



# Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges

Service Employee International Union (SEIU) Local 1973 – “Stronger Together!”

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February 28, 2019

Senator Haskell, Representative Haddad and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee,

I apologize that I cannot be there in person today to testify on these important bills.

The Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges (4Cs) represents over 3200 full-time and part-time faculty and professionals at Connecticut’s 12 community colleges, and as President, I submit testimony in support of SB 273, SB 435, SB 274, HB 7161, and SB 865. These bills will help lower student debt and keep Connecticut graduates in state to live and work after completing their degrees.

### **SB 273, AN ACT CONCERNING DEBT-FREE COLLEGE**

The 4Cs supports SB 273, which would require the Board of Regents to establish a debt-free community college program for qualifying students. Qualifying students must be recent Connecticut high school graduates, make satisfactory academic progress while in college, accept financial aid including grants and scholarships, and is a member of a household whose federal adjusted gross income is under \$150,000.

This legislation, if passed, would help many of our students that struggle financially complete an associates degree, and having a more educated citizenry will help support the state’s businesses and economy.

### **SB 435, AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TAX CREDIT FOR EMPLOYERS MAKING EDUCATION LOAN PAYMENTS FOR EMPLOYEES**

The 4Cs supports SB. 435 that would offer a tax credit for employers that make education loan payments for employees. Connecticut had the highest average for student debt at graduation: reported as \$38,510 in 2017 by a report from The Institute for College Access and Success ([https://ticas.org/sites/default/files/pub\\_files/classof2017.pdf](https://ticas.org/sites/default/files/pub_files/classof2017.pdf))

Incentivizing employers to offer an employee benefit such as student loan repayment will help both businesses by attracting a well-educated workforce as well as assisting those individuals struggling with significant student debt.

### **SB 274, AN ACT REQUIRING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE LEARN HERE, LIVE HERE PROGRAM**

The 4Cs supports SB 274, which would require the Commissioner of Economic

and Community Development to establish the Learn Here, Live Here program to help graduates of any institution of higher education or certain certificate programs of private occupational schools save toward a down payment on their first home in the state by segregating a portion of their state income tax payments for up to ten years after they graduate.

This legislation will assist college graduates with buying their first home in Connecticut, encouraging students who come to Connecticut to learn, stay here to live upon graduation.

**HB 7161, AN ACT ESTABLISHING FINISH LINE GRANTS**

The 4Cs supports HB 7161, which would allow undergraduate students at public institutions of higher education to finish earning their degrees without student loans. This legislation, if passed, would establish grants available to students who have completed over half of their credits towards an associate's or bachelor's degree.

These grants will help students who have started, but not yet completed, their degree.

**SB 865, AN ACT CONCERNING NO OR LOW INTEREST STUDENT LOANS FOR CERTAIN STUDENTS**

The 4Cs supports SB 865, which would require CHESLA to offer loan subsidies to graduates working in science, technology, engineering, and math fields who commit to live in Connecticut for at least 5 years.

This legislation will assist some college graduates with student debt while encouraging more graduates with STEM degrees to live and work in Connecticut upon graduation.

If you wish to discuss any of the legislation with me, please contact me at 860.296.5172.

Sincerely,

Bryan R. Bonina  
President, Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges (The 4Cs)