Sacred Heart University supports H.B. 7410: AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN TAX RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMISSION ON FISCAL STABILITY AND ECONOMIC GROWTH AND ESTABLISHING A STEM SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM.

On behalf of Sacred Heart University, I write in support of House Bill No. 7410. While we hope the legislature will also continue to support the need-based scholarships that are so critical to the students across the state, we also support a focus on STEM programs that will produce students who are ready to fill jobs that are currently going begging in our state. Jobs in STEM fields are expanding faster than non-STEM jobs and, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, will reach nine million by 2022. On the other side, less than half of all U.S. students are proficient in math, and that number drops to 26 percent by 12th grade. Science expertise does not score much higher, and these achievement gaps are creating a technology employment crisis.

Clearly some of the focus needs to be in K-12 math and science programs, but higher education can help by producing teacher candidates with strong STEM foundations so they can bring that learning and experience into K-12 classrooms.

Responding to these needs, Sacred Heart University has created four STEM-related majors in traditional science, neuroscience, molecular and cellular biology and coastal and marine science. In addition, we will be introducing a new elementary education STEM major next fall. A leader in health, biology and chemistry informatics, the University is stretching its science acumen across a variety of disciplines to ensure students in other curricula are properly exposed to these science strengths. That includes intelligent computing at the graduate level, with learning certificates and new graduate courses offered in artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning and big data.

Additionally, Sacred Heart is building a state-of-the-art AI laboratory, more than tripling its makerspace for promoting incubation, new-product development and engineering solutions and entering into innovation partnerships with technology employers like Verizon. Finally, Sacred Heart has created the state’s first formal certification in computer science for K-12 educators.

We commend the state for considering its future and recognizing the need for vigorous technology and innovation pipelines. Helping its colleges and universities to ensure that students and educators receive the right education—with goals of retaining STEM-related graduates and employers hungry for this talent—is a step in the right direction.

Sincerely,
Rupendra Paliwal, provost
Sacred Heart University