



**Testimony of Steve McDowell**  
Director of Financial Aid Services  
**Connecticut State Colleges & Universities**  
Before the Higher Education and  
Employment Advancement Committee  
February 25, 2016

**HB 5332 AN ACT CONCERNING THE GOVERNOR'S SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM.**

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis, Senator Witkos, Representative Betts, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the changes to the Governor's Scholarship Program (GSP) in HB 5332. My name is Steve McDowell, Director of Financial Aid Services and I am here today with my colleague Greg DeSantis, Associate Director of Financial Aid Services from Housatonic Community College on behalf of the Connecticut State College and University (CSCU) system which includes the state's 12 community colleges, 4 CT State Universities and Charter Oak State College.

It has been my pleasure along with my colleagues to serve on the Planning Commission for Higher Education's Financial Aid Task Force. As part of that committee, we've done a great deal of analysis to try to find ways to more strategically use state financial aid for our college and university students. The proposed changes to the Governor's Scholarship Program go a long way in making improvements that will benefit our students, particularly those who are engaged part-time at our community colleges.

While we are supportive of nearly all of the changes proposed in HB 5332, we have concerns with the elimination of the merit-based and academic incentive components, and recommend a few language changes to improve the program.

We recognize that the original intent of the Governor's Scholarship Program was to foster full-time college enrollment, however we have many students who have no other choice but to enroll part-time in order to balance work and family responsibilities. In fact, two-thirds of our community college enrollment is part-time. Though it will take them longer to earn a college credential, their continued enrollment is key to their persistence and eventual completion. As the program is structured now, it disadvantages those students as well as those who must decrease their credit load from time to time during their education. The proposed change in the program to allow for prorated support to part-time students aligns with the Federal Pell Grant, and would foster greater student persistence toward degree or certificate. We also support the increase in the maximum grant amount to \$4,500 to assist in awarding students who have little or no Pell Grant eligibility (but have remaining need), to mitigate eligible educational costs, and to increase enrollment and retention.

We support the increase in EFC eligibility from \$0 – \$11,000. Currently, our community colleges are only able to consider an EFC of \$0 – \$7,999. This change will improve our ability to award aid to more

students by allowing us to consider Connecticut residents with an EFC of \$8,000 – \$11,000. This also puts us in-line with eligible EFC ranges that are currently utilized at all four-year institutions. To date in 2015-2016, we had nearly 1,800 aid applicants that fell within this EFC range. One of the biggest problems our community colleges currently face is that some institutions return unused funds to OHE. The changes in this bill will help alleviate this problem.

Additionally, we support the clarity achieved by using FTE combined with family contribution characteristics in determining annual allocations to institutions. In general, this technique more effectively weights part-time students when compared to the current “point system” used in calculating allocations to institutions.

Most importantly, these modifications offer more predictability in recalculating a need-based grant if enrollment changes between Fall and Spring, particularly for community college students. As previously noted, we do have a number of students whose enrollment changes from term to term. For example, the number of financial aid recipients who were enrolled full-time in Fall 2015 but enrolled less than full-time in Spring 2016 was over 2,800. Recipients enrolled less than full-time in Fall 2015 but full-time in Spring 2016 was nearly 1,400. That’s a lot of change that our aid administrators must account for when there exists such a disparity between calculating awards at varying enrollment levels.

One change we have concerns about is the elimination of the need-merit and academic incentive components of this program. These are valuable sources of financial aid for our students, particularly at our state universities. While the colleges receive less in merit than need, the resources serve a valuable role in recognizing the accomplishments of our neediest students, as well as incentivize them to stay in Connecticut.

Finally, we have two technical changes we would like to suggest in order to provide more clarity to some areas of ambiguity in the new language:

- Since appropriations would be based off of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE), this term and calculation method should be defined within a new Section 1(a)(6).
- While we believe the following to be inherently understood in the language presented, we believe Section 1(d) should be amended to clarify the proration of a need-based award (Line 105), to include:
  - Students taking 12 or more credits are eligible up to a maximum award;
  - Students taking 9 – 11 credits are eligible for up to 75% of a maximum award;
  - Students taking 6 – 8 credits are eligible for up to 50% of a maximum award; and
  - Students taking 3 – 5 credits are eligible for up to 25% of a maximum award.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on these proposed changes to the Governor's Scholarship Program. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have, and to discuss further any of our recommendations.