



Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges

Service Employee International Union (SEIU) Local 1973 – “Stronger Together!”

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Hello, Representative Willis and Senator Bartolomeo and esteemed members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. My name is Roberto Fernandez, and I serve as the Political Organizer for the Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges, here unto referred as The 4Cs. We are here today to voice our position as it relates to HB 5071, An Act Requiring Connecticut To Participate In The State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement Regarding Distance Learning Programs (SARA). The 4Cs is asking the committee to include provisions in this Bill to protect Connecticut students.

There is no doubt that reciprocity agreements between states and its universities benefit Connecticut’s students. These agreements play a role in educating hundreds of thousands of students nationwide. Many of these students are working adults, where traditional educational settings and times do not work for their busy schedules.

I am proud to say that many of our members teach online in the community college system. 4Cs members have contributed greatly in enhancing the educational experience to our students in the distance learning environment, and continue to be strong supporters of online education. We support online programming because we understand the student population needs and trends change.

But we must ask ourselves is SARA the answer in protecting Connecticut’s students? We respectfully say that student protection rights must be added to SARA. The problems with SARA implementation in states like California and New York, and the legal questions raised by the Attorney General of Minnesota, should give this committee pause on ensuring that the rights of all of Connecticut’s residents are preserved. Connecticut should monitor how these states are dealing with implementation and enactment of SARA before we enact it. Our state may benefit from identifying best practices of other states in order to maximize protection for Connecticut residents.

The 4Cs stands ready to assist this committee on finding a common ground solution to this problem, and we continue to support Connecticut students when it comes to online education. Thank you for your time, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you!