



CONNECTICUT STATE  
COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES  
BOARD OF REGENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

**Testimony by Dr. Merle Harris, Member**  
Board of Regents for Higher Education  
Before the Higher Education and Employment  
Advancement Committee  
March 12, 2015

Senators Bartolomeo and Witkos, Representatives Willis and Betts, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today on ***SB 898, An Act Concerning Professional Doctoral Degree Programs.***

For the record, my name is Merle Harris, and I am a member of the Board of Regents for Higher Education, and the Chairwoman of the Board's Academic and Student Affairs Committee. It is my pleasure to be here to speak about this legislation.

In 1849, Central Connecticut State University was founded as the Connecticut Normal School, existing solely for the purpose of training future teachers. In 1889, Eastern was founded as the Willimantic State Normal School. In 1893, Southern was constituted as the New Haven State Normal School. Finally, in 1903, Western began training teachers as the Danbury Normal School.

In the case of each of these schools, evolution has been natural. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, normal schools turned into teachers colleges, which turned into colleges, which turned into the four regional comprehensive universities you know today. In each case, legislative intervention was required to expand the scope of these valuable institutions so they could offer the programs and degrees necessary to remain relevant in a changing world and keep Connecticut economically competitive. The legislation before you is no different in this respect.

As employment and accreditation standards reflect increasing specialization in careers, institutions of higher education are forced to adapt to these changing requirements. SB 898 simply permits our institutions to continue to adapt, as they have for the last 150 years.

As the Chair of the Academic and Student Affairs Committee, it is my role to ensure that our institutions offer programs that are meaningful and necessary for student success, and recognizing our role as state institutions, produce graduates that can make a positive impact in Connecticut.

If this legislation is approved, the Board will move in a very considered, deliberate fashion in establishing any Doctoral degree programs, including any of the ones briefly mentioned today. We do not intend to open the flood gates, or to establish programs with the sole goal of competing with programs already established in this state. Rather, we will carefully examine opportunities where we have established expertise in our institutions, and where there are clear needs to be served.

I consider it the duty of the Board to ensure that all of our programs are of the highest quality and a worthy investment for the state, the institution and the student. In examining proposed programs, we will look at need, quality standards, necessary fiscal support and employment opportunities. Given the points raised by President Papazian, I believe we must continue to be responsive to a changing environment and the Board of Regents should be given the opportunity, through this legislation, to meet the demands for doctorally prepared graduates in a number of professional fields. I urge your consideration of this bill.

Thank you, and we are happy to answer any questions.