



Higher Education & Employment Advancement Committee

Written testimony  
submitted by

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On behalf of the University of Connecticut, I am submitting comments on H.B. No 5361 An Act Concerning a State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement Regarding Distance Learning Programs.

For the past decade faculty at the University of Connecticut have been innovators in fusing pedagogy and technology to improve learning outcomes. In 2012, the University created UConn eCampus to provide strategic direction and operational support to academic programs whose value proposition was predicated on teaching and learning modalities best characterized as distance education (i.e. online and hybrid/blended). The University has committed significant resources over the past several years to the development of high quality online and hybrid/blended academic niche programs at the post-baccalaureate level including graduate certificates and degrees, and now counts more than 20 programs in areas such as Digital Media, Gifted and Talented Education, Accounting, Survey Research, Sustainability, Arts Administration to name a few.

We see benefits in supporting the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) based on the promise of alleviating the burdensome and duplicative efforts currently demanded by the existing state-by-state approval system. We believe that students should have access to the highest quality of education. With increasing areas of specialization and advanced knowledge requirements demanded by the 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge economy this access needs to become as fluid and seamless as possible. Today, we count more than 200,000 proud UConn Husky Alumni around the globe. Many of our alumni pursue additional educational opportunities at the post baccalaureate level, to meet their continuing and professional educational needs, to gain needed knowledge skills and abilities in areas that allow them to be more impactful in their present role or to pivot and take advantage of new and emerging career opportunities. We believe our ability to engage students equally and without prejudice based on their particular state of residence will be enhanced through SARA.

We also recognize and share concerns of those who worry that inconsistencies in standards between high quality in-state institutions like UConn, and lower quality out of state institutions, may be

accelerated and facilitated through SARA. We think it is important to recognize that these inconsistencies have existed, currently exist, and will continue to exist with or without SARA. We believe that the Office of Higher Education should continue its good work to champion processes that enhance student protection, and remain optimistic that there are means to do this within the context and confines of SARA. We also believe history has been pretty clear on the long term outcome of the impact of competition---ultimately quality becomes the differentiator and high quality organizations and institutions not only survive, they thrive. Hence we are not particularly concerned with increased competition that may or may not materialize with the passage of the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement. In some ways, SARA simply lowers the 'cost of entry' in economic terms, but this does not necessarily translate into market share---market share will only accrue to those institutions that have the capability to develop and deliver high quality educational programming. In closing, we support the passage of this Act.

We thank the many people who have worked countless hours on SARA in Connecticut, in other Statehouses around the country, and at the federal level. UConn joins our fellow Connecticut institutions of higher education in support of this important bill.

UConn strongly recommends approval of Bill No. 5361. Thank you for this opportunity to speak before you today.