

UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD

Testimony for the Higher Education Committee

H. Frederick Sweitzer, Provost

Feb. 12, 2019

On behalf of the University of Hartford, 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 for a Certain Number of Programs at Independent Institutions of Higher Education). Our exemption from program approval has now been in place for three years and is incredibly important to our ability to respond to student and industry demand.

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 (OHE) to adopt regulations and an application process by 2020 that would govern who qualifies for 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. This bill is unnecessary. There is no correlation between these metrics and program approval. 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.

The University's internal review process is both efficient and rigorous. After identifying and vetting potential new programs, our new program proposals and modifications are analyzed by our Office of Institutional Effectiveness to ensure that there is demand in Connecticut and the Northeast region, both for high school students interested in a program and in employers ready to hire its graduates. Proposals also undergo a rigorous financial analysis of projected income and expenses to ensure viability. A Program Review Committee reviews these data, along with a narrative that addresses student learning outcomes, assessment, and distinctiveness. The curriculum of a new program is reviewed by faculty committees at the program, college, and university levels. All of these various analyses converge in the Office of the Provost before being presented to the Board of Regents, our governing entity, for final approval.

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On the undergraduate level, we are focused on creating career-oriented programs blended with a solid liberal arts foundation. Last year, we approved a bachelor's in Computer Science and Engineering, and a bachelor's in Digital Media and Journalism, both housed in the College of Arts and Sciences. Without the moratorium, we would have lost an entire recruiting year for these programs. This year we have approved a Master of Science in Business Analytics in response to industry needs, and are in the midst of reviewing an undergraduate major in Robotics, something all our industry partners have encouraged.

At the graduate and degree-completion levels, our part-time programs are developed in direct response to the needs of our community. We work hard at understanding those needs, through our collegiate deans and our Office of Strategic Partnerships, and our director of collaborative research and economic development. As an example of our responsiveness, we created an online Master of Science in Management, which was able to progress from conception to recruiting in nine months.

The demographics of college-bound students, specifically in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions, continue to shift. The ability to be flexible and adaptable is imperative for our institution, for the students we educate, and for the businesses and industries in Connecticut and elsewhere that require an educated workforce. The University of Hartford is proud to play an important and critical role in the development of Connecticut's dynamic workforce. Making our exemption from program approval permanent is important to us, our students, and employers, and therefore S.B. No. 26 and S.B. No. 131 are among our top priorities for the 2019 legislative session. We appreciate your continued support in our pursuit to remain a relevant, sustainable, and powerful resource to our state's economic success.

Thank you.