



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## Office of Higher Education

Testimony  
by  
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before the  
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee  
Thursday, March 2, 2017

Senator Bye, Representative Haddad, Senator Linares, Representative Staneski and distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding H.B. No. 7119 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE AUTHORITY OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF HIGHER EDUCATION RELATING TO TEACH-OUT PLANS AND ON-SITE REVIEW OF ACADEMIC PROGRAMS and H.B. No. 7120 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING POSTSECONDARY CAREER SCHOOLS. The Office of Higher Education agrees with and supports the goals of both bills, which I will address in turn.

Let me begin with H.B. 7119. As you are aware, the Office of Higher Education licenses and accredits certain institutions and programs of higher education in Connecticut. While we seek every day to foster and improve higher education opportunities for students in our state, institutions sometimes encounter financial or administrative circumstances from which they cannot recover. This bill seeks to strengthen protections for students by permitting the executive director of the Office of Higher Education to require a teach-out plan that ensures all enrolled students can complete their programs and earn a degree. Please note that this may only be utilized as a last resort when an institution that lacks regional accreditation is failing and students are at risk. The Office of Higher Education already has similar authority in this regard for occupational schools, and in our experience, the ability of the Office to facilitate program

completions for students of institutions facing closure is an invaluable tool for ensuring that an acceptable academic plan is developed for them. Additionally, a teach-out plan would prevent such an institution from enrolling new students in programs whose viability is in serious question. The bill also requires that institutions offering instruction in a field where a state or federal license is necessary to practice supply evidence that their program qualifies graduates to obtain such license. The intent of this provision is to make sure that students who have taken and paid for coursework in pursuit of a professional license are provided with the education appropriate to attain that license.

With regards to H.B. 7120, this bill makes several minor, but helpful, technical changes to our postsecondary career school statutes. Among them, the bill clarifies the definition of a private occupational school and more specifically enumerates exceptions, including instruction in arts or recreation, for example, that do not lead to an occupation. Our office fields numerous inquiries regarding the current language which can be avoided with this change. Further, the bill expands last year's qualified annual financial reporting exemption for schools enrolling fewer than ten students per year. This careful expansion will save small schools thousands of dollars annually while still providing my office with the information we need to ensure the financial stability and viability of these schools.

The bill addresses procedures for inevitable school closures as well. As you know, the Office of Higher Education is responsible for the preservation and maintenance of the records and student transcripts of these schools. In many instances, schools close unexpectedly and leave thousands of student records in tremendous disarray, leaving my staff the enormous task of seizing, reconstructing and organizing files into functional systems that can supply former students with transcripts for employer verification or transfer to another school. This bill requires

that all schools maintain an organized file of specific information on each student and immediately transmit that file to the Office of Higher Education upon closure of the school. Many of our Connecticut schools already do this, but this change will ensure that all participate. Lastly, the bill conforms Connecticut's tuition refund policy to the federal procedure when a school does close without teaching out students or returning their tuition dollars.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about the merits of these two bills. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.