



Sacred Heart UNIVERSITY

Testimony for the
Higher Education Committee
February 14, 2019

Sacred Heart University strongly supports 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 S.B. No. 131 AN ACT MAKING PERMANENT THE MORATORIUM ON THE APPROVAL OF THE OFFICE OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR A CERTAIN NUMBER OF PROGRAMS AT INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION. The exemption from program approval has now been in place for three years and is critical to our ability to respond to student and industry demand.

In the same vein, we vehemently oppose H.B. No. 7088 AN ACT CONCERNING PROGRAM APPROVAL AT INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION. 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 for an institution to qualify for exemption. There is no correlation between these metrics and program approval.

The federal Department of Education has delegated accreditation oversight to the regional accrediting bodies—NECHE in our case. This regional accreditation review comes in addition to very rigorous reviews by professional accrediting bodies for disciplines such as nursing, engineering, physical therapy and business. These, along with our own comprehensive internal review processes, should be sufficient.

The primary concern with the state's review process is timing. Since the need for state review was lifted, Sacred Heart University has been able to develop new programs and get them to market in a timely way. The previous system often caused us to lose an entire academic year before admitting students to a new program. Our ability to develop and offer new graduate programs on a timely basis has helped us keep many of our out-of-state undergraduate students in Connecticut to pursue graduate degrees. Let's not lose that talent to other states.

The state's private colleges and universities serve a very important role for both students and their future employers. They strive to provide relevant and sought-after majors, degree and certificate programs that are responsive to student and employer demand. They connect with the employer community through advisory relationships, internships, research collaborations, guest teaching opportunities and statewide economic development efforts. In developing new programs, they assess the academic foundations and rigor, institutional fit, available teaching, support and faculty resources and market viability. Proposed programs at these regionally accredited institutions go through various extensive on-campus review. Only the academically and financially strong programs are ultimately offered.

When you consider that this extra layer of scrutiny is focused only on the private sector, it gives the impression that the State of Connecticut is uninterested in helping the citizens of Connecticut access all available routes to higher education and indicates a bias toward public institutions. The six states that still require state review of new programs for non-profit institutions of higher education also require that public institutions undergo the same scrutiny. By not eliminating this review for private institutions, Connecticut would give the private sector a handicap that will not serve our students nor the overall reputation of the state.

Also, considering that these programs receive no direct state funding along with the tough economic times the State is currently facing, it makes sense to weigh which state regulations add value. This is NOT one of them.

It is important to reiterate that most other states do not have this structure of review. Other states require that both private and public institutions inform them of new programs, but do not insist on evaluating them after they have been evaluated by professionals in the field. The state review process leads to a high level of frustration for the faculty and administration of the private institutions in Connecticut as it hampers their ability to be respond to shifting demographics and changing economy in a timely manner. Getting rid of the review process will be a critical step in helping us work with the business community to enhance our state's economic growth and development and keep our graduates right here in Connecticut.

Thank you.

Rupendra Paliwal, provost
Sacred Heart University