



**State of Connecticut**  
**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
STATE CAPITOL  
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

**REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPH P. GRESKO**  
**STATE REPRESENTATIVE**  
ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-FIRST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING  
ROOM 4006  
CAPITOL: (860) 240-8585  
TOLL FREE: (800) 842-8267  
FAX: (860) 240-0067  
E-MAIL: Joseph.Gresko@cga.ct.gov

**VICE CHAIR**  
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Public Hearing – February 23, 2017  
Higher Education Committee

Testimony Submitted by State Representative Joseph P. Gresko  
H.B. 6583 – AN ACT TRANSFERRING CONNECTICUT'S AVIATION MAINTENANCE TECHNICIAN  
SCHOOLS TO THE REGIONAL COMMUNITY-TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM.

Good afternoon, Chairman Haddad, Chairman Bye, Chairman Linares, Ranking Member Staneski, Vice Chairs and members. My name is Joe Gresko and I'm the State Representative from the 121st district in Stratford.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding House Bill No. 6583, which for the record...is co-introduced by Representative's Yaccarino, McGorty, Hoydich and Cummings as well.

(Rep. Yaccarino called our attention to the matter and Rep. McGorty had this idea.)

Connecticut has two aviation mechanics programs, CT Aero Tech in Hartford and the Stratford School for Aviation Maintenance Technicians. Right now, the programs are post-secondary adult education programs run as part of the Connecticut Technical High School System (CTHSS). 2 year program

Last June, the CTHSS superintendent informed aviation school officials the schools would continue to operate but would not be enrolling a new class in September. At issue was CTHSS no longer meeting the U.S. Department of Education's definition of a "post-secondary institution," so therefore the aviation school students were no longer eligible for federal Pell grants.

In September, the decision was reversed and new students were allowed, but it was too late to muster a class.

Why the change?

Federal regulations require that, in order for a post-secondary institution's students to be eligible for Pell grants, they must be legally authorized by the state to provide post-secondary education by being named in a state charter, statute, constitution, or other state agency issued-action as authorized to operate a post-secondary education program

CTHSS is established by name as an educational institution in statute, it is not authorized under state law to operate educational programs beyond high school. (The US Department of Education eventually agreed to consider CTHSS to be legally authorized to operate post-secondary LPN programs because there is a state law directing CTHSS to provide those programs, but there is no similar state law for aviation mechanics programs.)

State statutes would have to be amended to authorize CTHSS to operate post-secondary programs in general in order for aviation students to be eligible for Pell grants.

Students who attend community colleges are eligible to receive federal financial aid. Making aviation schools into community colleges or adding the aviation mechanics programs into the academic programs of existing community colleges would make them eligible to receive aid. The General Assembly has not made it a common practice to mandate the academic programs offered by state colleges and universities, but there is nothing in the statutes that would prohibit it from doing so.

The global commercial aviation industry will need new commercial airline maintenance technicians, but where will the new technicians come from? General aviation is often the training ground for those who work in the commercial aviation sector.

Getting students excited about aviation as a career while they're young is critical. For students interested in an aviation career without the hefty price tag of a four-year degree, community colleges offer an excellent path to gain the skills needed for maintenance and other aircraft jobs.

Aviation maintenance also offers tremendous opportunities for those looking for a new career, whether it's after military service a transition from a manufacturing job in another sector, or an unrelated profession. The median age of the current aviation workforce is increasing at the same time it is poised for growth.

I attended a recent open house at the Aviation School in Stratford and the attendance and subsequent sign up for the program beginning in March was promising.

Last year's special session approving the deal between the state and Sikorsky Aircraft was music to my ears, but also provides jobs for these school graduates.

Thank you for your time.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph P. Amato". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and a stylized 'A'.