



**Higher Education & Employment Advancement Committee  
Public Hearing**

**March 9, 2017**

**Written Testimony  
Submitted by**

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Dean of Students**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on *HB 7234 AN ACT CONCERNING FINANCIAL AID FOR STUDENTS IN CRISIS*.

The health and safety of our students are of the utmost importance to the University and we work to ensure that we support and are responsive to extenuating circumstances and needs that may arise. Understanding there are not unlimited resources to accomplish this, UConn students are provided access to a number of campus services including financial aid eligibility, housing assistance, counseling and mental health services, and much more.

The bill defines a student in crisis as one who does not have reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food; who is at risk of becoming or is homeless; or who is claiming an exemption from providing parental information under the Free Application for Federal Student Aid due to special circumstances, including, but not limited to, the incarceration of a parent or guardian of such student, such student has left home due to an abusive family environment, the inability to locate or contact a parent or guardian of such student, or other circumstances to the extent permitted by federal law.

At the University, each special circumstance, self-reported and presented by a student, is handled on an individual and case by case basis. Students frequently present with a variety of needs that cannot be accommodated in a pro forma manner. Rather, we have our best success by broadly and publicly presenting campus resource offices to the entire University population through programs such as orientation and web based resources. Student services staff are also trained on how to refer students to appropriate resources. Further, once students are appropriately referred, the University is able to customize resources that meet the unique needs expressed by the student.

Many of the areas noted in the bill would already be addressed by the University. For example, a student's self-reporting of financial hardship, due to special familial circumstances, would be directed to the Office of Student Financial Aid Services. This office has the expertise and ability to assist students in determining or reevaluating a student's dependency status and how to complete the necessary forms regarding determining financial assistance.

The bill also requires public institutions of higher education to identify students in crisis and provide certain resources to them. Unfortunately, it is virtually impossible for the University to identify all students in need; and again, with limited resources the University will continue to assist students as best it can, on a case-by-case basis.

We applaud the intent of the bill, however, we oppose its passage because we believe the matters referenced in the bill are better addressed administratively and not mandated in legislation. We are happy to continue to work with you on these matters.

Thank you for your consideration and ongoing support for the University of Connecticut.