

February 26, 2014

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee  
Connecticut General Assembly  
State of Connecticut  
300 Capital Ave  
Hartford Connecticut 06016

Mr. Bobby Berriault  
Student Senator  
Student Government Association  
Central Connecticut State University  
1615 Stanley Street  
New Britain, Connecticut 06050

Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee,

My name is Bobby Berriault and I am a student at Central Connecticut State University. I am writing in support of House Bill 5241. HB 5241 is an act that requires a study of a *pay it forward* college payment program. The state of Oregon has already created a pilot program to test this concept out. And if we are able to successfully study, pilot, and implement *Pay it Forward* here in Connecticut along the lines of what Oregon had done for the residents of their state; we can ensure that all of Connecticut's residents will have an equal opportunity to obtain a college education at one of the many public colleges and universities in our state; and we would be able to provide future generations with an equal opportunity to succeed regardless of their current socio-economic status.

I firmly believe that every child in our state and our nation should have an equal chance to succeed. Part of the American dream should be if you work hard, and if you get good grades; you should be entitled to a good quality college education at a public college. We are a public school. We exist to serve the public, and not to make a profit. This *pay it forward* program would give our entire state's citizenry the opportunity to attend a public college or university without paying tuition. This is not a wholly radical idea. In a matter of fact, up until 1971 - Connecticut's residents did not pay tuition at any of our state's public higher educational institutions. This *pay it forward* program would ensure that Connecticut's residents would be able to attend a public university at the same costs that our parents and grandparents used to pay. Upon leaving college, alumni would then be obligated to pay a certain percentage of their income over a set number of years.

Personally, I am struggling. I grew up really poor. I moved around from foster family to foster family, and it's a miracle that I'm even able to attend college at all. I'm a smart guy. I just never had the money or the resources that is needed in this day and age to succeed. The first two years I was able attend my community college for free. I got full financial aid and I didn't owe a dime. My first year here at CCSU I only had to take a few thousand dollars in loans. But within the previous year, my aid has been cut in

half and my student loan interest rates have doubled. Because of all this, I am going to end up owing \$33,000+ by the time I graduate – 75% of that debt I occurred within my last year here at CCSU. It wasn't my fault. It was just because of all the budget cuts at the state and federal level and my student loan interest rates doubling.

We are currently experiencing a national employment crisis. Many employers desperately need new workers, because many employers are unable to hire enough qualified and skilled workers. However the unemployment rate is hovering about 7%. And there are millions of people who are looking to obtain an education but they are unable to afford one. And for those people who do end up going to a four year university, the vast majority of graduates end up taking on an un-godly large amount of personal debt. 75% of all Americans currently hold personal debt.

Because of all of these facts, I strongly feel that the *Pay it forward* concept is an idea worthy of further study. The challenges to the future of our nation are great. And we need to start thinking outside the box when it comes to solving our nation's problems. It is clear to me that maintaining the status quo is not currently a feasible option, and so I want to encourage the passage of HB 5241 so that we can work together to come up with better solutions to help fix our state's education and employment crisis.

Please do not hesitate to email me at [Robert.Berriault@my.ccsu.edu](mailto:Robert.Berriault@my.ccsu.edu) with your questions, comments, or concerns.

Best regards,

Bobby Berriault  
Student - Central Connecticut State University