

**TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE HIGHER EDUCATION  
AND EMPLOYMENT ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE  
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Testimony Regarding House Bill No. 5332

AN ACT CONCERNING THE GOVERNOR'S SCHOLARSHIP

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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 on House Bill No. 5332, An Act Concerning the Governor's Scholarship.

The Office of Policy and Management has been actively participating in the Planning Commission for Higher Education Student Financial Aid Working Group, and we are very impressed with the thoughtful contributions of all the members.

We support two provisions in this bill, which received broad support from members of the working group:

- The use of "prior, prior year" data allows students and families applying for financial aid eligibility to use income information two years prior to when a student enrolls. This makes eligibility determinations much simpler for institutions and ultimately better serves students.
- Establishing an October 1<sup>st</sup> deadline for the Office of Higher Education to publish enrollment data; and notify each institution of higher education the proportion of the Governor's Scholarship appropriation that each institution will receive the following year in student financial aid funding. This enables institutions to make better eligibility determinations and ultimately better serves students.

However, we are concerned about eliminating merit aid to needy Connecticut students, and look forward to continuing this dialogue with the working group. Since 1987 the State of Connecticut has offered academically gifted students, who demonstrate financial need a unique state award originally called the Capitol Scholarship Program. Today, that same concept of awarding financially needy, academically gifted students, lives on through the Governor's Scholarship Need-

Merit program. This program recognizes Connecticut's best and brightest students, who demonstrate financial need, with enhanced state awards to assist in covering the cost of attending a college or university in the state. Students who qualify for these awards receive up to \$2,000 more than students who are awarded Governor's scholarship Need-Based grants. By doing so, the state encourages these students to remain in the state as productive citizens after they complete their program of study. The Governor's Scholarship Need-Merit program is somewhat unique as it is based on academic merit, however, students must first demonstrate financial need. As such, it only provides awards to academically gifted, needy students.

In FY 15 the governor's Scholarship Need-Merit program provided 2,381 needy students a total of \$8,471,307 in scholarship funds to attend Connecticut colleges and universities. The importance of continuing to provide awards based on need and academic merit can be illustrated by the fact that public and private colleges and universities in the state depend heavily on academic awards to recruit students. We are concerned that eliminating the need-merit funding will be disruptive to the institutions currently serving students who rely on this aid, particularly the public institutions which are facing a stark new fiscal reality, with a potential 5.75% across the board block grant reductions.

Because one of the state's goals is to provide financial aid to the neediest students, it is vital that the Governor's Scholarship Need-Merit program remain an integral part of the state's efforts to assist academically gifted, needy students and families afford a college education in the state of Connecticut.

I look forward to working with the committee and the working group on student financial aid issues. I would again like to thank the committee for the opportunity to offer this testimony.