



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Office of Higher Education

Testimony

by

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before the

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

Tuesday, February 10, 2015

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis, and distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding H.B. No. 6715 (RAISED) AN ACT REQUIRING CONNECTICUT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STATE AUTHORIZATION RECIPROCITY AGREEMENT REGARDING DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMS. You may recall that many questions were raised around this issue during the last legislative session, when we were required to come up with a plan to enter into reciprocity agreements. As a result, we produced a report, which has already been shared with you. The report includes a plan to establish state-to-state agreements and was based on data submitted by all of our institutions of higher education. The data indicate that few Connecticut institutions would benefit from joining SARA. At this time, only a few of them provide substantial online instruction outside of the state, and those that do enroll the majority of their students in non-SARA states. Further, SARA's membership requirements are costly for the state, and the SARA agreement precludes Connecticut from ever assessing fees to out-of-state institutions to recover SARA expenses.

We fully understand, however, the needs of today's higher education institutions to operate online and across state lines with as much flexibility as possible. Data show that our reciprocity model would actually 1) save the state money, 2) retain state oversight of new for-profit institutions wishing to enter the state, and 3) provide flexibility for Connecticut institutions

operating online in other states. Several states, which share our concerns about SARA, are working with us on our plan that would allow our institutions to operate within those states without fees and without undergoing the usual approval process. Under this approach, only institutions that meet our standards could enter Connecticut without going through our approval process. All Connecticut students would be assured of the same level of protections, as established by contract. Through this state-to-state model of reciprocity, Connecticut can ensure a level playing field in which none of our institutions are placed at a competitive disadvantage.

The fact is that the very real disadvantages of SARA far outweigh any promise of the benefits it seeks to promote. Our institutions (both public and private) would have to pay annual fees to the new SARA national council, which was initiated with a \$2.3 million implementation grant from the Lumina Foundation. Initial funding levels fell short of the actual costs of implementing the initiative, and an additional \$200,000 grant was provided by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The current fee structure is scheduled to be revised beginning in 2016.

Let us continue our strong oversight of for-profit institutions, our assurance of high academic quality and consumer protection, and adherence to the long-standing notion that all programs in the licensed professions meet state licensing requirements. We do not want any more unsuspecting Connecticut students to enroll in out-of-state online programs only to find out afterwards that degrees from those programs bar them from practicing in the state. Nor do we need to create a two-tiered system of higher education in Connecticut -- those with regional accreditation that have benefitted from our state's approval process and those that have not. We can avoid both of these outcomes by establishing a state-to-state reciprocity model.

Thank you. I would be happy to respond to questions.