



**Testimony of Evan Preston, State Director
Connecticut Public Interest Research Group (ConnPIRG)
in support of Proposed House Bill 6117:
An Act Concerning The Use of Digital Open-Source Textbooks In Higher Education**

Chairperson Bartolomeo, Chairperson Willis, Ranking Member Witkos, Ranking Member Betts and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB 6117.

I first want to thank Senator Flexer and Representative Haddad for their leadership on this issue. I also want to thank University of Connecticut President Susan Herbst, Vice Provost Sally Reis and Vice Provost Martha Bedard for their commitment to take leadership on textbook affordability through open source materials.

The Problem for Parents and Students:

College students and their families face many difficulties when trying to pay for higher education. Textbook prices are a significant expense for many families and students and sometimes must be paid outside of financial aid considerations. The high cost of textbooks is due largely to a broken marketplace that gives parents and students virtually no power to drive down prices. Some facts about why textbook prices are so high, prices dramatically increased recently and why the market alone cannot fix the problem:

- The average student will spend \$1,200 per year on textbooks and supplies, according to College Board.¹
- Between 2003—2013 textbooks prices increased 82% according to the Government Accountability Office.²
- Course materials are assigned by faculty, who do not need to purchase books themselves. Instead, the purchaser is the student, who has no choice in the product. This takes away consumer choice and the economic forces that moderate pricing.
- Just 5 publishers control 90% of the \$8 billion per year market. This means that they can increase prices without fear of market competition.

¹ Baum, Sandy. Trends in Higher Education 2013-14. Retrieved from <http://trends.collegeboard.org/collegepricing/figures-tables/average-estimated-undergraduate-budgets-2013-14>

² Government Accountability Office (2013). College Textbooks: Students Have Greater Access to Textbook Information. Retrieved from <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/655066.pdf>

What Are Open Textbooks and Why Are They a Solution:

Open textbooks are faculty-written, peer-reviewed textbooks that are published under an open license – meaning that they are available free online, they are free to download, and print copies are available at \$10-40, or approximately the cost of printing.

Open textbooks are part of a broader movement called Open Educational Resources (OER), and are conceptually rooted in the open-source software movement. Just as coders and developers realized the power of the Internet to facilitate collaboration and content delivery to massive audiences at little-to-no-cost, the concept was also applied to educational content in the late 90s.

Open licenses – the most common of which is the Creative Commons License – allow for intellectual property to be accessed, used, and even adapted for free by individual users and the broader public. This type of licensing is in direct contrast to traditional publishers, who strictly limit access and use of their textbooks and materials.

Open textbooks are created in many different ways. There are open textbook publishing companies, who follow the typical process of authoring, editing, and reviewing, and pay royalties to authors based on the sale of print books and supplementary materials. In other cases, authors or teams of authors are funded by grants from foundations, their institutions, or the government. In short, open textbooks still cost money to create, but they are produced and distributed in a way that allows maximum benefit.

Most open textbooks are of comparable quality to traditional textbooks, and there are online resources that can help identify the highest quality resources. However, as with any book, the professor is the best judge of whether or not a book is right for a class.

Right now, there are more than 100 open textbooks available, primarily for introductory-level and general education courses, as those have the highest enrollment and therefore, the largest potential impact.

More than 3,000 faculty have already adopted open textbooks. An initiative at UMass - Amherst invested \$60,000 in a limited pilot program to help faculty transition to an open textbook in their class. This program saved students \$1.5 million in four years. If open textbook use continues to grow nationally, we can expect billions in savings.³

How the State of Connecticut Can Facilitate Open Textbooks through HB 6117:

The current obstacles to the more widespread use of open textbooks is a lack of knowledge and a lack of momentum on campuses in adopting open textbooks in courses as well as a need to incentivize the creation of more open textbooks. The state of Connecticut can help parents and students by investing funds and programmatic support to create more open textbooks. While the state of Connecticut's support should not be a defining force in the long-term – nor should it be responsible for sustaining the

³ <http://www.studentpirgs.org/sites/student/files/reports/The%20Billion%20Dollar%20Solution.pdf>

movement – it would provide critical capital needed to fuel innovation in the short term. This is exactly what HB 6117 proposes to do.

Why Other Approaches Are Not Sufficient:

- **Used books.** Used books do offer students some upfront savings, but their effectiveness in cutting costs is severely reduced by the release of new textbook editions every couple of years.
- **Textbook rentals.** Renting can go a long way in cost reduction, but the price of a rental is still directly tied to the ever-increasing cost of a new print edition.
- **E-textbooks.** E-Textbooks are typically cheaper than a printed textbook. However, publishers have continued the same predatory practices they use to keep new print books high in the e-textbook market, removing their ability to really solve the problem of high prices.

Examples from other states:

- Open Education Initiative, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Faced with the rising cost of textbooks, the Office of the Provost and the UMass Amherst Libraries launched the Open Education Initiative (OEI) in early 2011. The goal of the project was to find alternatives to and replace high-cost textbooks.

Structure:

The OEI created a small grant program to provide faculty with resources and incentive to convert their classroom from a traditional, high-cost textbook to open educational resources (OER), including open textbooks. Grants range from \$1000 - \$2500, depending on the size of the class and the number of students impacted.

Library staff oversee the initiative, providing the content expertise and working directly with faculty to overcome obstacles and develop the materials necessary. Staff hold regular trainings and workshops for the faculty that apply, offering one-on-one consultation to give direct feedback.

Analysis:

After 4 years of operation, the Open Education Initiative has demonstrated tremendous impact on students. At an investment of approximately \$60,000 in grants to faculty, the program has generated nearly \$1 million dollars in savings.

More importantly, this figure does not include the number of faculty who continued using open textbooks after their inaugural semester. When included, savings estimates are as high as \$1.5 million.

On an individual level, when comparing the cost to students of the displaced traditional printed textbook and the open textbook/open education resources, average student savings was \$125.98 per course.

- Open/Alternative Textbook Initiative, Kansas State University

The Open/Alternative Textbook Initiative was launched in Spring 2013, in response to concerns around the high cost of commercial print textbooks. The Initiative was funded by the K-State Libraries and a Student Centered Tuition Enhancement fee, with the goal of “encourage faculty experimentation and innovation in finding new, better, and less costly ways to deliver learning materials to students.”^{xiii}

Structure:

The Initiative created a stipend program ranging from \$2,000 to \$5,000 for faculty who adapt or develop their own alternative to a traditional print textbook.

Applications are reviewed by a panel consisting of students, faculty, representatives of the Library, the Provost’s office, and the Center of Advancement of Teaching and Learning, and grantees meet at the end of each academic cycle to compare experiences and share best practices

Analysis:

After 3 semesters, the Open/Alternative Textbook Initiative has resulted in significant savings for students. At an overall investment to-date of \$96,250 in grants to faculty, the program has generated over \$1.1 million dollars in savings.

At the end of the Spring 2014 semester, twenty courses had been converted away from traditional textbooks, impacting more than 8,000 students at the University.

On an individual level, when comparing the cost to students of the displaced traditional printed textbook and the open textbook/open education resources, average student savings was \$138 per course.

- OER Project, Tacoma Community College

Tacoma Community College launched a pilot open education resource (OER) project in 2012 with the goal of lowering college costs to students, after campus librarians noticed that the most checked-out books were course textbooks. The library and e-learning directors wrote a joint proposal to the Vice Provost of Instruction, who involved the student government in a project to save students \$250,000 on textbooks in two years.

Structure:

The Project was funded through a start-up investment from the Student Technology Fee and through the campus administration’s budget. The funding was allocated to hire a full-time staff member that would promote OER use on campus and work directly with faculty to develop content, compile it, and adopt it in their classes.

Analysis: Since its launch, the OER Project has reached more than 10,000 students at Tacoma Community College, generating more than \$1.1 million dollars in student savings.

In its first year alone, the Project helped introduce open education resources and displace traditional textbooks in more than 65 sections, a number that increased exponentially in following years as new faculty joined the program and earlier faculty continued using OER.

On an individual level, when comparing the cost to students of the displaced traditional printed textbook and the open textbook/open education resources, average student savings was \$110.79 per course.

- Open Textbook Library, University of Minnesota

The Open Textbook Library was launched nearly 4 years ago, as a way to centralize existing open textbooks and make them easier to find, and to provide credibility and quality assurance around those materials. The Library consolidated available open textbooks onto a simple, user-friendly website, and includes a system for faculty to provide peer-reviews.

UMN's College of Education and Human Development provided the funding to pay faculty for reviews in the catalog.

While the original intent of the project was to build open textbook credibility through reviews, it soon became clear that when faculty engaged with open content to provide a review, they were likely to adopt the open textbook in their class.

To date, the program has expanded to provide training and workshops to a number of other campuses across the country.

As the project has expanded significantly beyond the boundaries of the University of Minnesota and now has impacted more than a dozen institution's open textbook efforts, it should be noted that the savings presented here are a small portion of the total impact of this project.

To date, this project has impacted over 2,900 students, and generated more than \$382,000 in student savings. That results in an average student savings of \$132.

- Maryland Open-Source Textbook Initiative, University of Maryland

The MOST Initiative was launched in 2013, with the goal of expose faculty and students to feasible alternatives to traditional educational materials and encourage faculty to use or even create open educational materials.

While the momentum and drive behind the creation of the initiative came primarily from students and a concerted effort by the UMD Student Government, the University System recently expanded their efforts and partnered with Lumen Learning, an organization that conducts trainings with faculty and education around OER adoption and creation.

As of March 2014, the initiative reports having impacted more than 1,100 students, for a total savings of \$130,000. On an individual level, this results in an average student savings of \$118.18.

For Further Reference:

ConnPIRG, along with Student PIRGs in other states compiled an analysis of current open textbook programs in a report called "The Billion Dollar Solution."⁴ This report and preceding years of research by the Student PIRGs is the primary source for this testimony.

In conclusion, I urge members of the committee to support HB 6117.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Evan Preston

⁴ <http://www.studentpirgs.org/sites/student/files/reports/The%20Billion%20Dollar%20Solution.pdf>