



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Office of Higher Education

Testimony

by

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before the

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

1:00 p.m. – LOB Room 1E

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Senator Cassano, Representative Willis, Senator Boucher, Representative LeGeyt and distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony this afternoon. I would like to speak to three bills involving the Office of Higher Education.

First, I would like to speak in support of Senate Bill No. 18 (RAISED) - AN ACT CONCERNING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER EDUCATOR INCENTIVE PROGRAM. The original language of this program, because of technical issues, did not allow our agency to administer this program. Senate Bill 18 corrects these deficiencies, and allows us to run this program as originally intended. This program will provide much needed college tuition assistance and loan relief to students who are interested in becoming English language learner educators. Equally important, it provides a strong incentive for these individuals to take added steps to pursue their endorsement in teaching English to speakers of other languages or bilingual education studies at a Connecticut public institution of higher education.

The second bill I wish to speak to is Senate Bill No. 19 (RAISED) AN ACT ESTABLISHING UNIFORM STATE ACADEMIC DEGREE STANDARDS. This bill makes technical changes to statutes to ensure that all institutions of higher education in the State

continue to adhere to the same minimum standards of academic quality. We sought guidance from the Attorney General's Office and have attached their language.

The application of academic standards to all institutions of higher education is long-standing practice in Connecticut, and is a key reason for our state's reputation for high academic quality regardless where a student enrolls. The technical changes contained in this bill provide greater clarity in state statute to specify that all higher education entities in Connecticut -- the Board of Trustees of the University of Connecticut, the Board of Regents for Higher Education and the Office of Higher Education -- adhere to a single set of academic standards to promote academic success for all students. Although the standards are the same across the state, each system retains the ability to employ procedures to enact them based on their individual policies and organizational structure. In essence, Senate Bill No. 19 simply codifies decade's old existing practices.

The Office of Higher Education has recently completed revising the regulations containing the academic standards, and these revisions are currently being reviewed by the Office of Policy Management. Once this review is complete, the Office will post a Notice of Public Intent on the Secretary of State's website for 30 days to allow for public comment. They will then be submitted for review to the Office of the Attorney General for 30 days to ensure that they are constitutionally and legally sound. During this period, the Office will gather and respond to all public comments. The proposed regulations, the comments, and the Office's responses to those comments will then be assembled as a Statement of Purpose, which will be sent within five months of the posting of the Notice of Intent to the Regulations Review Committee. A brief Certifying Statement, the current regulations, and the notice of approval from the Office of the Attorney General will be included. The Regulation Review Committee will then have the proposed regulations before them ready for final action.

The third and final bill I would like to comment upon formally is Senate Bill No. 20 (RAISED) - AN ACT CONCERNING THE MINORITY ADVANCEMENT PROGRAM. This bill, like the others, makes technical but needed statutory changes so that this program conforms to current practice, and corrects discrepancies that occurred during the higher education reorganization. With regard to Section 1. Section 10a-11, we support its conceptual spirit to ensure the racial and ethnic diversity of students, faculty and administrators at higher education institutions. However, this is mandated information compiled by the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO). To eliminate redundancy, we propose that Section 1. Section 10a-11 be repealed.

This concludes my formal remarks. I would be happy to take questions, and look forward to working with each of you in our common purpose of advancing higher education in Connecticut.

Language from the Attorney General's Office:

Section 10a-35a of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2014*):

(a) Notwithstanding sections 10a-34 to 10a-35, inclusive, the Board of Regents for Higher Education shall have the authority, in accordance with the provisions [of said] and standards established in sections 10a-34 to 10a-35, inclusive, and any regulations promulgated thereunder, [over academic degrees awarded by the state colleges within the Connecticut State University System, the regional community-technical colleges and the Board for State Academic Awards, including the (1) operation of such public institutions of higher education and the programs offered by such public institutions of higher education, (2) licensure and accreditation of such public institutions of higher education and programs offered by such public institutions of higher education, (3) evaluation and approval of applications to confer academic degrees made by such public institutions of higher education, and (4) assessment of any violation by such public institutions of higher education of the authority of said board as described in subdivisions (1) to (3), inclusive, of this section and the imposition of a penalty for such violation.] to (1) review and approve recommendations for the establishment of new academic programs for the universities within the Connecticut State University System, the regional community-technical colleges and the Board for State Academic Awards and (2) report all new programs and program changes to the Office of Higher Education.

(b) Notwithstanding sections 10a-34 to 10a-35, inclusive, the Board of Trustees for The University of Connecticut shall (1) have the authority, in accordance with the provisions and standards established in sections 10a-34 to 10a-35, inclusive, and any regulations promulgated thereunder, to review and approve recommendations for the establishment of new academic programs for the university, and (2) report all new programs and program changes to the Office of Higher Education.