



Sacred Heart UNIVERSITY

Testimony for the
Finance Revenue and Bonding Committee
April 10, 2019

On behalf of Sacred Heart University, I write in strong opposition to House Bill No. 7408, AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPAL REVENUE AND STORMWATER AUTHORITY, STUDIES OF THE PILOT GRANTS PROGRAM AND PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION FOR MACHINERY AND EQUIPMENT AND ENTERPRISE ZONES.

I am particularly concerned with the provision in Section 6 that authorizes the legislative body of a municipality to establish a municipal public safety and infrastructure benefit charge to be levied on non-profit entities that own tax-exempt property. The bill's stated purpose is to allow municipalities to assess a fee on tax-exempt nonprofits to mitigate the costs incurred for the provision of police, fire, emergency services and road maintenance. The idea is to recoup costs for services to these institutions since it is believed that they do not pay their share for these costs, specifically in the form of taxes. While the bill includes consideration of the fees, assessments, voluntary payments and in-kind services received from the nonprofit, it opens the door for towns and cities to assess fees that could severely debilitate these nonprofits

The state's nonprofit colleges and universities make a tremendous impact on the state and the communities where they reside. According to a recent study using 2017 data, the economic impact to the State of Connecticut from its 15 nonprofit, independent colleges and universities is \$33.2 billion.

Since 2006, Sacred Heart University has contributed \$5.4 million dollars in taxes and permits to local municipalities.

There are also countless ways that SHU gives back to the community through direct spending, job creation, volunteer hours, charitable contributions, donations of goods and services and free use of space. Here are just a few examples of the ways we assist first responders:

- SHU offers a **50 percent tuition discount** for first responders who enroll in its Master of Public Administration (MPA) program.
- SHU assisted in developing, reviewing and instituting plans for mutual aid for Bridgeport, Fairfield & Trumbull. These plans have the University offering supplies and facilities, **at no cost**, in the event of an emergency to include relocation of students should an incident occur at one of their schools.
- SHU participates in the CT DHEMS Region 1 emergency planning team, with staff chairing the school safety sub-committee to assist in preparation, prevention and response to a school emergency in the region.
- SHU assisted with developing plans that designate SHU facilities, **at no cost**, as one of the points of distribution for vaccines in an emergency for municipalities, since they do not have that resource.

- SHU's WSHU radio station provides emergency broadcast messages, **at no cost**, to local municipalities during certain emergencies. This is in addition to the official federal emergency messages.
- SHU is providing secure space, **at no cost**, for Fairfield, Westport and potentially other municipalities, for a regional 911 emergency center on University property, potentially saving these communities close to \$1m dollars in costs for space elsewhere.
- SHU has assumed financial responsibility for all maintenance costs of three traffic lights around the University on public roads, to mitigate the costs for other services these municipalities may provide the University.
- Since 2017, SHU has paid for two Bridgeport police officers to patrol North End neighborhoods Thursday-Saturday from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. to handle issues related to Sacred Heart and its students.
- SHU is providing training in computer skills, **at no cost**, for Bridgeport Police Department supervisors, as the department moves to computer-generated reports.
- SHU provides state-of-the-art resources and space, **at no cost**, for police training in the area of leadership, investigations, FBI training, active shooter etc.

In addition to the many ways we work with first responders by offering our personnel, facilities and tuition discounts, we make a tremendous difference in the local communities. In fact, the positive economic impact from having Sacred Heart University as a neighbor is eye-opening: direct spending by students accounts for \$99 million pumped into the local economy. Visitors spend at least \$1.6 million annually in the area, and total direct spending by SHU, its employees, students and visitors is estimated at approximately \$1.6 billion annually. What's more, 17,121 jobs have been created to support this population and the University.

Students, their families and visitors spend millions of dollars annually supporting the local economy. Our shuttle buses regularly deliver our students to downtown Fairfield where they buy groceries, make purchases at stores, dine at restaurants and support a myriad of small businesses. That means income, as well as jobs and new businesses. As you consider whether to assess an additional fee on colleges, please consider all the contributions they already make to the towns where they reside.

Sincerely,
 Gary MacNamara
 Executive director, Public Safety & Gov't. Affairs
 Sacred Heart University