



## University of Bridgeport

To: Higher Education and Advancement Committee  
From: Kris Bickell, Director of Global Learning Initiatives, University of Bridgeport  
Re: H.B. No. 5071 (RAISED), approval to participate in SARA

As the Director of Global Learning Initiatives, University of Bridgeport's online division, I submit testimony in support of H.B. No. 5071 (RAISED) AN ACT REQUIRING CONNECTICUT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STATE AUTHORIZATION RECIPROCITY AGREEMENT REGARDING DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMS.

The University of Bridgeport supports this initiative for the State of Connecticut to join the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC\_SARA).

The University of Bridgeport offers online degree programs to students who reside in nearly every state. The process of obtaining approval to be authorized in each state is requiring the university to allocate resources to burdensome administrative processes when it could be using resources for direct student support. The current state authorization process is a burden for the following reasons:

First, each state has its own regulations, fees, and procedures for obtaining approval, and determining how to proceed in each state requires extensive investigation.

Second, many of the regulations were written before the inception of online learning, and often utilize terminology that is not directly applicable to an online learning environment, and therefore require considerable research to interpret.

Third, the state offices designated to support & enforce these regulations are not always responsive to requests for clarification, so there is a large degree of uncertainty involved with going through the application process.

Fourth, the economic impact on the University of Bridgeport is very significant. In addition to the high cost of applying to each state, there is an increase in internal resources needed to do the research, prepare the applications, and stay abreast of the changing regulations. Given the complexity of the state regulations, this is a sizable financial impact.

Fifth, the need to apply to every state individually, even with a small number of students residing in a given state, is leading some institutions to decide not to obtain authorization in some states, eliminating access to certain programs for students. In some cases these programs are not widely available, as is the case with several programs offered by the University of Bridgeport, so this would negatively impact a student's ability to choose the best program for their needs.

Finally, these financial and regulatory challenges may also discourage institutions from developing new online degree programs that serve a distinct need for students to remain competitive in the workplace. This is in direct contrast with the mission of many institutions, including the University of Bridgeport. But with the additional fees & paperwork required by some states for each new program, this is an additional burden that SARA would help to reduce or eliminate.

By joining SARA, the State of Connecticut would help institutions like ours to have a more consistent framework in which to work through the state authorization process, and ultimately better serve our students.

Sincerely,

Kris Bickell  
Director of Global Learning Initiatives  
University of Bridgeport