



UNIVERSITY OF SAINT JOSEPH

CONNECTICUT

**Testimony for the
Appropriations Committee of
President Rhona Free
University of Saint Joseph
February 10, 2016**

Good evening, I am Rhona Free, President of the University of Saint Joseph, an independent college in West Hartford that offers the only women's undergraduate program in the state. We also offer coeducational undergraduate and graduate programs, including a Doctorate of Pharmacy program at our campus in downtown Hartford.

I am here to testify on House Bill 5044, **AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017**, which seeks to cut and consolidate the Governor's Scholarship Program.

We are very grateful for the support that our students have traditionally received through the Governor's Scholarship Program. However, I urge you not to cut funding for the program or to create the uncertainty inherent in giving the Office of Higher Education discretion to determine how much funding is allocated to the program.

In the last year, funding from this program to the University of Saint Joseph students dropped by more than 45%. With a student body that is very diverse and economically needy, this has meant that support for some very capable students was affected. More than a third of our students are Pell-eligible, and more than half are from under-represented ethnic or racial groups.

The University of Saint Joseph has a high four-year graduation rate that makes the Governor's Scholarship dollars well spent— our students use these funds to get their degrees quickly and move right into the workforce. Many have decided that a women's undergraduate experience is the best for them. Reduced funding for USJ through the Governor's Scholarship Program means that some students will have to drop out or transfer to a program that does not meet their academic needs or career plans as well.

I have seen the amazing impact of Governor's Scholarship grant students who take the skills acquired at USJ in nursing, social work, education, business, or science education, and apply them in our community. They volunteer at the Malta House of Care or Catherine's Place while they finish their degree requirements. The majority of our students come from Connecticut and stay in Connecticut upon graduation, to work or continue their studies in master's or doctoral programs.

Last year, we awarded students aid based on the assumption that funding for the Governor's Scholarship program would remain relatively stable. Unfortunately, we found out in August – just weeks before the beginning of the semester – that the amount allocated to USJ students dropped by 45% from the year before. We covered this loss using institutional funds, but we don't have an endowment that will allow us to do that again.

Our budget for need-based institutional aid continues to grow substantially each year and we have cut our costs so that we remain accessible. With most of our graduates moving into occupations that meet critical social and economic needs but that are not lucrative, we don't have a large donor base. Our endowment is being stretched as we use it to replace Governor's Scholarship dollars so that we can continue to admit students who have ability and motivation, no matter their financial means.

Cuts to the Governor's Scholarship program, or any changes that increase the uncertainty of allocations to our students, will mean that we produce fewer bilingual nurses; fewer teachers prepared to work with students with special needs; fewer social workers to help families; and fewer business, biology, or chemistry majors ready to support the region's growing economic sectors.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this information about the value of the Governor's Scholarship program to University of Saint Joseph students. I will be happy to answer questions.