

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH  
PUBLIC ACT SUMMARY



**PA 19-174—HB 7253**

*Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee*

**AN ACT CONCERNING DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMS  
OPERATED BY INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION OUTSIDE  
OF THE STATE**

**SUMMARY:** This act requires out-of-state higher education institutions that do not participate in the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) to apply for authorization from the Office of Higher Education (OHE) to operate distance learning programs in Connecticut. SARA is a voluntary, multistate agreement that establishes uniform national standards for participating higher education institutions offering interstate, postsecondary distance learning programs. (Connecticut is among SARA's member states.) Existing state law allows an out-of-state institution that participates in SARA to operate distance learning programs in Connecticut that follow the agreement's uniform standards.

The act also makes a technical change.

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** January 1, 2020

**APPLICATION AND AUTHORIZATION PROCESS**

The act requires an out-of-state institution that does not participate in SARA and seeks to operate a distance learning program in Connecticut to (1) apply to OHE on a form the office prescribes and (2) agree to standards OHE establishes that are similar to the SARA standards. OHE must approve or reject the application in accordance with these standards. Once approved, the OHE authorization is valid for one year and may be annually renewed.

The act requires OHE to establish a fee schedule for applications and renewals for such institutions, which must be graduated based on the number of full-time equivalent students enrolled at each out-of-state higher education institution.

**BACKGROUND**

*State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA)*

SARA allows institutions in member states that offer interstate distance learning programs to enroll students under uniform standards without state licensure. SARA participation is open to member states' non-profit and for-profit degree-granting postsecondary institutions accredited by a U.S. Department of Education-recognized agency. States participating in SARA commit to resolving complaints from distance learning programs offered by their institutions. Currently, California is the only state that does not participate in SARA.

OHE is the state agency that administers SARA in Connecticut and is

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responsible for reviewing institutional applications for SARA participation and resolving out-of-state students' complaints against Connecticut SARA institutions.