

UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD

Testimony for the
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
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February 25, 2016

On behalf of the University of Hartford, I am submitting testimony in support of HB 5332, AN ACT CONCERNING THE GOVERNOR'S SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM, which seeks to make the Governor's Scholarship Program more simple, predictable, flexible, fair, and transparent.

As a key partner in the education of over 3,000 Connecticut residents annually, we are grateful for the funding that the state has provided in the past. These students rely heavily on funds from the Governor's Scholarship Program to achieve their educational goals. This bill will address some of the issues with the program administration, while ensuring that our students can continue to access these important funds.

The Governor's Scholarship Program supports over 500 of our neediest students, annually. Last year, this program allowed us to help 384 Connecticut residents who were also eligible for the Federal Pell Grant program. The average family income of those students was approximately \$31,000 per year. Many of these students would not be able to attend the University absent these funds. This bill seeks to consolidate the need-merit and incentive portions of the program into one need-based program. This is a better use of the state's already limited funds. By focusing funding on need-based awards instead of merit, we can help the economically disadvantaged students access the education that they deserve and increase the number of college graduates that our state needs to succeed.

The current system of awarding lacks flexibility. We have a matrix that defines the exact award amount for students within specific ranges of Estimated Family Contribution. When students have a change in family income, we sometimes have to reduce or even rescind their awards. Even worse, many of these changes happen after the student has already begun attendance. Lack of institutional discretion in awarding causes instability in the student's educational plans. Allowing institutions discretion in awarding is in the best interest of our students.

This bill proposes the use of prior, prior year FAFSA data rather than the institutional unit data report to determine allocations. This would allow institutions to know, at least on an estimated basis, the amount of funding they should receive from the Governor's Scholarship Program and award students before they enroll. We don't receive allocation notices, currently, until July or August, well after the standard May 1 deposit deadline. Our financially disadvantaged students need this information earlier in the process to make an informed decision about their ability to enroll. Giving institutions their estimated allocation earlier in the cycle would allow institutions to plan and allocate resources in a timely, focused, and equitable manner.

The University of Hartford contributes to the economic well-being of the state. Almost 60% of our graduates stay in Connecticut after completing their studies. About 90% of our graduates report being either employed or otherwise enrolled in post-secondary education. Allowing schools more flexibility in the administration of Governor's Scholarship funding so we don't have to reduce or cancel their awards when they have a small change in their economic situation would enhance the ability of our students to persist in the attainment of a University education that ultimately benefits the state.

We will continue our partnership with the state to give low-income Connecticut students the opportunities they deserve. Thank you in advance for voting to simplify and streamline the Governor's Scholarship program.