



Fairfield University

Office of the President

Mark R. Nemeec, PhD
President

Testimony for the Higher Education Committee
Mark R. Nemeec, PhD
President & Professor of Politics

On behalf of Fairfield University and as a scholar who has extensively researched the societal role of higher education in creating civic capital and fostering economic competitiveness, I write in strong support of S.B. No. 26 (An Act Making Permanent the Moratorium on Approval of a Certain Number of Programs at Independent Institutions of Higher Education) and of S.B. No. 131 (An Act Making Permanent the Moratorium on the Approval of the Office of Higher Education (OHE) for a Certain Number of Programs at Independent Institutions of Higher Education). Our independent universities exemption from program approval has now been in place for three years and is essential to our ability to provide students and the greater community with innovative programs and necessary skills to create positive change.

I also write in strong opposition to H.B. No. 7088 (An Act Concerning Program Approval at Independent Institutions of Higher Education). This bill would require the Office of Higher Education to adopt regulations and an application process by 2020 which would govern who qualifies from the exemption from program approval. The bill requires OHE to put standards in place that mirror the existing standards, as well as require minimum thresholds on measures including graduation rates, student loan default rates and employment rates, in order to qualify for the exemption.

H.B. No. 7088 is unnecessary. Our internal review processes are strong, clear, and consistent, and more than sufficient to ensure quality in the aforementioned response to student and industry demands.

Fairfield University's Program approval process is rigorous and efficient. After a faculty and then a School-specific vote on the program(s) and course(s), programs are then considered by the Dean of the respective School and – for Undergraduate programs – the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee. The Education Planning Committee then reviews the budget and resources needed to launch the program successfully, followed by a full review of the proposal by the Academic Council including program description, objectives, impact, administrative structure and governance, and more. Finally, the Implementation Team meets to ensure a successful launch by bringing together all executive level department heads for final approval.

Additionally, universities undergo significant and comprehensive accreditation evaluations that are conducted by individuals and teams deeply immersed in higher education standards. Fairfield just finished its 10-year Comprehensive Review and will have its 5-year Interim Review in 2022. We also submit an Annual Report to the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) with updates. Universities like Fairfield also undergo rigorous self-studies. Every institution accredited by NECHE undergoes evaluations at 5 and 10-year intervals. Beyond the regional accreditors, our programs undergo rigorous evaluation by organizations including, but not limited to, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the Accreditation Board of Engineering and Technology (ABET), the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).


Fairfield University is focused on creating career-oriented programs blended with a solid liberal arts foundation to enrich our communities. We created a Palliative Care Program in our Egan School of Nursing and Health Studies to address the growing need for quality end of life care. Graduates of our new Social Work Program – which provides both Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees – will prepare social work professionals to enhance human well-being and to help meet the basic needs of all people. Without the moratorium, these programs – which both provide a necessary and skilled need – would not meet the immediate demand for these societal services.

At the continuing education level, our part-time and certificate programs are developed in direct response to the desires of professionals who want to advance their education and apply it immediately to the community. From business analytics to cyber-security, these programs meet the demands of local and state businesses and increase the excellence of the community’s workforce. If our state’s economy is to thrive, all our universities must be able to be nimble and responsive to the needs of society and the marketplace.

This Fall, Fairfield University welcomed the largest incoming undergraduate class in our history which coupled with our exceptional retention has generated a record number of enrollments and graduates. Our ability to attract talented students to our university and to this state is predicated on our ability to offer a range of programs which help students prepare for life after graduation. Fairfield University and our fellow independent colleges and universities must remain flexible and adaptable in order to effectively prepare even more students for the professional world. Making our exemption from program approval permanent is important to students, faculty, and employers. Therefore approval of S.B. Nos. 26 and 131 is essential.

We appreciate your continued support as we continue to be a relevant, sustainable, and powerful resource to our state’s economic success.

Thank you,



Mark R. Nemecek, PhD
President
Professor of Politics