



# Trinity College

HARTFORD CONNECTICUT

March 28, 2016

Honorable Senators, Representatives, and Committee Members, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Joanne Berger-Sweeney. I am President of Trinity College, Professor of Neuroscience and a resident of Hartford since 2014.

I am offering testimony on Senate Bill 464 AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE HARTFORD FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION.

Trinity College has been part of the fabric of the City of Hartford for 193 years. Trinity College began as a two-building, nine-student institution on "College Hill" overlooking Bushnell Park. College Hill is now known as Capitol Hill where the State Capitol sits today. We built our Gallows Hill campus a mile southwest of the original campus and Trinity College has grown into one of the finest liberal arts colleges in the country.

Section 7 (a) of SB 464 requires the city to "enter into negotiations with the number of the largest tax-exempt organizations in the city, as measured by value of property owned, recommended by the commission. Following such negotiations, and upon the recommendation of the commission, the city may impose a levy on each such organization representing a percentage of the taxes such organization would pay if not excluded from taxation under the provisions of the general statutes."

The publicly stated goal of this section of the legislation is to provide the City of Hartford additional revenue streams to help address significant budget deficits that are the result of long-term decision making and structural limitations in its tax base. One of the intended sources of that revenue is non-profit institutions of higher education. The legislation as drafted is vague, so while we are unsure of the exact financial impact of the bill, property taxes on our buildings and grounds would have significant negative implications on the financial health of our institution.

Trinity College has long been a partner to the City of Hartford. We have long invested College resources that positively impact residents of Hartford and contribute to the quality of life in the Frog Hollow, Barry Square and the Behind the Rocks neighborhoods.

In partnership with Hartford Hospital and Connecticut Children's Medical Center, we invest more than a half million dollars in Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance, or SINA. SINA works to rehabilitate blighted houses into affordable rental and owner occupied houses in Hartford. We invest directly in the operations of the Trinity College Boys and Girls Club, hosting many of its events and activities on our campus. We operate an off-campus internet café, which provides Hartford residents with internet and computer access as well as computing services/education in English and Spanish. The café has 20,000 visits a year from neighbors in our community.

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We leverage our campus facilities by hosting a high-quality child care center and preschool, the Hartford Youth Scholars Foundation, Inner City Lacrosse and Capitol Squash as well as the Hartford Police Department, which uses one of our buildings as a substation. We also host many community events, such as the recent “Rock Your Future 2016,” the City of Hartford’s Youth Employment and Empowerment Day that drew nearly 500 Hartford students ages 14-19 and their family members to our campus.

Trinity has a partnership with the Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy (formerly Hartford Magnet Middle School). Trinity advises the school with academic affairs, provides professors to lead summer courses and opens up some Trinity courses to qualified seniors at Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy. In the summer months, the College opens its campus to the community for its Plumb Memorial Carillon Concerts as well as Dream Camp, which is a summer and year-round academic mentoring program that serves 250 children from Hartford, ages 6-16.

In addition to our investments in the community, the City of Hartford collects over \$400,000.000 in property taxes from Trinity College for residential and commercial properties that we own. We are responsible stewards of our financial resources and understand the responsibility we have to our community because of our tax-exempt status. We have had an initial conversation with the Mayor’s Office about SB 464 and we plan to continue a dialogue with the city. We are committed to working toward solutions that sustain our relationship with the city and the significant community investments we make. We recognize the fiscal crisis facing the City of Hartford and the limited revenue options available to the city. Likewise, Trinity – along with virtually every college and university in the country – is subject to financial constraints and is limited primarily to the tuition that our families pay to provide their children a world class college education. We will work with the city to identify opportunities that support the Mayor’s goal of addressing Hartford’s budget challenges but at this time we are opposed to SB 464.

Thank you.

Joanne Berger-Sweeney