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CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

**Testimony of Paul L. Maroni
Vice President for Finance, Connecticut College
Wednesday, April 15, 2015
Submitted to the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee**

On behalf of Connecticut College in New London, I am submitting testimony in opposition to **HB 7037, AAC a Municipal Option to Impose an Admission Surcharge on Events Promoted by a Private Institution of Higher Education**. This bill would give a municipality the authority to pass an ordinance that would impose an up to fifty cent ticket surcharge on events held within the municipality and sponsored/promoted by private colleges like Connecticut College.

We oppose this bill for a number of reasons. First, Connecticut College offers a wide variety of events on our campus that are free of charge. These include lectures; art exhibits; music, dance and theater productions; athletics competitions; symposia and other events. We believe that by offering these events free of charge – and inviting the public to attend – we are providing a vital service to the local community. Charging a fee for these events would not only limit access, but it could limit the number of events we can offer because we would have to develop a staffing structure for the fee collection and distribution to the municipality.

Connecticut College does charge a nominal fee for a limited number of events, including our highly regarded onStage at Connecticut College performing arts series that brings world-class artists in music, theater and dance to New London. This series is subsidized by the College and by outside grants, so ticket sales cover only a fraction of the cost of the events while the rest of the cost is covered by the College. Bill HB7037 would further increase our costs by imposing an administrative burden, and it would limit access to these events by increasing the cost to our local community.

Connecticut College does not charge a fee for athletics events, except in the case of NCAA playoff events hosted at the College where the fee is determined by the NCAA. There is no clarity in this bill about how private colleges would manage an NCAA-mandated fee to which the municipality added a surcharge.

Connecticut College students do charge nominal fees for fundraising events in which students are either raising money to fund a student-run organization or club on campus or are raising money to support a local charity. For example, a group of students organized, wrote, choreographed and produced a special event this year that raised more than \$15,000 for Safe Futures, a shelter and network of services for battered women in eastern Connecticut. The students' promise at the event was that 100 percent of the money raised would go directly to Safe Futures. If they had been forced to collect a surcharge for the city, their fundraising message would have been diluted, and it is very likely they would not have been able to achieve the great success they did.

Employing nearly 900 people, Connecticut College stands as a foundation for economic stability in southeastern Connecticut – the third largest employer in New London. Our payroll, including salary and benefits, is \$67 million, approximately one-half of our annual operating budget, and is reinvested into the region by our employees who pay property taxes, shop in local stores, eat in local restaurants, hire local service providers and donate both their energy and money to local charities and community activities.

Connecticut College provides critical resources to our community through the volunteerism of faculty, staff and hundreds of students each year. In fact, community service has been part of the required orientation for the 500 members of the first-year class we enroll each fall – and we have a number of classes that incorporate community learning into the curriculum. Right now, a psychology professor and an architectural studies professor are team-teaching a class that is working with the community to create a small community park in Hodges Square, to foster a more vibrant community with greater sense of cohesion in a neighborhood spacially segregated from the rest of New London by Interstate 95. This is an example of the way we educate our students for responsible citizenship.

New London schools benefit from the work of both our faculty as consultants and our students as aides, mentors, after-school program and activity coordinators, and tutors. Our students volunteer in more than 50 community organizations, providing support in areas such as health and wellness, social justice, education, arts and culture, and early child development. The College Arboretum campus is open to the public as are its library and certain of its athletic fields and facilities at selected times.

Connecticut College is a destination for thousands of visitors each year who seek our campus for cultural, intellectual, athletic and entertainment events. They include the families of students and prospective students. They include academics from across the country who take part in conferences, summits and symposia. Many stay in local hotels, eat in local restaurants and shop in local stores. In short, they spend money in New London and the surrounding region.

The imposition of adding a surcharge to events, especially events that the College is trying to offer to the local community free of charge or events in which the College's students are raising money for a local charity, would be an unfair burden on the College and the local community. I strongly urge you to defeat HB 7037.

Thank you.