



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Office of Higher Education

Testimony

by

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before the

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

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Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis, Senator Flexer, Representative Lopes, Senator Witkos, Representative Betts, and distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding S.B. No. 26 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING PRIVATE OCCUPATIONAL SCHOOLS. Last year, a nearly-identical bill unanimously passed the House but did not make it to the floor of the Senate.

As you are aware, one of the responsibilities of the Office of Higher Education is the regulatory oversight of private occupational schools and the protection of students enrolled in those schools in accordance with the statutes enacted by you. Through our day-to-day interaction with school officials, we are constantly seeking to improve our role, both as a consumer protection agency for students and as a facilitator of compliance for Connecticut's private occupational school community.

This bill seeks to improve those protections. Included in this bill are small logistical and efficiency changes to the way schools are approved, including provisions allowing the Office of Higher Education to (1) verify rent or mortgage payments are current to ensure school fiscal stability, (2) offer a small stipend to curriculum specialists to assist the Office with program reviews, as we currently rely on volunteers that must take time off from work and do not get paid, and (3) clarify timeframes regarding the assembly of review teams, schools' responses to

evaluation visit findings, and notification of changes such as the opening of a new branch campus. Further, in the event a school closes without following Connecticut law, this bill allows the Office to facilitate a teach-out of students utilizing the letter of credit provided by the school when it first opened to arrange for program completion and the issuance of certificates of completion, allowing graduates to enter the workforce with minimal disruption.

In addition, the bill changes the nomenclature used in the law when referring to these schools. "Postsecondary career school" is now the mandated language used by the Code of Federal Regulations, and including this new term in Connecticut law will ensure that those schools that participate in federal financial aid programs may continue to do so without interruption.

The sole addition to the 2015 version of this bill appears in Section 1. Among the types of training overseen by the Office of Higher Education are schools based at Connecticut hospitals. These schools' program offerings are subject to the review and approval of an authorized accreditor in much the same way that accredited occupational schools are. Current law allows the Office to accept this accreditation for occupational schools in lieu of a lengthy review by my staff, and this new provision allows the Office to accept programmatic accreditation for hospital based-programs in a similar fashion, at the discretion of the Office.

Before I conclude my comments, I would like to make a suggestion regarding the language of this bill. As you will recall, the Office of Higher Education gained oversight of hairdressing and barbering schools in 2013 pursuant to a statutory change. Many of these schools are very small, and enroll only a few students per year. The law currently requires that all schools submit, on an annual basis, reviewed or audited financial statements to our office for analysis of fiscal stability. However, in the case of hairdressing and barbering schools without

accreditation and fewer than ten (10) students enrolled per year, submitting compiled statements instead would save these schools an expense while still providing the information necessary to ensure that the school is appropriately funded and the school is protected. No distinction currently exists.

Thank you.