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## **OLR Bill Analysis**

### **HB 7253**

#### ***AN ACT CONCERNING DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMS OPERATED BY INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION OUTSIDE OF THE STATE.***

#### **SUMMARY**

The State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) is a voluntary agreement between its member states and U.S. territories, including Connecticut, which establishes comparable national standards for higher education institutions to postsecondary distance-education courses and programs out of state. Under existing law, an out-of-state institution that participates in SARA must comply with the agreement's standards in order to offer a distance learning program in Connecticut. Under this bill, out-of-state higher education institutions that do not participate in SARA must apply for authorization from OHE to operate distance learning programs in Connecticut. (Current law does not specify any standards or requirements for such institutions to offer these programs in the state.)

EFFECTIVE DATE: January 1, 2020

#### **APPLICATION AND AUTHORIZATION PROCESS**

Under the bill, an out-of-state institution that does not participate in SARA and seeks to operate a distance learning program in the state must (1) apply to OHE on a form the office prescribes and (2) agree to standards OHE establishes that are similar to the SARA standards. OHE must approve or reject the application in accordance with the standards it establishes. Once approved, the OHE authorization is valid for one year and may be annually renewed.

The bill requires OHE to establish an application and renewal fee schedule for such institutions. The fee schedule must be graduated based on the number of full-time equivalent students enrolled at each

out-of-state higher education institution.

## **BACKGROUND**

### ***State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA)***

SARA allows institutions offering distance learning programs outside of their home state to enroll students under uniform standards. SARA membership is open to non-profit and for-profit degree-granting postsecondary institutions accredited by a U.S. Department of Education recognized agency. States participating in SARA commit to resolving complaints from distance learning programs offered by their institutions. Currently, California is the only state that does not participate in SARA.

OHE is the portal agency that administers SARA in Connecticut, and is responsible for the review of institutional applications and the resolution of out-of-state students' complaints against Connecticut SARA institutions.

## **COMMITTEE ACTION**

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 22    Nay 0    (03/12/2019)