

# UConn | UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

## Labor and Public Employees Committee

February 26, 2015

Testimony

Submitted by

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Athletic Director

University of Connecticut

Co-Chairs, Ranking Members, and Members of the Labor Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony today on House Bill 6783, *An Act Concerning Study of the Unionization of College Athletes*.

As the Committee deliberates on this legislation, I thought it would be helpful to provide information on all of the services and support the University currently provides its student-athletes.

It is important to note at the outset that the mission of the Division of Athletics is to develop student-athletes into well-rounded individuals who achieve academically and are active members of our community. We work closely with the University to ensure that our student-athletes have the best experiences possible in the classroom, on the playing field and in social settings that are part of vibrant campus life. We take great pride in the comprehensive set of resources we have developed at the University to support and nurture our student-athletes. What follows is a brief overview of these resources.

### **Cost of Attendance Scholarships & Food**

The University announced earlier this month that beginning in the 2015-16 school year, student-athletes that are on full scholarships will be provided an additional stipend that will cover the student-athlete's full cost of attendance. The purpose of this additional stipend is to compensate for the money that student-athletes are not able to earn through part-time jobs due to their demanding schedule.

The NCAA has also ruled that all college athletes, including walk-ons, are allowed to receive unlimited meals and snacks from their universities. In deference to the interests of student-athletes,

UConn provides beyond what is required by NCAA rules as student-athletes living in University housing have access to unlimited meals and snacks in University dining and athletic facilities.

### **Student-Athlete Opportunity Fund**

UConn student-athletes have access to the NCAA Student-Athlete opportunity Fund which is intended to provide direct benefits to student-athletes to meet financial needs. All student-athletes, including international students and those on Federal Pell grants, are eligible to receive Student Athlete Opportunity Fund benefit, regardless of whether they are grant-in-aid recipients or have demonstrated need. They continue to be eligible even if they no longer participate in athletics due to medical reasons. The fund provides direct benefits to student-athletes and their families. The fund can pay for essentials such as clothing, shoes, toiletries, bedding and laundry products; school supplies such as notebooks, textbooks, laptop repair and additional required school materials; emergency travel; and some medical expenses that are not covered by insurance. Although there are many things that the Student-Athlete Opportunity Fund can provide for, there are some items that the fund cannot be used for such as food and drink; entertainment; electronics; room décor; and educational fees such as tuition, laptops, or bursar fee bills.

### **Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC)**

Like all NCAA institutions, UConn has a Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) in to provide a forum for student-athletes to express concerns and needs directly to the UConn administration. It consists of student-athletes from all of the University of Connecticut's varsity teams. The mission of the SAAC is to enhance the total student-athlete experience by promoting opportunity, protecting student-athlete welfare and fostering a positive student-athlete image. In addition to SAACs at the university level, SAACs exist at the Conference and National levels. Each conference within the NCAA has its own SAAC. The American Athlete Conference SAAC is made up of two members from each member institution (plus Navy). The American Athlete Conference SAAC serves as the voice of student-athletes hailing from its member institutions and competing in twenty-one sports. The Conference level SAAC strives to improve communication with all student-athletes at member institutions as well as between institutions, and provides critical feedback on NCAA and Conference legislation and promotes student-athlete well-being, academic achievement, personal development and community service. The NCAA also has a national SAAC in order to provide insight on the student-athlete experience and offer input on the rules, regulations and policies that affect student-athletes' lives on campus.

### **Keeping Student-Athletes Strong & Healthy**

The Department of Sports Medicine at the University of Connecticut works as an integrated multidisciplinary team whose purpose is to provide medical support for every intercollegiate student-athlete. The Sports Medicine staff is devoted to the care, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation of injuries while maximizing athletic performance and assuring access to the finest health care possible.

The Strength and Conditioning staff provides a well-designed, collaborative training program based on sound physiological principles. The staff uses sport scientific training methods and a positive but demanding motivational atmosphere for training. UConn student-athletes get the benefit of training and conditioning with knowledgeable and dedicated sports medicine professionals.

Student-athletes are also protected against catastrophic injuries. All member institutions of the NCAA are automatically provided coverage from the Catastrophic Injury Insurance Program. This insurance policy covers student-athletes who are catastrophically injured while participating in a covered intercollegiate athletics activity. The insurance policy provides a maximum benefit to a student-athlete of \$20,000,000 who is injured during a covered event and is not restricted by any time limit.

### **Academic Services**

We want our student-athletes to reach their highest potential in the classroom and have created a support system to help them do so. The Counseling Program for Intercollegiate Athletes (CPIA) provides tutoring services to all student-athletes. The CPIA program maintains a staff of about 100 tutors that are available on nights and weekends to all 650 student-athletes at UConn.

### **Closing**

In closing, I would just like to reiterate that the Division of Athletics will continue to do everything possible to maintain the most robust support services for our student-athletes. Despite budget challenges, we pledge to continue exploring best practices around the country and looking for ways to enhance and improve our programs in the future.

I hope this information is useful to the Committee as it continues its consideration of HB 6783. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or require additional information.

As always, thank you for your continued support of the University of Connecticut.

Senate Bill #439

An Act Concerning State Service Retirement Credit

February 25, 2015

To: Dear Labor Committee Members

As Chairman of the State Emergency Response Commission, it has come to my attention that an injustice has been going on in the DEEP Emergency Response Unit relative to promotional opportunities in the management of this unit.

When the current Director was promoted to this Management position he had to resign from the ERU pension and accept a new pension plan which essentially reduced his pension for accepting a promotion. In my opinion it is counter productive to promote good people into management positions when it cost them pension dollars to accept such a position. Why would you accept a position of increased responsibility without a commensurate increase in benefits.

It appears obvious that if the Department wishes to promote good people from within the department to management positions, people with obvious training and experience in the department this policy of changing pension plans has to cease for the benefit of the people of Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Gerard P. Goudreau

Chairman of the SERC

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