

UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD

WALTER HARRISON, PRESIDENT

Testimony to the
Higher Education and Workforce Advancement Committee

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I am providing testimony today in support of **SB 24, AN ACT CONCERNING PROGRAM APPROVAL FOR INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION**. With me are Stephen Healey, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs at the University of Bridgeport and Bruce W. Berdanier, Dean of the School of Engineering at Fairfield University. This bill seeks to exempt independent institutions of higher education in Connecticut from the “academic program approval process” administered by the Office of Higher Education. The first time I spoke before a legislative committee to request this important action was in 2008, and I have worked with my colleagues each year since to create better understanding among about this issue to legislators. Last year, the General Assembly overwhelmingly supported the exact bill you have before you today and by votes of 112 to 31 in the House and 31 to 3 in the Senate, and sent the message that the time was now for this important change. Unfortunately, the bill was vetoed, and we are before you again. May I implore you, in the strongest possible terms, as one who has guided a private, independent university in Connecticut for the past eighteen years, as one who spent nine years as a vice president of one of this country’s foremost public universities, and as someone who has spent 44 years as a faculty member and administrator in higher education, that it is time to again approve and move this bill forward to the Governor and to its final approval and place in the Connecticut General Statutes.

The independent universities and colleges that will benefit (and are the alma maters of many of you) are not fly-by-night organizations. We have thousands of employees who are citizens of Connecticut, we educate Connecticut, out-of-state and international students, and we maintain the highest ethical standards in all our dealings. Our new programs, our modified programs and programs we may eliminate are vetted in a thorough and comprehensive way. Our faculty, senior administrators, our boards of trustees and our national and regional accrediting bodies approve of what we do. Higher education in the 21st century is too competitive to make mistakes in program administration. I particularly would note that the bill before you does contain a number of safeguards that will ensure that student resources and their interest in obtaining the best education will not be compromised.

The latest information on state-by-state program review indicates that 36 of the 50 states have no regulatory authority over the approval of academic programs offered by private non-profit

independent colleges. Why not Connecticut? In six of the remaining states, the requirements are straightforward or the state statute exempts a majority of the private non-profit institutions that operate in those states. The remaining states, Connecticut included, have a burdensome review process. And I understand that information that this Committee has just recently received says that Connecticut's program approval requirements for regionally accredited not-for-profit independent institutions appear to be far more extensive than virtually every other state with the exception of New York.

My colleagues and I from independent colleges and universities are here today to testify on this bill, so let me conclude by saying that as important drivers of this state's economy, as anchor institutions in many of the cities and towns in Connecticut, we in the independent sector support this bill so we can continued to help develop our workforce and make Connecticut a leader among the great states of our country.

Thank You.