

SENATOR JAMES MARONEY

DEPUTY MAJORITY LEADER

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Chairwoman McCarthy Vahey, Chairman Casano, Vice Chairs, Ranking Members, and distinguished members of the Education Committee, my name is James Maroney, I represent the 14th state Senate district and I am here to testify in favor of Senate Bill 361, An Act Concerning a Municipal Option to Establish A Property Tax Credit for Donations to Promise or Similar Scholarship Programs Established by the Municipality.

This bill would grant municipalities the option to offer a property tax credit to people or companies who donate to a "Promise" or free college program. This is not a mandate, it is simply enabling legislation. Currently we have two promise programs in Connecticut: New Haven Promise and Hartford Promise. The New Haven program offers up to a \$10,000 a year scholarship for up to 4 years (\$40,000 total).

When the New Haven program had been instituted, their school district population had been declining for years, but thanks in part to New Haven Promise, the school district population has grown over 15% and the graduation rate has gone from 64% to 80% in the eight years the program has been in existence. These results are not unique to New Haven.

On the tenth anniversary of the Kalamazoo Promise, the nation's first promise program, they had a summit and released some statistics from their successes. Kalamazoo's promise reversed a 40 year trend of declining public school enrollment in Kalamazoo. In fact, Dr. Ashley Miller of the College of Holy Cross released a study showing that Promise programs across the country had a positive impact on public school enrollment. Enrollment is not the only benefit. Other benefits at Promise programs across the country include improved GPA's, improved test scores, better attendance, and increased college enrollment and persistence.

Another benefit is that families with children are reluctant to leave towns with promise programs. This helps in building a community and helps to combat out migration. It also has helped increase property values in towns that have Promise programs. In Kalamazoo Michigan, they estimated that the promise program contributed to a 1% increase in property values. While that doesn't generate enough tax revenues to cover the program, it is a sizable contribution to local coffees.

In my business I help high school students get ready for college. Unfortunately, I see too many of these students come out of college with almost \$100,000 in debt. In fact, the amount of Connecticut student loan debt outstanding has more than doubled in the last 10 years from \$8 billion to \$17 billion. Couple that with the fact that by 2025 it is estimated that 70% of Connecticut jobs will require a post-secondary credential, and you will see that it is incumbent upon us to explore creative ways to enable students to pursue higher education. I believe this can be one tool, and I encourage you to support this legislation.

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