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University of Bridgeport

Division of University Relations

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Testimony for the
Planning & Development Committee
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As a member of the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges, Vice-President of the University of Bridgeport and a Bridgeport resident, I am testifying against HB 5583: An Act Concerning the Payment of Real Property Taxes by Certain Institutions of Higher Learning and Hospital Facilities.

The University of Bridgeport is situated on 54 acres in the south end of the city of Bridgeport. The city of Bridgeport is perhaps the most economically challenged city in the state of Connecticut and the south end of Bridgeport is one of the city's neediest neighborhoods.

Since its inception in 1927, the institution has provided education, culture and opportunity to the residents of the city and region. It has weathered mighty storms, literally and figuratively, and remained a key anchor and asset. Today, the university, alumni, faculty, students and visitors contribute \$65 million to the city's economy. 2.6% of city of Bridgeport revenues and 1.3% of expenditures resulted from the University of Bridgeport—a 1.3% net benefit to the city which translates to a net benefit of more than \$8 million to the city's treasury. Over the last 5 years, UB has spent nearly \$50 million in capital improvements thereby stabilizing the neighborhood and advancing the city's opportunity for revitalization. The university completed the city's streetscape sidewalk improvement program by reconstructing and installing two blocks of sidewalks at a cost of \$50,000. UB partnered with the city to construct a softball field in Seaside Park, contributing \$75,000 of the \$225,000 cost.

The university is an active and engaged community partner. In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Sandy when the city had no power, UB fed meals to first responders and members of the National Guard, provided warm shelter and charging opportunities at no cost. UB is a member of the city's Emergency Operations Center and the Regional Emergency Response team. Training space for various drills and certifications are given to the police and fire departments. Disaster preparedness drills are done in conjunction with our partners.

Health Sciences Clinics contribute over \$2 million a year in free or reduced services to the needy and elderly including all of the dental prescreening for children in Head Start. UB's School of Education sends interns and volunteers to teach, mentor and train in partnership with Bridgeport schools. The School of Engineering is host to the Junior National Society of Black Engineer where young

Bridgeport students come to learn STEM and prepare for study and careers in those disciplines. Our students, faculty and staff provide more than 50,000 volunteer hours each year to local organizations. UB hosts a multitude of art, film and theatre events and lectures all open to the community.

Nearly half of our students are from Connecticut and our financial aid package lowers cost by as much as 48%. Our deeply held commitment to educating first generation students, to assuring affordable access and every opportunity for success fuels our work with students. The university has increased financial aid every year since the recession hit in 2008-2009 while growing programs, improving infrastructure and giving back to the community.

Proposed HB 5583 will undermine both the university and the city of Bridgeport's fiscal well-being. Apart from widely held opinions on the value and efficacy of tax-exemptions for institutions of higher education, in Bridgeport's specific case the university is an anchor and stabilizing force in the state's city with the largest population situated on just a 17 square mile footprint. The physical presence and the breadth of contributions of this institution to this particular municipality secure the present and open opportunities for future growth and redevelopment. With unemployment in the city hovering at 12%, Bridgeport needs jobs and UB is growing and can provide some of those jobs. Our city's school children are included in the statistics of achievement gap and poverty level studies. The university partners with schools and partners with the community to alleviate those issues.

Reducing, eliminating payments in lieu of taxes or creating burdensome processes for reimbursement will negatively impact an already stretched municipality. Significant additional expense will impair the University of Bridgeport's ability to maintain lower tuition, increase financial aid and contribute as vibrantly to the community. The goal should be to recognize the synergies and the benefits the community, region and state derive from its institutions of higher education and in this specific case, understand the pivotal role the University of Bridgeport plays in the well-being of the city of Bridgeport.