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**Testimony for the
Higher Education & Employment Advancement Committee
Jennifer Widness, President
Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges
February 28, 2019**

On behalf of the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges (CCIC), I am submitting testimony on two bills before you today: **S.B. 273 An Act Concerning Debt-Free College** and **H.B. 7161 An Act Establishing Finish Line Grants**.

Connecticut's independent colleges play a significant role in educating our state's citizenry. We enroll over 80,000 students, over 30% of the total, and award nearly 50% of the bachelor's degrees earned each year. We award the bulk of degrees earned in STEM fields, including Engineering and Computer Science, and we award nearly half of the bachelor's degrees earned by minority students.

Rather than picking winners and losers in making one sector of higher education free for certain Connecticut residents, as these two bills would do, CCIC believes the state should support access and choice to *all* sectors of higher education institutions by investing in the state's need-based financial aid program, the Roberta Willis Scholarship Program, which has faced significant reductions over the last eight years (see Figure 1). Connecticut's state need-based aid program lags the national average in both average grant awards and investment per student enrolled (see Figure 2-4).

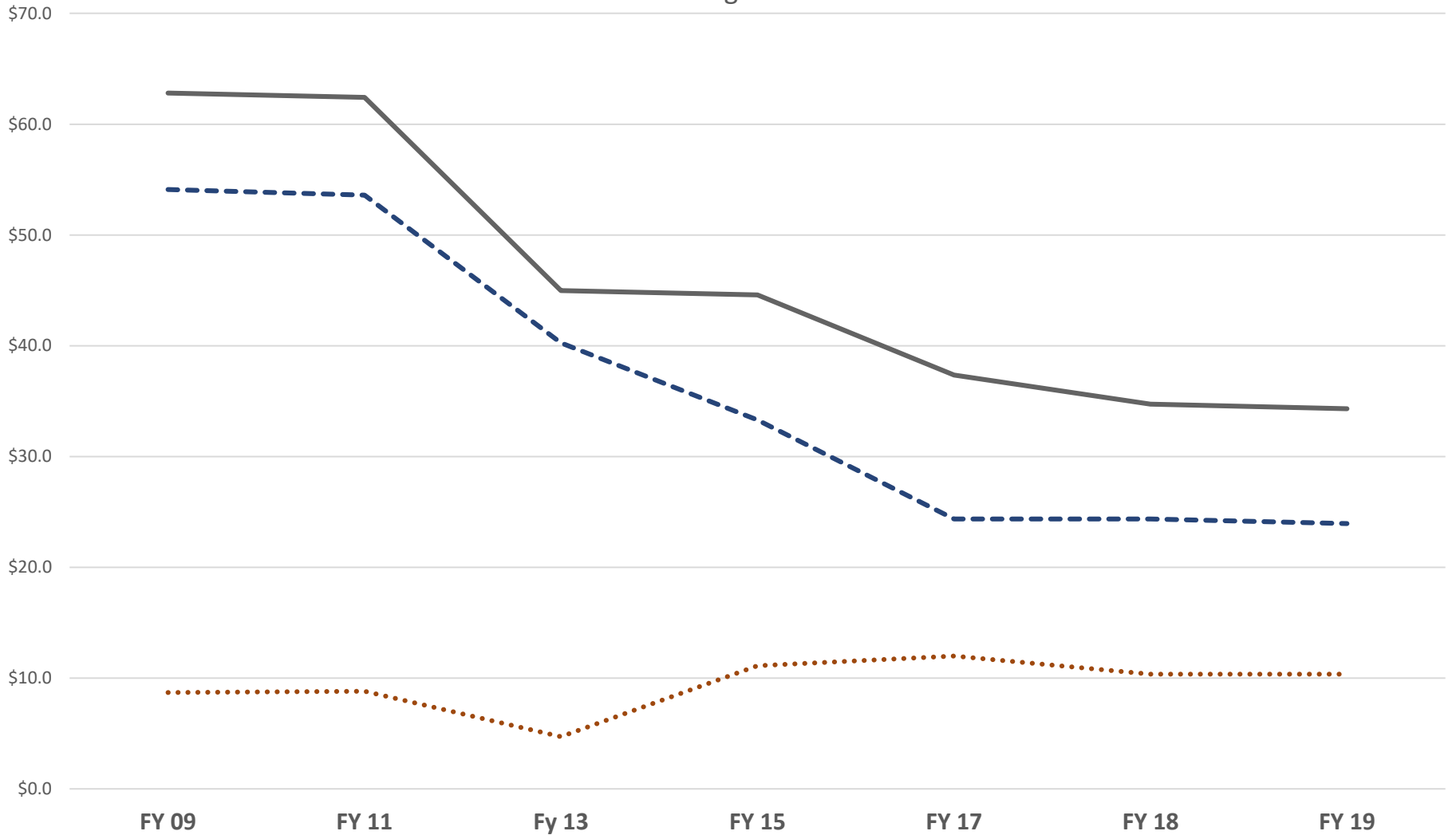
A robust student aid program will incentivize Connecticut students to stay in-state for college and allow them access to the institution that fits them best. Connecticut ranks towards the bottom in the nation for the percent of its high-school graduates who stay in state for college (see Figure 5).

Contrary to popular belief, it is not whether an institution is public or private which determines what percent of graduates stay in-state, but what percentage of Connecticut students are enrolled at that institution (see figure 6). In fact, recent data from P20 WIN found 85% of Roberta Willis Scholarship grant recipients at independent colleges were found working in state after graduation. (see figure 7).

State need-based aid has been cut in half since 2011. A recent analysis by the Hechinger Report found that 80% of CT students that are eligible to receive the state grant are unfunded (see figure 8). This is the 4th highest unmet need in the country. If new resources are available to support scholarships for Connecticut residents, those funds should be invested in the state's need-based aid scholarship program, the Roberta Willis Scholarship Program.

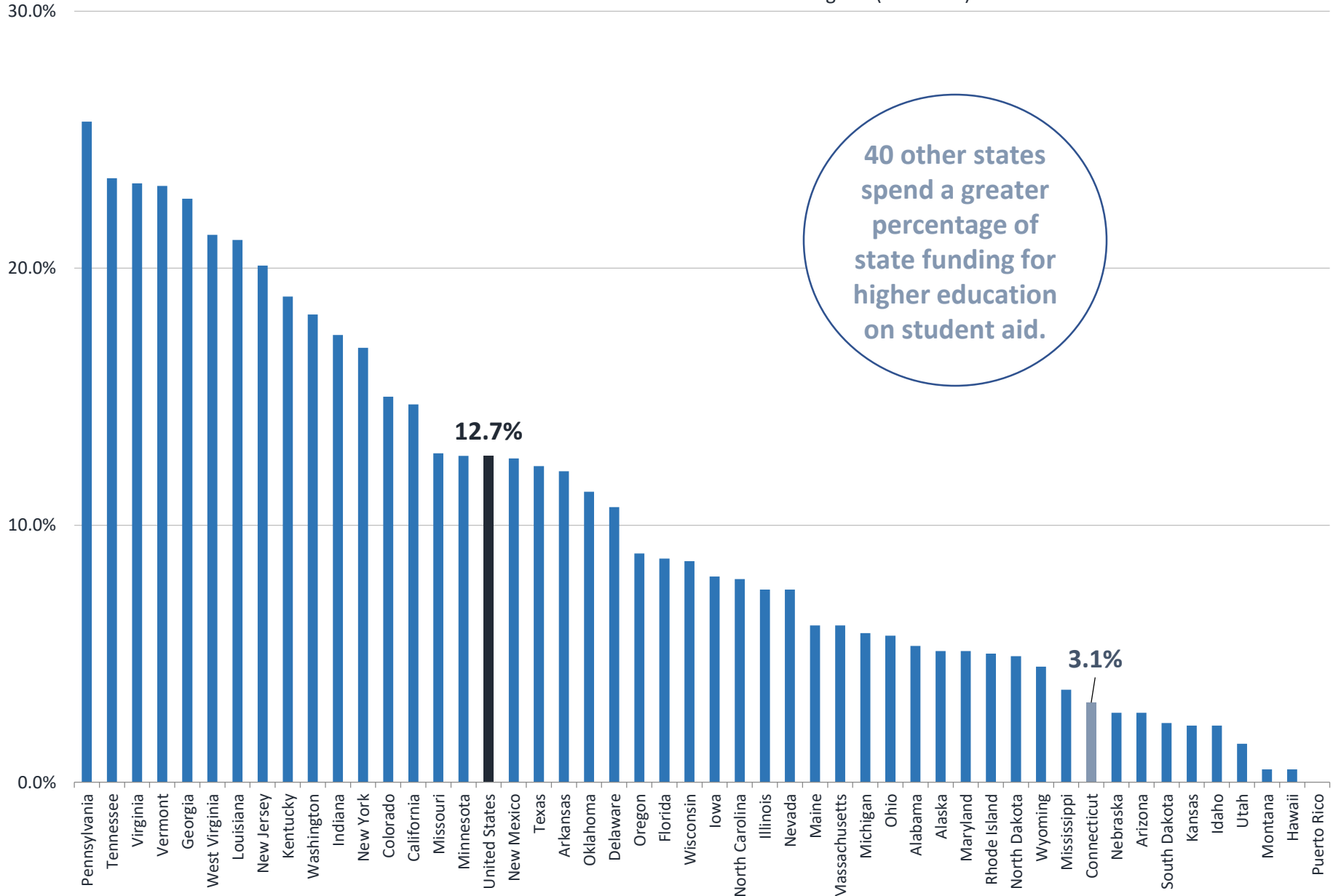
Trends in Funding for State Financial Aid: FY 09 - FY 19

- State Funding for Need-based Aid
- State Funding for Need-Merit Aid
- TOTAL State Funding for Student Financial Aid



State Grant Expenditures as a Percentage of State Fiscal Support for Higher Education Operating Expenses, by State: 2016-17

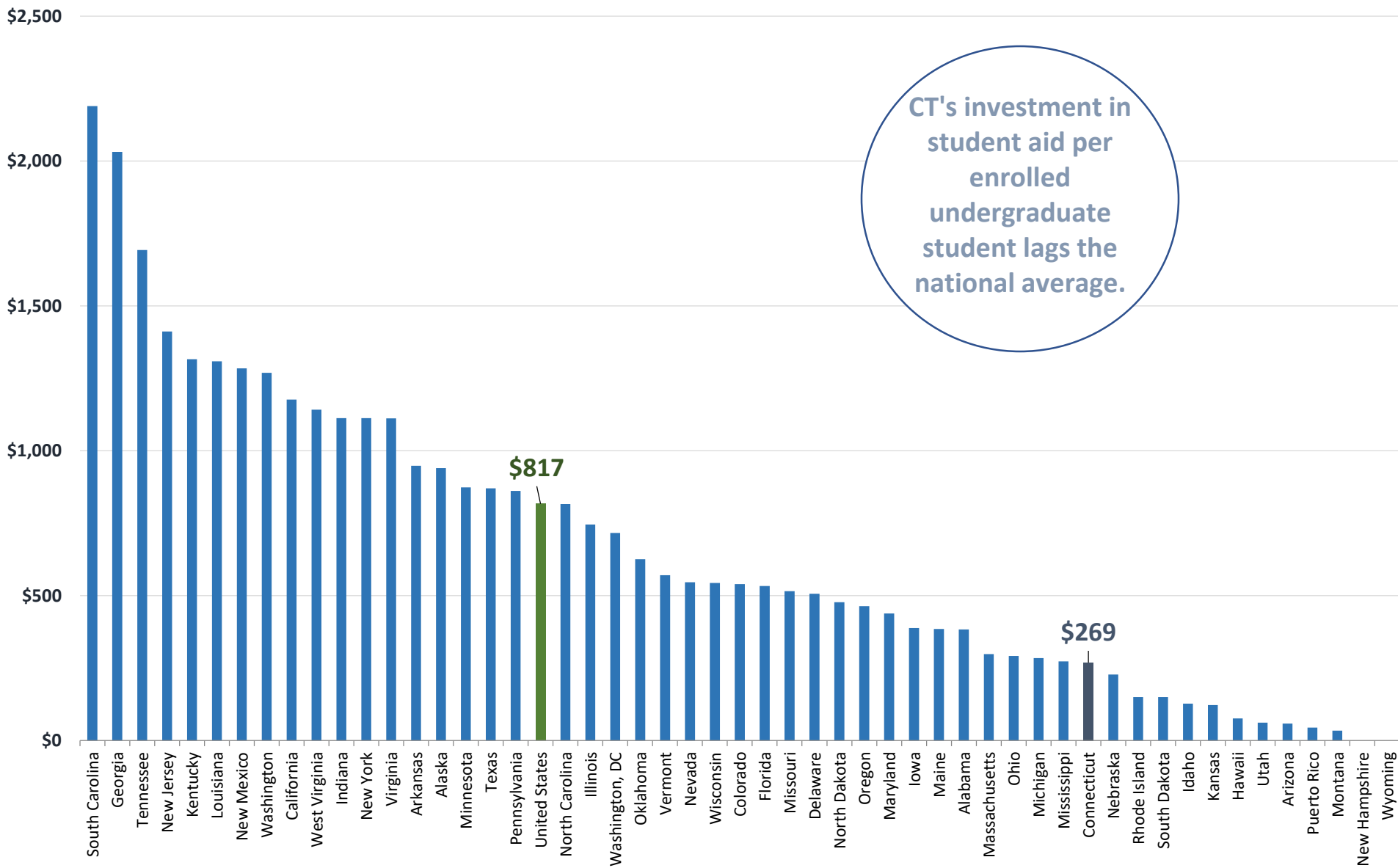
Source: National Association State Student Grant Aid Program (NASSGAP)



Estimated Undergraduate State Grant Dollars per Undergraduate Enrollment, by State: 2016-17

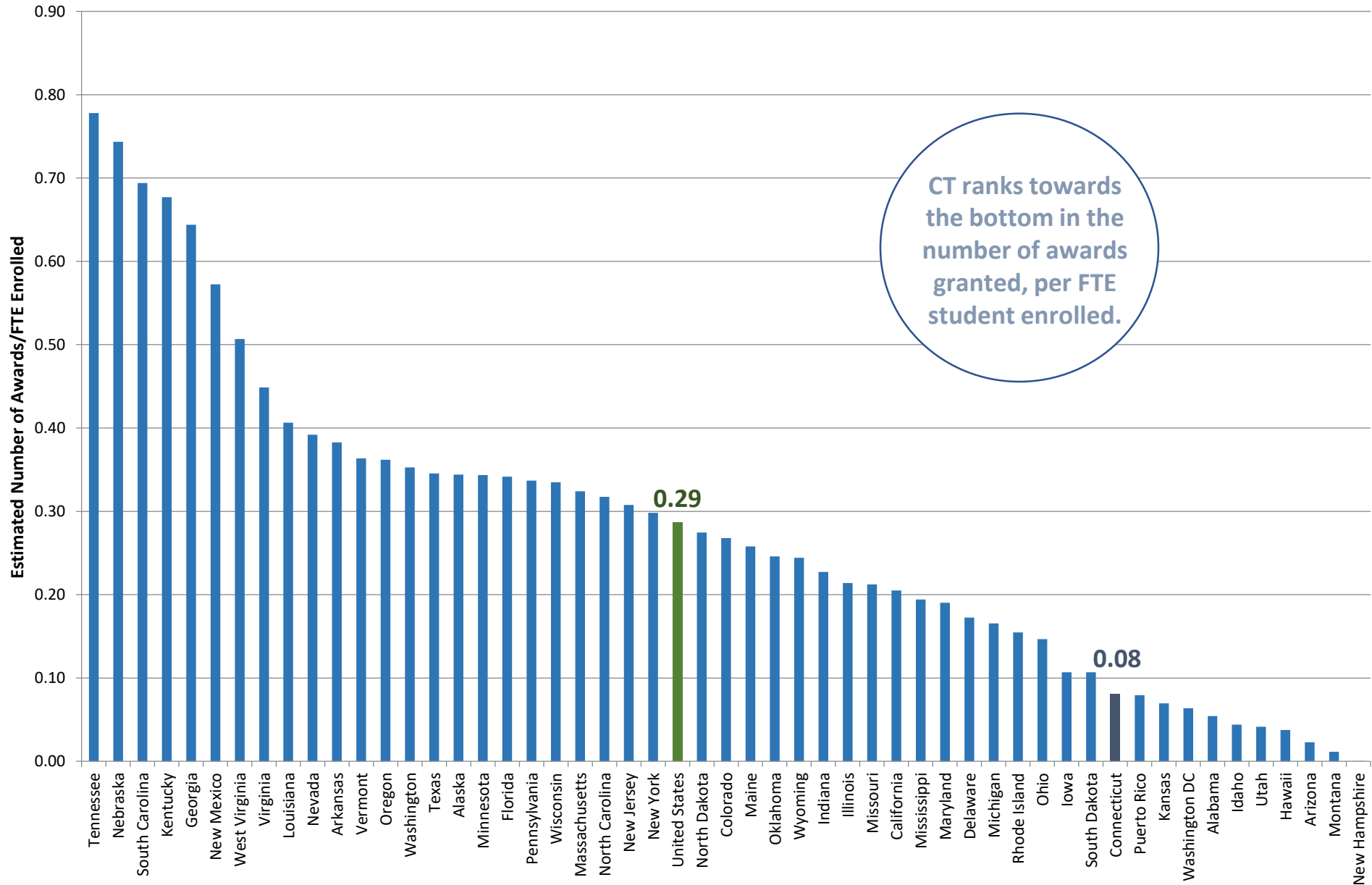
Figure 3

Source: National Association State Student Grant Aid Program (NASSGAP)



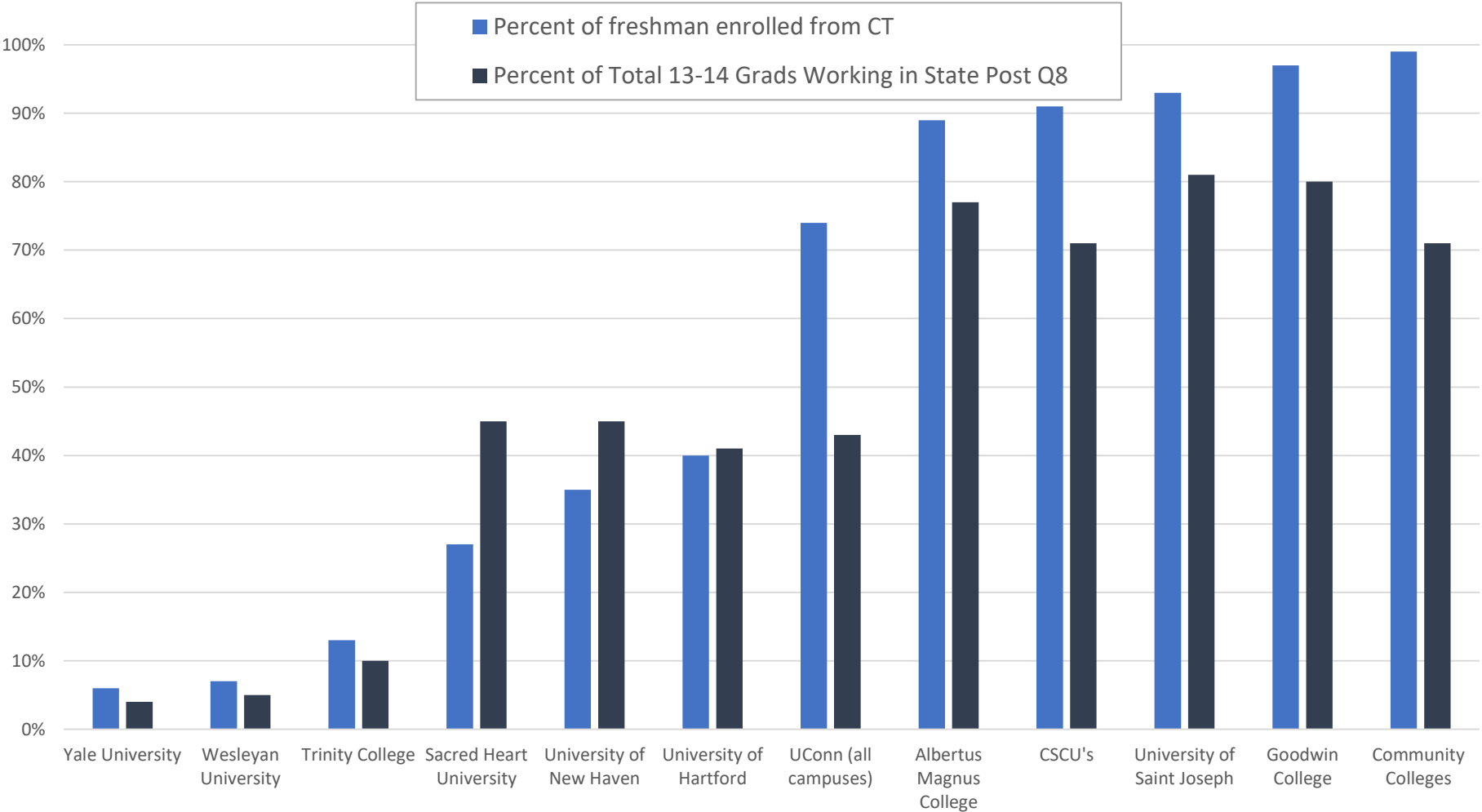
Estimated Total Number of Awards per FTE Enrollment, by State: 2016-17

Source: National Association State Student Grant Aid Program (NASSGAP)



Percent of CT Residents Enrolled as Freshman as Compared to Percent of '13-'14 Graduates found Employed in CT 8 Quarters after Graduation

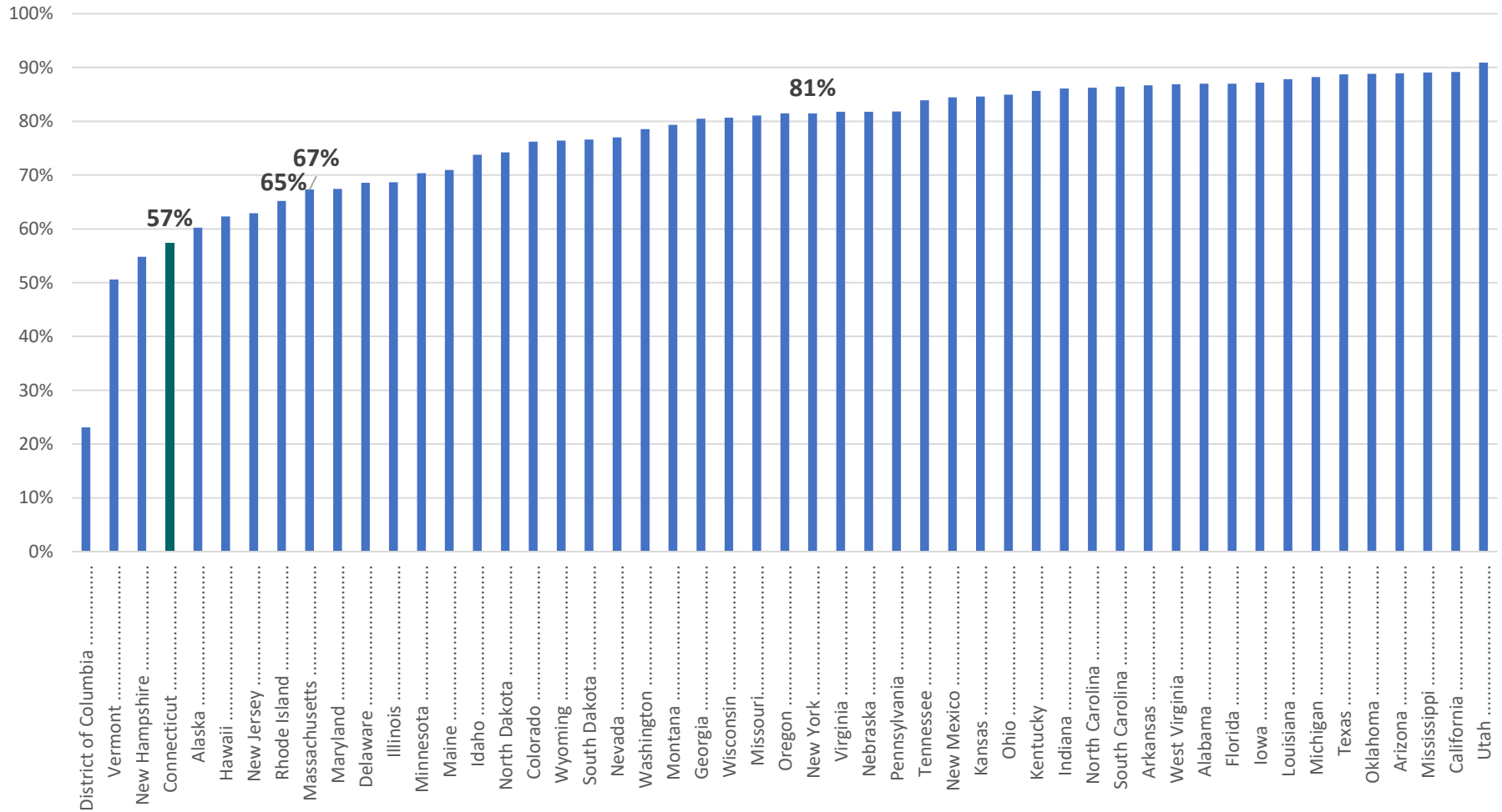
Source: P20 WIN



Public and private institutions that enroll a greater percentage of CT students retain more graduates in state upon completion

Percent of all first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates that enrolled at in-state institutions: Fall 2016

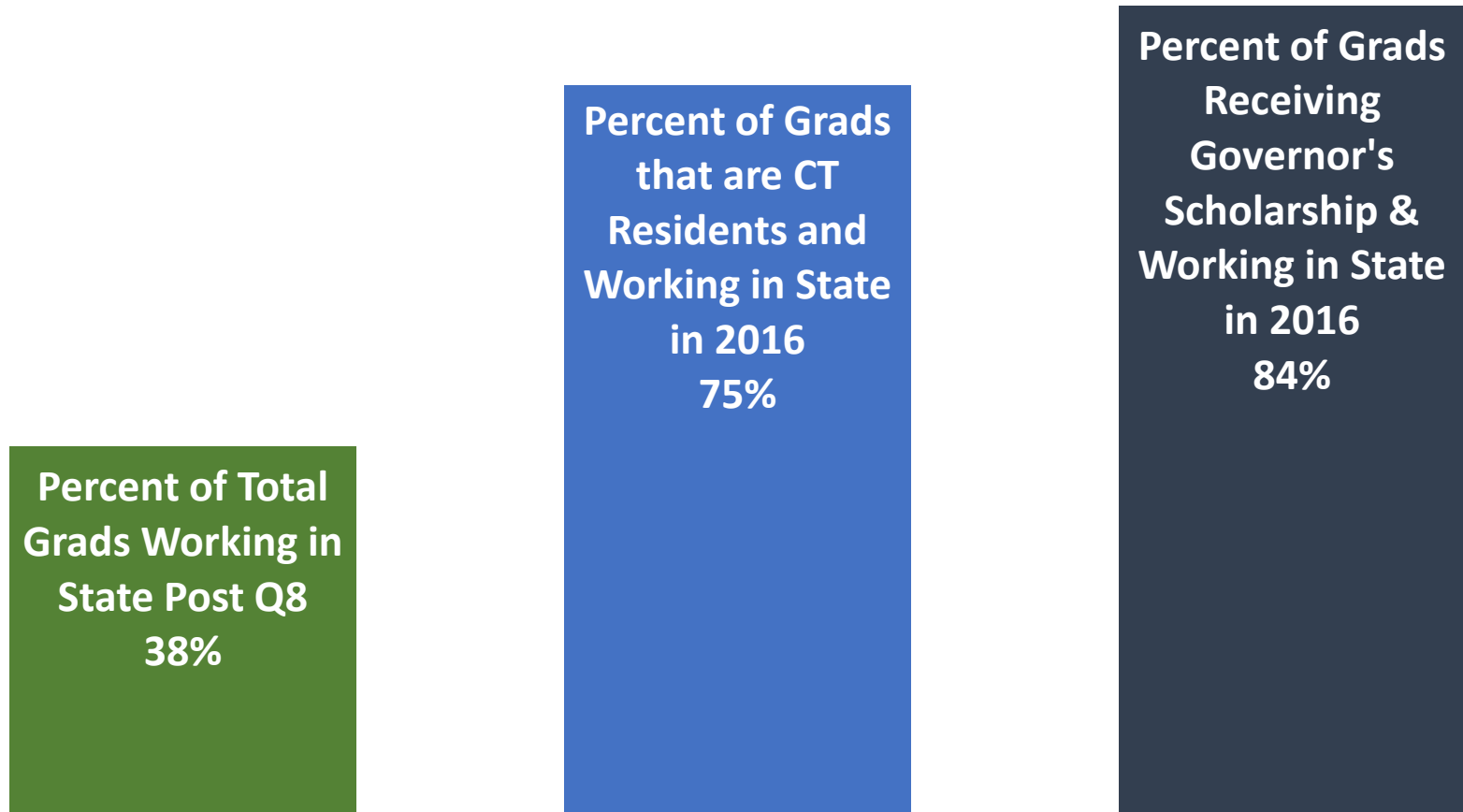
Source: NCES



Only 57% of recent high school graduates enroll in college in-state; this is the 4th lowest percent in the country, after only DC, VT & NH.

Percent of 13-14 Graduates from CCIC Institutions* found Employed in CT 8 Quarters after Graduation

Source: P20 WIN



CT residents and Roberta Willis Scholarship recipients at independent colleges are working in state upon completion at a higher rate than average

* Data set limited to: Albertus Magnus College, Goodwin College, Sacred Heart University, University of Hartford, University of New Haven, University of Saint Joseph, Yale and Wesleyan.

Nickel-and-diming need-based aid

The chart below shows the percentage of eligible students who actually received state grants and the average amount per grant in 2016-17. Hover over each state to see more data.

A recent analysis by the Hechinger Report found that 80% of CT students that are eligible to receive the state grant are unfunded. This is the 4th highest unmet need in the country.

Source: [Hechinger Report](#)

