



Testimony to the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee on February 28, 2013, by Walter Harrison, president of the University of Hartford.

Good afternoon. I am Walter Harrison, president of the University of Hartford, and I am here today to testify against two provisions of SB 844: An Act Implementing the Budget Recommendations of the Governor Concerning Higher Education. I urge you not to implement these two programs: The creation of the Governor's Scholarship Program and the Imposition of Fees for Independent Colleges and Universities in the Program Approval.

I spent four very happy years as an undergraduate student at Trinity College in the 1960s and graduated in 1968. Thirty years later I returned to Connecticut to assume the presidency of the University of Hartford, and I am now in my fifteenth year in that position of leadership.

As both a student and as a president, I have always felt that the independent colleges and universities in Connecticut are both excellent and strong. I would make the case that Connecticut and Massachusetts have the two strongest independent higher education sectors in the country. This is something that our entire state, and you as legislators, should be extremely proud of.

Under the leadership of our current and last two governors and the legislature, the state of Connecticut has belatedly invested in strengthening the public universities in the state, the University of Connecticut and the universities and colleges that are now grouped under the Board of Regents system. I applaud you for doing that because by providing our citizens with both a strong public system of colleges and universities and an equally strong variety of independent colleges and universities we are preparing our citizens to be able to succeed in the increasingly knowledge-intensive world of the current workplace. As Governor Malloy has so articulately stated, this body of strongly prepared graduates will do more to make us economically competitive than any other single measure I can think of.

In advocating for his ten-year plan for strengthening the University of Connecticut, Governor Malloy cited the state of Michigan's commitment to public research universities as a competitive advantage. I was vice president for university relations at the University of Michigan for nine years and advocated for the University before the legislature, and let me say this directly: had I heard a Governor of Michigan say what Governor Malloy has said, I would have thought I had died and gone to heaven!

But having lived in Michigan and been a close observer of the higher education world both here and there, I can say this: Connecticut's private colleges and universities are hands down better than anything Michigan has to offer. Michigan has no Yale, no Wesleyan, no Trinity, no Connecticut College, no Quinnipiac, no University of New Haven, no Sacred Heart University, no Fairfield University, and no University of Hartford. And I am just naming some of our

private colleges and universities. Michigan has a collection of good, smaller liberal arts colleges, but nothing like the array of private institutions we have.

In the end, by strengthening the University of Connecticut and the Board of Regents institutions and leaving the independent colleges free to improve themselves you will be doing the best you possibly can to make our state competitive in a growingly knowledge-driven world.

Unfortunately, two pieces of Governor Malloy's budget package that are in front of you today will begin, brick by brick, to dismantle the strong array of independent colleges and universities we have developed. My question to you today is just this: why is it good public policy to weaken one of our strongest educational sectors for no apparent gain and no savings to the state budget?

Here is my sense of the overriding problems with these two proposals.

1. **Creating the Governor's Scholarships:** This legislature should be extremely proud of current CICS and CAPS programs. At very little cost to the state in administration of this program, you have provided scholarship support to deserving low-to-middle income students at both public and private universities. This proposal takes funds away from scholarships in order to administer a system that is designed, basically, to shift support to students at public institutions and away from independent institutions.

Why would you do this? If you don't believe in providing scholarship support to Connecticut residents at independent institutions, put that on the table and let's discuss this in the light of day? This seems like a calculated way to do that without being honest about it.

I am not here to brag about the University of Hartford, although I am very proud of what we have accomplished over the past fifteen years in attempting to be what we call "a private university with a public purpose." All of my sister institutions could make similar statements. So that you are clear about what we have done with the CICS scholarships: 40 per cent of our undergraduate students come from Connecticut, and 28 per cent of our undergraduate students are students of color. We have made this accomplishment without special financial aid for students of color and without using affirmative action in our admissions decisions. It is one of my fondest accomplishments. CICS scholarships have helped us make an excellent undergraduate experience available to low to mid-income level Connecticut residents without much cost to taxpayers. Why would we want to dismantle that?

2. **Making changes to the program approval process for independent colleges and universities:** Five years ago I appeared before you and argued that this entire approval process makes no sense. Thirty-six states save taxpayer funds by not requiring this sort of Byzantine process for state approval. Unfortunately, I was not able to persuade you of that then. I know there are ongoing conversations about making changes to the process and hope they are fruitful.

This change, however, would require independent colleges and universities to pay a fee for the privilege of having new programs reviewed as well as an annual fee for opening our doors each day. What ever happened to making Connecticut the innovation state? This is actually a tax on innovation. I cannot understand why you would want to create what is essentially a tax on innovation.

So what am I advocating? I never knew before now that I had an inner Nancy Reagan to channel, but here's what I suggest to you: Just say no to both of these proposals. They add nothing to the state and, together, send a strong negative message to those of us in the private sector. What possible benefit can be gained by that now?

I know that now is not an easy time to serve in the state legislature. The state faces very serious budget challenges. But neither of these two proposed changes makes any real difference in that challenge and both harm one of the state's strongest sectors, our independent colleges and universities.

I want to be honest. Neither of these proposals will bring about irreparable damages. But they will begin to dismantle one of the best parts of being a citizen of Connecticut, brick by brick. Is that really what you want to be remembered for?

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