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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE REGARDING SB.30 AND FUNDING FOR REMEDIAL EDUCATION IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Good evening, Senator Cassano, Rep. Willis and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advance Committee. I am Roger Senserrich, Policy Coordinator at the Connecticut Association for Human Services. CAHS works to reduce poverty and promote economic success both through policy and program work.

Governor Malloy recently proposed an ambitious plan to revamp and revitalize Connecticut's public higher education institutions, Transform CSCU 2020 (SB.30). The plan includes new capital investments and new operating funds to improve college access and streamline credit and course transfer between schools in the system. Of all the pieces in this new plan, CAHS would like to stress the need for additional funds dedicated to improve remedial education and bolster college completion.

About two thirds of students entering community colleges are placed in remedial and developmental courses. The majority of them never complete the degree or credential they enrolled for: only 8% of the students taking remedial courses graduate in three years. This statistic is especially worrisome as it disproportionately affects African American, Hispanic and low income students: 72% of African Americans, 70% of Hispanics and 71% of poor students require remediation.

Connecticut's workforce will require more and more qualified workers in the common years. We are going to need more and more students to enroll and graduate from higher education institutions. This includes both recent high school graduates and, even more importantly, older workers trying to improve their skills, who often are discouraged by remedial classes. We can not afford our higher education system to leave any of them behind.

To address these issues, The General Assembly passed in 2012 "An Act Concerning College Readiness and Completion", PA 12-40. This legislation is an ambitious reform of the remedial education system for Connecticut's community colleges. PA 12-40 limits remediation for one semester and introduces courses with embedded remediation. For students who would not be able to participate in credit bearing classes in one semester, the legislation created the figure of

“transitional programs” where they receive remediation without being enrolled in community colleges.

Transitional programs will be, as a result, a key piece to guarantee open access to community colleges. These programs will be serving those students who need the most help to become college ready: minorities, older workers, low income. Unfortunately, PA 12-40 does not include sufficient funding for community colleges to provide transitional courses in an affordable manner.

This represents a significant problem for these students and our state. As transitional students are not enrolled in community college, they cannot use financial aid or scholarships to pay for the courses. Lacking funding, community colleges are forced to offer them at a loss if they want to keep them affordable, limiting how many students they can enroll. The potential result is limited programs with very high time commitments that do not serve the needs of adult students. Without additional resources, transitional programs would be an entry barrier for many students, as paid remedial classes or limited schedules might put college out of reach.

The lack of funding for transitional programs also limits community colleges’ ability to partner with adult education departments. Many states like Maine, Minnesota and Washington have been able to build very strong college access pathways by building partnerships between adult education and community colleges. Connecticut’s higher education institutions do not have the resources to build these integrated systems, key to serving adult workers.

As a result, CAHS strongly believes that Transform CSCU 2020 needs to include additional funding for transitional remedial programs to make higher education truly open for all. Transitional programs are a key first step for those students who have decided to take the step to improve their skills and earn a credential. We need to provide resources to community colleges to expand these programs and build a transitional system ensure that anyone who wants a college education has the resources and support to earn a degree.

The funding, in addition, needs to take into account the diverse needs of students that need remedial education. The focus should not only be on building bridges from K-12, but for adult workers as well. If we want Connecticut to have an educated, competitive work force, we cannot afford to leave these students behind.

Besides funding for remedial education, CAHS supports HB-5050, or “Go Back to Get Ahead”. According to a Harvard study, only 56% of college students in America graduate within six years¹, with a significant percentage dropping out due to cost. Offering incentives and assistance to complete their higher education would help close that gap.

¹ http://www.gse.harvard.edu/news_events/features/2011/Pathways_to_Prosperty_Feb2011.pdf

In addition, CAHS would like the committee to consider HB-5241 introducing a “*pay it forward*” model for higher education. Under this model students in public institutions do not pay any tuition for college up front; instead, they pay a fixed percentage of their income *after* they graduate. This income based repayment model is being considered in other states (Oregon, Washington), and has been the norm in Australia since 1989. It would greatly improve college access in the state.