



CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

**Testimony for the Joint Meeting of the
Appropriations, Finance, Commerce and Planning & Development Committees
from Deborah MacDonnell, Connecticut College
March 21, 2018**

On behalf of Connecticut College, I want to commend the members of the Commission on Fiscal Stability and Economic Growth for their work to study the potential within Connecticut to regain economic growth and to develop the Commission's recommendations on how to achieve it. We particularly appreciate the Commission's recognition of higher education as an economic driver in the state of Connecticut, and look forward to continuing to do our part to educate and retain students in the state.

Connecticut College is a vital part of the state's independent college sector which awards nearly half of the bachelor's degrees in the state. At Connecticut College, our mission is to educate students to put the liberal arts into action. That mission is put into play every day through our unique Connections curriculum which lets students integrate their interests into meaningful education pathways that carry them through college and into fulfilling, effective careers and lives.

With our mission firmly in mind, we applaud the Commission's goals to further develop the state's colleges and universities into centers of economic growth. We support the state's drive to increase STEM graduates and continue to find creative and effective ways to partner in efforts to develop our region of the state as a hub for innovation, entrepreneurship and business growth.

We do have concerns, however, that the Commission is placing an unfair burden on higher education by recommending cities be authorized to charge colleges and universities for services. We have a mutually beneficial relationship with the city of New London, and want to do as much as we can to help the city. Currently, by employing more than 800 people, Connecticut College stands as a foundation for economic stability in southeastern Connecticut – the third largest employer in New London. Our payroll, including salary and benefits, is more than \$60 million, approximately one-half of our annual operating budget, and is reinvested into the region by our employees who pay property taxes, shop in local stores, eat in local restaurants, hire local service providers and donate both their energy and money to local charities and community activities.

Connecticut College provides critical resources to our community through the volunteerism of faculty, staff and hundreds of students each year. In fact, community service is part of our community's DNA, and we have a number of classes that incorporate community learning into the curriculum. Recently, an urban design class worked with community partners to design and implement a community garden in New London to support healthy, sustainability living in the city. This is just one example of the way we educate our students for responsible citizenship.

New London schools benefit from the work of both our faculty and staff as consultants and our students as aides, mentors, after-school program and activity coordinators, and tutors. Our students volunteer in more than 50 community organizations, providing support in areas such as health and wellness, social justice, education, arts and culture, and early child development. The College Arboretum campus is open to the public as are its library and certain of its athletic fields and facilities at selected times.

Connecticut College is a destination for thousands of visitors each year who seek our campus for cultural, intellectual, athletic and entertainment events. They include the families of students and prospective students. They include academics from across the country who take part in conferences, summits and symposia. Many stay in local hotels, eat in local restaurants and shop in local stores. In short, they spend money in New London and the surrounding region.

Connecticut College wants to continue to be a strong partner in the state and in the local community. Any additional financial burden, such as the proposal to charge fees for services, would significantly impact our ability to do so.

We understand that the state's cities and towns are facing severe financial challenges. The Commission's recommendation for the state to more fully fund PILOT for state and tax-exempt property is the better approach, and one we fully support. This approach provides municipalities with the funding the program originally intended and recognizes that tax-exempt status for non-profit institutions grew out of the tradition of important public needs being provided by private entities, such as private colleges. Connecticut College is certainly doing its part in providing critical benefits and services to the region and in positively impacting the economy, and support the Commission's recommendation that the PILOT program be fully funded.

We applaud the Commission's recommendation to fully fund the PILOT program and strongly oppose the concept of authorizing municipalities to charge tax-exempt entities for services.

Thank you.