



71 Raymond Road
West Hartford, CT 06107
(860) 678-0005
www.theccic.org

**Testimony for the
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
Jennifer Widness, President
Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges
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On behalf of the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges (CCIC) I am submitting testimony on the following bills today:

- **S.B. 17: AN ACT REQUIRING THE COMPLETION OF THE FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID**
- **S.B. 19: AN ACT CONCERNING SEXUAL MISCONDUCT ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES**
- **H.B. 5013: AN ACT CONCERNING ACCESS TO THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM BY ELIGIBLE COLLEGE STUDENTS**
- **H.B. 5014: AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TAX CREDIT FOR PROVIDERS OF CLINICAL NURSING EXPERIENCES**

S.B. 17: AN ACT REQUIRING THE COMPLETION OF THE FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID

CCIC supports this legislation which requires high school students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) prior to graduation, beginning with the class of 2023, with a few important exceptions that are outlined in the bill.

Annually, the independent colleges in Connecticut enroll over 13,000 Pell Grant recipients and grant over \$1 billion in institutional aid. Accordingly, the average net price varies broadly based on a student's estimated family contribution, which is determined in large part by completing the FAFSA.

Connecticut's achievement gap does not end at high school. Our state's attainment gap – the difference in the percentage of white and minority adults that have a post-secondary degree – is among the largest in the country. One important component of closing this gap is to do more to educate high school students about what their eligibility for financial aid might be and to help them understand that higher education – at a public or private college – is more accessible than they might think.

As such, we support this bill.

S.B. 19: AN ACT CONCERNING SEXUAL MISCONDUCT ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

CCIC certainly appreciates and supports the intent behind SB 19. Campus safety is a top priority for all our member institutions.

As written the bill has two components. Section one requires each institution of higher education in the state adopt a policy such that any “student or employee who reports or discloses the alleged assault, stalking or violence shall not be subject to disciplinary action for violation of a policy of the institution of higher education if (i) the report or disclosure was made in good faith, and (ii) the violation of such policy did not place the health or safety of another person at risk, including, but not limited to, when the violation of such policy involves the use of alcohol, drugs or other banned substances that does not place the health or safety of another person at risk.” Sections two and three establish a committee to create a statewide sexual misconduct climate survey and mandates it use by all higher education institutions in the state, biennially.

As to the first component of the legislation, CCIC understands and shares the goal of the bill’s proponents that institutions should remove barriers that may discourage students to come forward when they have been a victim of or witnessed sexual misconduct. In fact, many of our member institutions have such a policy in writing – in one form or another – to codify this.

However, some of our member institutions have concerns with the breadth of the provision laid out in this bill, the lack of discretion it gives institutions for extenuating circumstances and the notion of having this concept mandated in statute in the form prescribed.

In addition, the federal Drug Free Schools and Communities Act mandates that institutions of higher education have a drug-free campus policy in order to continue to be eligible to receive federal funding. State law mandating that an institution cannot enforce violations of campus policies involving drugs and alcohol may contradict that. We look forward to working with stakeholders on refining this component of the bill, moving forward.

On the issue of the campus climate surveys, many if not all, of our member institutions have conducted a survey in the past few years or have one planned in the new future. Most of our institutions agree that these are important tools although some worry that surveys may re-traumatize survivors.

We are concerned about the existing language that mandates one specific survey tool be designed for all institutions, which are diverse in size, scope and mission. We are also concerned that conducting a survey every two years is too often; every four years is more appropriate.

Last, conducting these surveys takes time, resources and expertise that some of our member institutions lack. If this is to be required of all institutions in the state, funding should be set aside to support this work, for both public and private colleges.

We look forward to working with the proponents of this bill moving forward.

H.B. 5013: AN ACT CONCERNING ACCESS TO THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM BY ELIGIBLE COLLEGE STUDENTS

CCIC supports the intent of this bill which seeks to highlight programs at public institutions of higher education that may meet the eligibility requirements for SNAP training programs. Our only feedback is that the scope of the effort should not be limited to public colleges exclusively and that programs at independent colleges should be considered and highlighted accordingly as well.

H.B. 5014: AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TAX CREDIT FOR PROVIDERS OF CLINICAL NURSING EXPERIENCES

CCIC supports this bill which provides a tax credit to preceptors who provide clinical nursing experiences to nursing students at Connecticut institutions of higher education. McKinsey has reported to both the Governor's Workforce Council and the Commission on Fiscal Stability and Economic Growth that one of our greatest talent shortages in Connecticut is in the area of Healthcare. However, institutions are challenged in their growth of these critically important programs due to limited clinical preceptors to oversee the student clinical experiences necessary to complete the programs. The state would be well-suited to support these preceptors with a tax credit as proposed to help shrink that talent gap.