Town of Fairfield

Office of the First Selectman
Fairfield, Connecticut 06824

Michael C. Tetreau
First Selectman

Sullivan Independence Hall
725 Old Post Road

March 20, 2014

Planning and Development Committee
c/o Co-Chairs State Senator Catherine Osten and St Representative Jason Rojas
Room 2100, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: Raised H.B. No. 5583—An Act Concerning the Payment of Real Property Taxes by Certain Institutions of Higher Learning

Dear Co-Chairs Osten and Rojas,

On behalf of the Town of Fairfield, I wish to inform the State that the Town is against the proposed Raised H.B. No. 5583 that would allow universities to pay the full amount of taxes to their host towns and seek partial reimbursement from the State for a portion of that payment. The Town wishes for the State to keep the existing PILOT Program in place for universities.

The Town of Fairfield is fortunate to have two thriving universities—Fairfield University and Sacred Heart University—which we have had a positive and beneficial partnership since their inception. Both universities, which are fully integrated into our community, provide economic, cultural, safety and educational needs that not only benefit the Town, but add to our quality of life and economic base.

Economically, students, and faculty and alumni, many of whom are residents of the Town, add to Fairfield's tax base by frequenting our many shops and restaurants. When our universities open their doors to showcase their plethora of education forums, parents' weekend, arts, museums, concerts and so much more, they attract visitors in and out of Connecticut that help the Town's tax base by using our hotels and many other establishments. Many of our residents work at these institutions which among are our Town's top employers.

The Fairfield University Bookstore, anchored in the heart of our downtown area, had filled an empty storefront and now attracts people of all ages from the region. Fairfield University recently partnered with the Town and a local developer to spearhead an innovative incubator program to help small businesses launch and thrive.

Regarding arts and culture, both universities offer an array of fine programs to students and residents who often dine and visit local Fairfield shops following evening shows or educational lectures.

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Both universities have arts and cultural programs that add to the Town's growing arts and cultural scene. Both universities are playing a key role in the Town's 375th anniversary with Sacred Heart University hosting a town-wide Gala in November.

As for public safety, the Town is very grateful to both universities for allowing us to use their campuses to park some of our emergency vehicles since the town buildings are situated in a flood zone. Fairfield University is now the Town's back-up emergency operations center. During Storm Sandy, Fairfield University supported all first responders, allowed Fairfield residents who had no powers for days to charge their phones, use university computers and get meals on campus. During that same storm, Fairfield's Police Department relocated some of their emergency operation assets to Sacred Heart University to be deployed.

Fairfield's police and fire departments often collaborate with the universities on safety programs using their space, resources or faculty. Recently, one university hosted a Connecticut Senator speaking to students, faculty, town residents, town officials and officials from our other university about sexual violence and bullying on campuses. Senior Citizens met at one university to receive safety and well-being tips from the Fairfield Police Department. The Town's Emergency Management Team held several mock disaster and emergency-related exercise drills at both campuses.

Both universities also provide numerous educational tools and resources to help our town employees and residents. Sacred Heart University offers innovative technology and some of the best campus facilities and resources in New England. Town departments have collaborated with both universities on projects that have saved town dollars.

In this economy, raising expenses for our universities makes these universities less competitive. This puts them at a real disadvantage when competing for students with universities located in other states. We cannot afford to put our universities at a disadvantage. We need our educational institutions to be a competitive advantage for our State.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Mike

Michael C. Tetreau
First Selectman