



Testimony for
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
From
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On behalf of the University of New Haven and the distance learning students we currently serve and look forward to serving, I am submitting testimony on **HB 5361, AN ACT CONCERNING A STATE AUTHORIZATION RECIPROCITY AGREEMENT REGARDING DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMS**. The University of New Haven fully endorses HB 5361, which will permit the University and other higher education institutions in the State to participate in a state authorization reciprocity agreement (SARA).

A little over three years ago, the University of New Haven made the strategic decision to begin developing totally online programs as a way to extend the opportunity to participate in the quality of a UNH degree to a new audience of students who cannot come to campus due to life circumstances. In the fall of 2012 with the approval of the State Office of Higher Education and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), the University introduced the M.S. in Criminal Justice as its first online program.

With the introduction of the online MSCJ, the University began the process of seeking state authorization from each of the 50 states and territories to serve distance students. What we found was a convoluted maze of state requirements with no two states alike and in some cases of having to work through two different agencies within the same state. We were also one among hundreds of other higher education institutions vying for attention from each state and agency.

With tenacity and perseverance we finally managed to get exempt or authorized to offer our *first* online degree in all fifty states. With the introduction of our second online degree in the fall of 2013, we had to update our state authorization in all states.

To date the University has invested almost \$20,000 for two online programs for the right to serve distance students regardless of where they live. That amount will continue to grow significantly as the number of online programs and the numbers of students continue to increase.

Why did the University of New Haven decide to invest the time and money to get exempt or authorized in every state? We did it for all the students who may ultimately decide that they

want the quality of a UNH degree in spite of the fact that they can never come to the West Haven campus to study. We did not want to be in the position to tell even one student that we could not accept them because we were not approved by their home state to serve them.

But, there is a better way. And that better way is through SARA, State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements.

The SARA process has the potential to drastically improve the process of obtaining state authorizations by creating appropriately reasonable and necessary standards of practice across states while enabling individual states to focus more effectively on the higher education institutions within their state with regards to quality of the offerings and of student service.

Ultimately, SARA will create a less costly endeavor and investment for states and institutions to better serve students at a distance.

By passing HB 5361, the Connecticut legislature will pave the way for each higher education institution within the State to decide for itself whether to participate in the SARA process or to “go it alone” or take the risk of ignoring compliance.

The benefits to students are important to recognize as a part of this decision making process. SARA will:

- Expand access to a wide array of high quality distance-based educational offerings,
- Lead to better resolution of complaints from students in SARA states,
- Reduce the growing authorization costs that ultimately get passed along to students, and
- Should enhance the overall quality of distance education programs.

If the Connecticut legislature approves HB 5361 (which I sincerely hope it does), I can assure you that the University of New Haven will be at the head of the queue at the New England Board of Higher Education to apply to participate in the SARA process.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.