval process. For those of you who have been on this committee for some years, and for those who are serving for the first time, this is an issue, of the utmost importance to the students and families of the State of Connecticut as well as to our colleges and universities.

The academic program approval process is first and foremost a consumer protection role that ensures when a student enrolls in a program at one of our Connecticut institutions, that program has an infrastructure to support the delivery of that program; and most importantly, the curriculum delivers content that ensures the student has a knowledge base in a specific field and is career ready when they graduate.

Having said that, I would like you to know that we are in continued conversation with our independent colleges and universities, the Governor's Office, and higher education leadership about a final compromise that we hope you will approve. I am sorry that we cannot bring the compromise specifics to you today, but we all believe that by ironing out the differences with the industry, always with a mindful eye towards consumer protection, we can present a final resolution to you very shortly.

The question of response time in a regulatory review is important to any regulated industry, and we are in agreement that there are ways to streamline the process, but without sacrificing consumer protection. While not too embarrass any one institution, I have attached a few real examples of why transparency and adherence to standards are of such great importance.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Examples

We currently have an application for a master's degree program which our review found does not meet standards for faculty qualifications. Upon bringing this to the institution's attention, they re-evaluated their faculty choice to teach in this program.

Another example: We recently reviewed a program that originally proposed offering medical training in a field that required a lengthy clinical component. Under current law, this clinical component could not occur in the state of Connecticut. In our initial review, no provision had been made to address how and where students would be able to complete a quality and safe clinical. Would students be advised they would have to seek a clinical outside of Connecticut? Who was willing to offer a clinical? What support services would be provided to the student in seeking a clinical outside of Connecticut? All of these questions – essential to quality medical training – were addressed by the institution only after our review brought them to their attention.

And, finally, I would like to share with you a proposal we received for an associate of science degree in dental hygiene where the admission requirements allowed for math and science pre-requisites to be accepted with a C-. The Office of Higher Education, along with our curriculum evaluator, indicated that these low admission standards did not adequately and objectively evaluate a student for success in the program. This is another example of how current regulations address a graduate's ability to pass a licensure exam in their field.