



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Office of Higher Education

Testimony

by

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Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

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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. 6767 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE APPROVAL AND AUTHORIZATION OF PRIVATE OCCUPATIONAL SCHOOLS. As you are aware, one of the responsibilities of the Office of Higher Education is the regulatory oversight of private occupational schools which results in the protection of students enrolled in those schools in accordance with the statutes enacted by you. Through our day-to-day interaction with school officials, we are constantly seeking to improve our role, both as a consumer protection agency for students and as a facilitator of compliance for Connecticut's private occupational school community.

With this in mind, we are seeking several small changes to allow my office to perform its functions with greater effectiveness. Among these:

1. There are approximately 80 private occupational schools in our state that serve nearly 28,000 students and provide a variety of training programs. While nearly all operate with adequate financial stability, we often find that a weakened financial state is a good indicator of trouble. Rather than receive a telephone call from an attorney for an evicting landlord or a foreclosing mortgagee, we would like the ability to investigate proactively when a school's finances indicate a potential loss of premises, thereby minimizing the risk to students enrolled at the school.

2. New and existing schools require an evaluation visit, and part of that evaluation includes a review of a school's curriculum. We enlist the help of volunteer curriculum specialists. These are experts in their particular fields who evaluate the curriculum and equipment offered by occupational schools during a visit to the school, accompanied by Office of Higher Education staff. We seek out highly-qualified individuals to ensure the best possible programs. However, the difficulties involved in coordination of schedules and availability often stretches the limited timelines currently in statute. Increasing the defined time to set up these visits ultimately benefits the students of the school. Additionally, current law denotes that these experts must serve without pay. Individuals who are advanced in their fields often express an eagerness to assist us, but decline our requests because they cannot take the time off from their full-time employment. The discretionary ability to pay a small stipend for this important work would help to speed up the evaluation visit, enabling a school to offer more programs more quickly. Lastly, at the conclusion of an evaluation visit, the findings of the evaluation team are compiled in a single document and provided to school officials. In order to ensure a timely response and authorization, a revised thirty-day timeframe would speed the process and enable a school to open. Further, in an effort to resolve a conflict in our statutes, schools must notify my office sixty days prior to any substantial changes, including the opening of a new branch or classroom site.