



**Testimony for the  
Planning and Development Committee**

**from**

**Rev. Jeffrey P. von Arx, S.J.**

**Fairfield University**

**March 11, 2015**

Good afternoon. I am here to express my strong opposition to **House Bill 6965, An Act Concerning the Preservation of Municipal Tax Bases**, as the legislation would only add to the already challenging financial pressures that we are facing as institutions of higher education.

Our concerns are three-fold:

- First, this legislation adds another layer of expense that must be passed on to our students. It is tantamount to a reduction in financial support for students in need, putting higher education outside their reach when the state's economic future is contingent on an increasingly educated workforce.
- Second, the proposed tax would greatly impact our ability to provide educational resources in the classroom— not only day to day equipment replacement, but it would also hamper efforts to enhance academic facilities and educational experiences – both dedicated to preparing our future workforce.
- And finally, we are concerned that this legislation would undermine the strong, collaborative relationships that our University enjoys with the town of Fairfield, the city of Bridgeport and other communities. We submit that Fairfield University adds significant economic and quality of life value to these communities, the region and the state.

There is a tradition in this nation of extending property tax exemptions to universities and colleges from the recognition that colleges and universities provide an essential economic, social and cultural function. House Bill 6965 is contrary to this spirit and our understanding of this long-standing tradition.

Briefly, I'd like to acquaint you with some facts about Fairfield's direct and indirect economic and fiscal impact on the state's economy as well as ways in which we work collaboratively with the Town of Fairfield and other communities.

According to an economic impact study, released just today by the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges and based on FY13 data, the unadjusted direct economic impact of Fairfield University on the state's economy includes the following spending:

- \$54 million on goods and services;
- \$42 million for equipment;
- \$35 million in student spending; and
- \$14 million for visitor spending.

There are 6,795 full-time equivalent jobs (direct and indirect) supported by our University operations; the University's adjusted spending generates \$551 million in total labor income, \$1.08 billion in new sales in the state and \$57 million in new taxes remitted to state and local governments.

While we have a large economic footprint, there are a myriad ways we serve local communities and the state:

- The University served as the backup Emergency Operations Center for the town during Hurricane Sandy and would serve in that capacity in future emergencies.
- When the Town lost its only major bookstore, Fairfield opened a full service community bookstore in the same flagship location that also attracted a major coffeehouse retailer.
- In a cooperative venture with the town of Fairfield, we launched a business incubator in the retail district. Our faculty and alumni provide expertise and mentoring to clients who seek to open new businesses.
- Our faculty and students are intricately involved in programs in our local schools and we support local teachers through ongoing workshops at our Connecticut Writing Project.
- Faculty and students from our Marriage and Family Therapy program are actively engaged in supporting local families who benefit from our services.

Looking toward the future, it is predicted that the health care industry will represent 20 percent of the future employment opportunities for college graduates. Fairfield University is committed to preparing students for the professions of tomorrow in all fields of health care. To that end we have launched an integrated nursing and health studies initiative. We have received approvals from the Town to construct a Nursing and Health Sciences Center next to the School of Nursing and adjacent to the Bannow Sciences Center –also home to our School of Engineering. This facility will feature technologically advanced and interactive learning environments and is being designed with state-of-the art simulation and clinical learning environments. This initiative could be negatively impacted should this legislation become law.

In closing, Fairfield University is integrally linked to the quality of life and economic vitality of the Town of Fairfield, and beyond its borders. Our commitment to accessibility is foundational to our mission and last year alone, we provided \$8.5 million in institutional financial assistance to students from Connecticut, and we are working diligently to contain our costs in order to remain affordable.

With these facts in mind, we ask you not to support House Bill 6965. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with the committee.