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**Testimony for the
Appropriations Committee of
Jennifer Widness, President
Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges
February 18, 2020**

On behalf of the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges, I am submitting testimony on **H.B. 5005: AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2021**, the Governor's budget adjustment recommendations, pertaining to funding for the Roberta Willis Scholarship Program. Governor Lamont has proposed to continue to flat fund this program in FY 21, at \$33.3 million.

CCIC and its member institutions appreciate the strong legislative support that the Scholarship Program has received over the last few years during times of extreme fiscal pressures on the state.

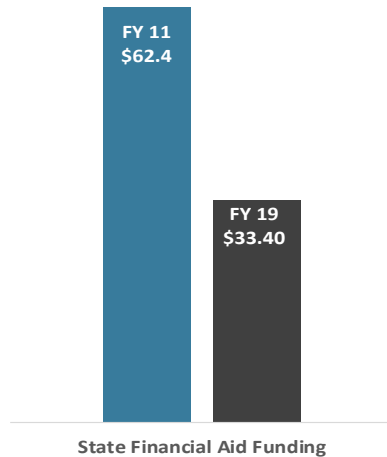
However, despite this support, state funding for student financial aid has been cut 46% in the last few years, from a total appropriation of over \$60 million in FY 11 to \$33 million in FY 20. Further, Connecticut now lags the region and the nation in our investment in state financial aid as a percent of state funding allocated for higher education. As a result, the unmet need is significant: over 40,000 Connecticut students were eligible to receive the grant in FY 18 yet just over 11,000 awards were granted.

I highlight these data points to remind members of the Committee that, as you consider where to prioritize your investments this year and next, the Scholarship Program should remain a priority.

It is not frequently discussed that Connecticut's achievement gap does not end in K-12. Connecticut's attainment gap – the difference between the percentage of white and minority adults with post-secondary degrees – is the worst in the country. Providing financial aid is critical in making progress to close that gap.

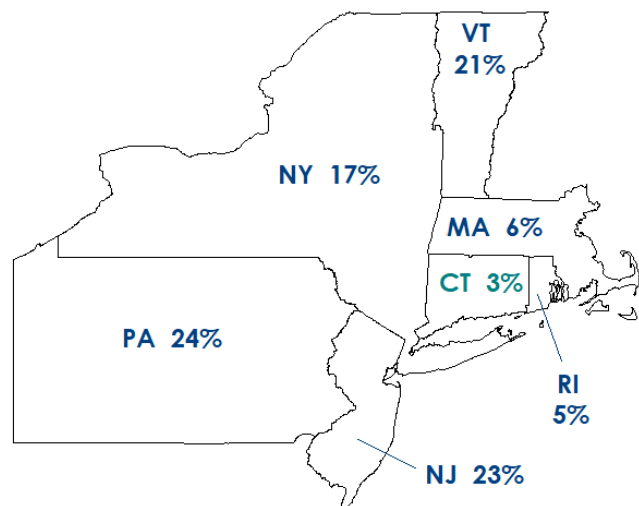
Further, significant attention has been given to the need to expand our state's talent pipeline to ensure we can meet the needs of the state's employers. McKinsey recently noted to the Governor's Workforce Council a significant mismatch in supply and demand in certain degree programs in Health Sciences, Engineering and Computer Science. CCIC member institutions award more than half of the bachelor's degrees and above in these areas and thus we must be part of that solution. Recent data from P20 WIN found 84% of Roberta Willis Scholarship grant recipients at independent colleges were found working in state after graduation.

We understand that significant fiscal challenges remain but, given those very challenges, funding for need-based financial aid to provide access and opportunity to higher education for low-income residents of this state is critically important to grow our state's workforce.



DRASTIC CUTS: Funding for state financial aid that provides need-based grants for CT students to attend CT higher education institutions has been cut **46%** since FY 11.

LAGGING OUR NEIGHBORS AND THE NATION: **41** other states in the U.S. spend a greater percentage of state funding for higher education on student aid than CT. CT is at the bottom among its neighbors.



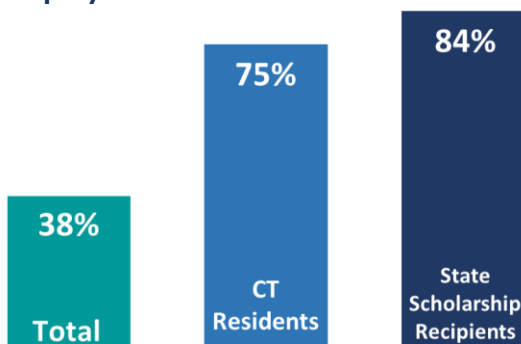
There is significant **UNMET NEED** among CT students in CT's higher education system:

41,463
 CT students were **ELIGIBLE** for the RWSP Grant in FY 18



11,306
 CT students **RECEIVED** a RWSP Grant that year

Graduates from CCIC Institutions found Employed in CT 2 Years after Graduation

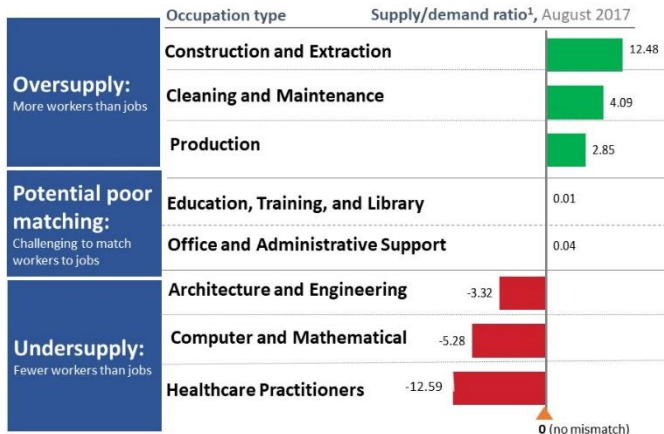
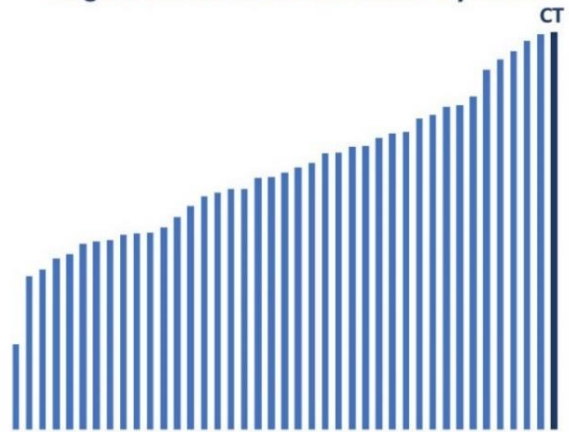


STRONG OUTCOMES: RWSP recipients at independent colleges complete at a higher rate than average, and data from P20 WIN finds over 80% working in state after college.

SUPPORTING ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION IS CRITICAL TO CLOSE THE EQUITY GAPS IN THE STATE.

Connecticut's attainment gap – the difference between the percentage of white and African American adults with post-secondary degrees – is the worst in the country.

Percentage Point Gap in Black & White Degree Attainment for Adults by State



JOBS REMAIN UNFILLED BECAUSE OF AN UNDERSUPPLY OF TALENT IN KEY AREAS.

In 2017, McKinsey identified health sciences, Engineering and Computer Science as areas needing more workers.

CCIC MEMBER INSTITUTIONS award more than half of the bachelor's degrees and above in key industry fields.

Percent of Statewide Industry Cluster Degrees Awarded by Connecticut Independent Colleges in 2017-18: Bachelor's Degrees and Above

Source: IPEDS Data Center

