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Haddad, Senator Will
Haskell

SENATORS: Flexer, Hwang, Maroney,
Slap

REPRESENTATIVES: Ackert, Arora, Betts,
Doucette, Hall, Mushinsky,
Rochelle, Sanchez, Smith,
Sredzinski, Turco, Wood,
Ziogas

REP. HADDAD (73RD): We're ready. We're going to call the public -- well, I just want to make a couple things. One note is the -- the committee meeting that was recessed earlier this morning is still recessed, but we'll suspend voting until the conclusion of the public hearing, in which case those members will be able to cast a vote when they return from -- after the public hearing is adjourned.

And with that, we'll call the public hearing to order. There are seven bills on our public hearing agenda today. A fair number of speakers, but not an overwhelming number of speakers [laughter] it's good to see. And the first person on the list is Eleanor Daugherty from UConn.

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: Thank you.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): Thank you very much. Why don't you introduce yourself to the Committee, and then commence with your testimony?

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: I am still Eleanor Daugherty, [laughter] the Dean of Students and Associate Vice President for Student Affairs at the University of Connecticut, and here today to testify regarding Bill 303, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE TASK FORCE REGARDING THE PREVENTION AND TREATMENT OF MENTAL ILLNESS AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

I briefly introduce myself to say more about my role, my primary responsibility is to care for the well-being of the student body. That includes the supervision of our student health and wellness areas which includes counselling, medical care, and health promotion.

First, let me say, that I applaud the Committee and the Task Force for their commitment to what is a crisis of mental health care in our nation. The leadership of the state of Connecticut and specificity of its interest in college mental health and our late adolescent population are essential areas of focus if we are to address the needs of our youth. UConn, like all colleges and universities, has been grappling with this issue for some time, and is always seeking ways to better provide services for our students. Our recent addition as JED campus is a reflection of that commitment and a partnership that we have done jointly with our undergraduate student leadership. As you may know, JED provides a best practices framework designed to guide schools towards achieving a comprehensive institutional approach to mental health.

There are a few areas of the legislation that I would like to highlight and discuss a bit more. First, as we have learned at UConn through our work

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with Student Coalition and the creation of the Wellness Coalition, the creation of a Campus Mental Health Coalition as described in the bill, is essential for our development of resources and community education.

Second, UConn and many institutions of higher education participate in existing health and wellness surveys, including the Healthy Mind Study and the National College Health Assessment. UConn annually administers at least one of these nationally recognized research surveys measuring students' health habits, utilization of services, behaviors and perceptions, including substance use of our students. It may be advisable for the General Assembly or the Commissioner of Mental Health and Addiction Services to review those existing survey instruments and to determine a standard measure of assessment through those surveys. It would also be advisable to be thoughtful about the timeframe for the survey administration to ensure affective and reliable data collection.

Third, Section 3 discusses a required MOU with third-party provider care and/or emergency services. At the University of Connecticut, such a provision would be disruptive to the primacy of care that currently is provided by existing university employees. UConn requests the language be amended so that, if -- so that it states that colleges and universities, as determined by the Commissioner, is lacking those resources, may then contract with a third-party as described in the legislation.

Fourth, Section 4 recommends identifying dangerous areas on campus for self-harm. It is challenging

for campuses with large physical plants such as the University of Connecticut with over 400 buildings on the Storrs campus to safeguard against all potential lethal means. However, performing an environmental scan to help prioritize highly lethal means and ways to restrict access would be more feasible. An environmental scan would allow the university to undertake more comprehensive efforts such as increased signage of mental health resources, visible hotline numbers in potentially high-risk environments, and scanning the physical campus to establish areas of safety and emotional respite. This approach increases the focus on well-being and overall mental health, and has been utilized at other institutions in the country.

Section 4 also refers to the development of a mental health policy. UConn strongly encourages the committee to reconsider this language with thought for the reduced confidentiality that will occur within the university system by creating such a classification. Instead, we recommend the development of resources and training for staff that enable students with any health issue to leave or withdraw with minimum financial penalty and ample consideration for extenuating circumstances. Policies should assure compliance with the ADA and assure equality of access for all students regardless of reason for a leave and avoid discrimination based on mental illness.

Finally, UConn supports the creation of an ongoing task force on mental health with broad representation across the state. It is worth noting that it is essential that college mental health professionals be included in this task force. UConn has found, through our own Recovery Advisory

Council, that a robust exchange of ideas occurs when state agencies, like the Commissioner's office, community organizers, and higher education professionals join together to resolve complex issues. The University of Connecticut's Board of Trustees would hope that they, too, could appoint membership to the task force.

Thank you very much for your time today. And I welcome your questions on this important matter.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): Thank you very much for your testimony. You had -- it's interesting because you -- you managed in the span -- span of a short piece of testimony to talk not only about the broad needs but also specific recommendations for approval. You know, I -- you know, I'm -- I was quite saddened, as I'm sure many people in this Committee were saddened to learn about some of the tragic events that occurred over the winter at UConn, this late fall and -- and into the winter. And I know that -- that this has been an issue that UConn has been grappling with for a long time.

I think the, you know, those -- those deaths probably just remind us, you know, just how important it is that we provide the right kind of services to students and that we do the best we can. I don't know that, you know, in all instances, will be successful at avoiding those kinds of tragedies, but I think we can try.

We -- we've had a previous conversation I just want to revisit a little bit, because you -- you know, reportedly we hear this when we talk about budgets for universities about the growth of the need for services, mental health services, in particular, or among the services that are increasingly need --

students need, and I was curious to -- as to figure out why? I mean, I think the task force spent some time trying to assess why it is that mental health services are increasingly needed on college campuses. I didn't know if you had any quick observations to share with us about, you know, why that trend is occurring and how we might understand, how to address it?

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: Part of it is good news. I think there's been significant decrease of stigmatization of being able to go to college with a past history of mental health, attend college and be diagnosed, which is -- this is an age, if you're looking at a traditionally-aged student, where we may be diagnosing for the first time some significant psychiatric disorders and for students to support each other. And that is very different from when I was in college. And I think that is a good thing. But it does create a push on clinical resources that can be incredibly difficult for staff.

And I say this, fully knowing, that at the University of Connecticut, I have one of the most robust counselling centers in the country right now. I have 26 full-time counselors. We've added six counsellors in the last five years. We built out a case management system for our regional campuses. And it would not be hard for me to pull data for you to tell you that's still not meeting the need of our students.

And I think the pivot point for us, as universities, to the question that you're asking, Representative Haddad, is that we need to look beyond clinical care. We need to look at a cultural shift,

particularly on higher -- in higher education campuses that are known for being high stress places. And this needs to mean employee training, education and promotion awareness, building peer-to-peer support networks, increasing access to resources for critical emergent needs. I mean, we have to take an intuitional look at what we do. And that is the way that we can really meet the need on campus.

And -- and just to give you a snapshot, in 2017, close to 70 percent of our students reported feeling overwhelmed on campus. We dropped down a little bit into sort of the 60 to 40 percent range, and you're talking about students reporting, within 30 days, they feel anxious, depressed, or lonely. That volume, for a student body of 30,000, that can't be met clinically. And so, we've got to build out in order to meet those needs.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): You -- you answered one of my next questions, because I was going to ask you about your comment about Section 3 and the requirement that we would mandate essentially an MOU with a third-party provider. University of Connecticut actually, you know, it's interesting because I -- you know, I mean, you have -- what is your undergraduate student population now? It's --

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: A little over 22,000.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): Twenty-two thousand? I mean -- yeah, that's a lot of people. The -- and you have 26 -- you said you had 26 mental health counselors on -- on campus. So, currently, I imagine, that your practice is to provide as much counselling as you can provide on campus. But I think you -- you just mentioned that there would -- that you still

find that there are cases or people who -- what -- what happens when you reach your capacity, and you identify a student that still needs care? What -- what happens in that instance?

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: Yeah. And I think this is different than the intention of the legislation, so -- and I may be wrong, we utilize a case management system. So, we have two full-time case managers on the Storrs campus that liaise with outside providers for students that have needs greater than what we can provide. The examples, however, that I would point to for that would be, you know, facilities like Nantik [phonetic], which is an outpatient or extended inpatient care facility, or other -- you know, other resources that we even use in the Hartford area that are strong for us. So, we're looking for -- we're looking to liaise with areas that are able to provide a greater depth of care for students than we can provide. And that may or may not relate to hospitalization or post-hospitalization plans for students.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): And just as background information, when someone accesses mental health care services on campus from your staff, do you attempt to recoup any of the cost of that through insurance?

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: When students have insurance, we do bill insurers and generate some revenue from that, that's helpful. It's all told, probably \$2 million dollars over the course of a year. I can get you a more exact number, that's a fraction of the cost of care for students, though.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): Yeah. I ask the question, because I've heard from other folks who also provide

mental health services to college campuses, that sometimes the -- the notion that their parents' health insurance policy would be billed, is a barrier to the student -- is perceived to be a barrier to the student, at least, and that they might turn around at the front door because they don't want their parents to know that they're accessing those services. Is that -- can you speak to that concern at all?

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: It does happen. It could also happen in other things that we joint -- worked jointly on, like the issues of sexual violence where you're receiving care. There are ways for us to meet and counsel the student, and assure the primacy of their confidentiality, even if that means not relying on the parents' insurance.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): Thank you. Are there any other Committee members who have questions? I could keep going but [laughter], Representative Arora.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much for testifying today. I have a couple of questions. The first one is that, this bill asks for a setup of a Campus Mental Health Coalition?

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: Yes.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Now, are you supportive of that? And --

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: Very much so.

REP. ARORA (151ST): And what kind of resource of what kind of format would that take, because the worry would be that you have 26 counselors and --

and you -- you need more resources, would that take away resources from what you're trying to do?

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: No. And -- and thank you for the question. I would argue that we should view these as two very different things. The clinical care that we provide and the dedicated employees we have to that work will be the same. The asset of a Coalition is we take it out of the clinical environment for the campus to commit to what I was suggesting earlier an institutional cultural shift in how we view mental health on campus. This is something that JED strongly advocates for, and something that I think is a very positive move for us to be doing as institutions.

What we've seen at UConn is we've had a Talk Down Wellness Coalition, where our Executive Director of Student Health, created a Wellness Coalition that has over 70 faculty and staff and students on it. But we've also seen a very ground-up coalition building effort from the students who have wanted to increase visibility of this issue on campus. Both Coalitions are good models for increasing awareness and action beyond a clinical model.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Sure, that's really good to hear. Just a follow-up question, do we need a statute and a law to do that or can you not just basically as a -- as a -- as a -- as a school, decide that we need such a Coalition or such a participatory, you know, body? You know, why do you need a statute or do you think it's right for us to write a bill and a law to make you do that?

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: I think that's for you to decide. However, it's best practice.

REP. ARORA (151ST): It's best practice?

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: And if we have --

REP. ARORA (151ST): But you don't have one now?

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: We have two.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Okay.

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: And we will likely have a third, given the recommendation that I anticipate the JED foundation providing us.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Right.

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: The -- the question is, UConn will do that naturally, but is that something we need to discuss more fundamentally across the state?

REP. ARORA (151ST): Great. Great.

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: Yeah.

REP. ARORA (151ST): My next -- my next question is, do you have a crisis intervention and management plan at this point? Because I think that's a very important thing. And if you don't, we would definitely need to write a law for it. But don't you have one? And are there schools around the state which don't one --

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: I can't --

REP. ARORA (151ST): -- in your mind?

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: -- speak to the rest of the schools in the state, but absolutely. We have a couple different areas of crisis response. So, we have 24/7 care that we provide for students in crisis that can lead to hospitalization or emergency intervention. We have teams that are formed in

times of crisis, which we call a Critical Incident Response Team. And then, more broadly across the university and this is a very good time to be asking me that question, given concerns about coronavirus, absolutely. We have mandated plans for the university to take during times of crisis, pandemics, serve illness, whatever that may be.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Oh, that's great. And I think it's extremely important. And finally, in terms of the task force, this task force which we are suggesting actually is -- is being appointed more from the legislator?

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: Uh-huh.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Now, do you think that a task force like that would be effective? Or do you think it should be changed to have something more technical? You know what I'm saying, people who know about mental health, between the SMIs, as well as the other kind of --

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: Yes.

REP. ARORA (151ST): -- challenges which we have? Because our objective is to improve things at the university. Not to impose more -- more reporting requirements or more to -- to basically require more of you on a more bureaucratic basis. So, my question is can you give a candid assessment that if you have to write the task force or a -- or something like that, who would -- would you make it more technical? Would you make any changes to the way it is being appointed here in this -- in this -- in this bill?

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: So, I support the idea of the task force. I would not build it this way. And I

would -- I would point to the construction of our Recovery Advisory community as an example of a good way to bring people together with different areas of expertise to come up with complex solid recommendations of best practice. My concern about this task force is, I think, absent from this, is a strong voice from the college mental health community and from practitioners in that field. And UConn feels this as being involved as well.

REP. ARORA (151ST): I see. So, your suggestion would be that we formulate it differently, perhaps with a -- a more technical composition or perhaps even asking various institutions, like yourself and other large institutions within our state, to come up with some kind of recommendations? And then just consolidate them?

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: I love the latter idea. That if we were to suggest how can policymakers, practitioners, and educational leaders come together to make sure there is a broader commitment across the state to student health and well-being, will create, I think, the kind of conversation and action that you're looking for.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Thank you so much.

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: Yeah.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Thank you, Chairman.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): Thank you Representative Arora. Representative Wood.

REP. WOOD (141ST): Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you, Eleanor for being here.

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: Thank you.

REP. WOOD (141ST): I had a couple of questions. One, you said, look beyond -- you -- you would like to look beyond the clinical care to a cultural shift?

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: Yeah.

REP. WOOD (141ST): Can you outline what that would look like to you?

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: Yeah. At my institution, it would mean making sure our employees are trained throughout the university in suicide prevention as well as in engaging and connecting with students. We know that the healthier student is a student who is connected to individuals and resources on campus.

I often give this example to Department Heads and Deans, where I do training, and maybe I'll ask the same of all of you, I'm going to imagine that some of you have been to a college reunion recently. How many of you looked for your Dean of Students at that reunion? Yeah. It usually works out that way.

[Laughter] And my feelings aren't hurt, because if I were to say, who did you seek out, it's going to be a faculty member or it's going to be someone who touched your life directly. And so, I do think, as a Dean of Students, I have the means to extend the training and education that I have to those who make those connections to institutions or to individuals as institutions, how we present learning and doing that in a welcoming and productive environment. I think we all remember times when we were in school and heard the look left, look right, one of you isn't going to make here by the end of class. That's a really intimating thing for an entering student to hear.

And if we opened our class with, you know, with a welcome and a commitment to students with syllabuses that reflect the resources that are available to students, with faculty who are trained to engage and notice when a student is slipping a little bit. You know, one of the things I stole from faculty, myself, in my own practice, was basically a let it go pass that they can have. I forget what I called it on the syllabus. But it says, you know, what we have rough weeks. And if you can't do your assignment this week and want to give me your pass, I'll look -- great, we won't worry about it, because I believe in you and want you to be successful and do well in the class as a whole. And I don't want a posting to be scaring you from showing up in class because you haven't done the reading.

So, if we were to look environmentally across our campuses, that is where we shift. Training and education, increased resources to students, building upon the peer-to-peer strengths that they have that is so profound, engaging students in ways that they understand. And I'll give a great example of this. I've got tons of data here. But it doesn't speak to the stories of the students; right? And we -- one of the things our students have said to us, is they want 24/7 care, they have it.

So, we had to understand the gap. And you have this provision, but you don't feel like you do. The gap was as simple as we were giving you the phone in the middle of the night to talk to a therapist to figure out what our next step should be. And in this traditionally-aged population, they're not comfortable talking on the phone. They would prefer to use FaceTime.

What a simple change for me to make and resource neutral. But one where I can now build connection and care better for students in their own terms. So, it's harder work. We need to look across our institutions. We need to find -- we need to listen to students. One of the things that we'll be doing on our own mental health task force that I'm sharing with my colleague in social work is listening sessions, hearing from a 20-year-old as opposed to the National College Health Association. We -- we want to listen to them too, but we may not be listening to our 20 year olds as much as we should be, in terms of making organizational changes that allow us to connect in a way that is meaningful to them. And that's harder work. It's more we're working, we're pushing a boulder uphill, but we can do it. I do find that on our campuses everyone is committed to student success, maybe we just need to provide more tools.

REP. WOOD (141ST): Thank you.

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: I love hearing that. It reminds me of a lot of what David Brooks has written about in a number of his books, *Emotional Quotient*, *Road to Character*, and the latest one, *The Moral -- Moral Code -- Moral* -- magnificent stuff.

REP. WOOD (141ST): On my bedside table --

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: Oh.

REP. WOOD (141ST): -- not read. So, don't give it away. [Laughter]

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: Well, I was thinking that he was --

REP. WOOD (141st): Absolutely.

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: Yeah.

REP. WOOD (141ST): Very funny, I didn't realize how funny he was but really it's -- it's very hearting in these times when there's so much unrest and so much discomfort. We can create that in our communities. We don't have to be guided by the hysteria that's out there. So, I applaud your effort to that.

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: Thank you.

REP. WOOD (141ST): And especially the listening session. Listening is -- needs to be taught and understood, and we need to all practice more of it. My other thought is, it seems that UConn is taking responsibility for something that should be happening in middle school and high school, developing resilience in children and yikes, but that's not what higher ed is for. So, I won't get into that one. On -- you said you had 26 full-time counsellors on the UConn staff. Do you differentiate acuity of the students and their needs? Because you could, conceivably, get away -- not get away with, but have a social worker work with the student on some basic anxiety and how to deal with that him or herself on to more difficult challenges like schizophrenia or the more complicated end of mental health. Do you --

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: We triage every student. And we can do that through a same day appointment, and then route you to care. We can do it on the phone. There's many different ways we can do that. And I'm very fortunate. So, I have social workers, psychologists, and psychiatric APRNs. So, we can -- it's very hard for higher education to afford a full-time psychiatrist. They're doing very well.

So, a psychiatric APRN has been the tool that we make available, so that allows us from -- from anxiety to psychosis that we're able to provide care, not sustained long-term care, and that's where resources like Nantik and inpatient hospitalization is -- is helpful to those students.

REP. WOOD (141ST): Thank you. How much of this do you think starts in college and how much started before?

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: Sixth grade is, to your point, generally where we see the onset of anxiety. It's also where we see the beginnings of substance use. So, one of the things we need to contradict is my anxiety is best met by substance. And I think you're right, in naming 6 through 12, there's significant willingness across the state to address this. And I know we've had some preliminary conversations with former superintendents, because I do think as your state flagship, we have the ability and the research to be able to support 6 through 12, so that's onset.

And we do have an increasing amount of students coming to campus with pre-existing conditions. We've actually surveyed all of our medical records to get a handle on that, and that is, you know, to the earlier question a good thing. It's a sign of increased access to higher education. But yeah, I think there's -- there are some that are presenting much earlier anxiety and depression generally, in that 6 through 12 window, some that present later more of the psychiatric disorders. And we need to be very nimble in institutions to be able to respond to all of that. And we can't meet the standard of care that that student may be used to. So, we, you

know, we -- we provide out-of-pocket care for my son. That's not something that I know any university will be able to maintain. And many parents who have been providing care for their kids, are going through a difficult transition when we bring them into a college setting.

REP. WOOD (141ST): And I know this might be getting into the regular education committee but you mentioned -- so what you're saying is Neag, what you might do is parent with Neag school on how they deliver mental healthcare awareness to -- in their teaching certificate programs.

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: And with current state K through 12. So, we've had some conversation with several commissioners on this topic, and so much willingness to do this work and to work collaboratively. And yes, we'd be happy to provide the research that we have the ability to do, where we learn so much from 6 through 12, through their work in the classroom, with these students all the time.

REP. WOOD (141ST): And if the Chairman would indulge me, one last question. You mentioned JED? Why did you all connect into JED and not another mental health care agency organization?

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: So, I've been aware of the JED agency since 2001. And how they have grown is exactly right. So, they started with suicide prevention, because it was a close and intimate need of the family that supports this foundation. And they realized, as have I, that -- that is just the tip of the iceberg; right? We have roughly 10 percent of students around this age nationally presenting suicidal ideation. But we have 40, 50, 60 percent presenting degrees of anxiety and

depression. And so, JED has grown over time to say universities need to look beyond this sort of one off training. And instead, look at cultural shift. So, JED will review us. JED is administering the Healthy Mind Study. They will present a strategic plan for the university to follow. And we will have the tools to shift culture and that is the hardest work, but JED is willing to take that on.

REP. WOOD (141ST): Great. Thank you very much. I think UConn's lucky --

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: Oh, thank you.

REP. WOOD (141ST): -- of your direction. I appreciate it. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): Thank you. Are there any additional questions? Seeing none, we'll say thank you very much for your testimony --

ELEANOR DAUGHERTY: Thank you.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): -- and move on. Next up is Mark Ojakian. Good afternoon.

MARK OJAKIAN: Good afternoon. It's lovely to be back in front of you. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on a couple of pieces of legislation this afternoon.

I'm here to talk about the S.B. 15 and H.B. 5353, both which deal with the State's Free Community College Imitative, known as PACT, the Pledge to Advance Connecticut.

These are two very different pieces of legislation. And I'm here to support 5353 which appropriates \$16 million dollars to -- to fund this program in the upcoming academic year, and talk to about a couple

of the challenges that we would have should S.B. 15 be enacted into law.

As you know, S.B. 15 invests \$2 million dollars into PACT scholarships, provides \$500,000 dollars for much needed marketing, but also I believe makes changes that would significantly limit access to the program.

I would like to point out, though, that I'm very appreciative in the -- in the Governor's budget, that he did include \$2 million dollars for a down payment on our Advising Initiative through the Guided Pathways Project. But under the Governor's proposal, it would make families with an estimated family contribution of \$7500 dollars more ineligible. We believe this would have the effect of shutting out many middle class families.

Second, it would limit the program to people who graduated from high school in the past year, shutting out both young adults who entered the work force immediately out of high school and older working adults who recognize that a college education would improve their employment opportunities in the future. Now, most of our first-time students begin college a few years after high school, so this change will severely limit the impact on the scholarship program.

I would also like to point out that the uncertainty around the final [laughter] version of the legislation and the funding mechanism is making it somewhat difficult for us to affectively market the program. We have been out there marketing the program, as the bill was originally passed last year. We will continue to do so until there's a change in the law. But there's a certain amount

of -- amount of anxiety among folks that call the office or among the constituent groups that I visit about what is going to be the -- the final version of the bill and will they be receiving what we are promising them, which is free community college.

I would also just -- also, like to point out that, at some point, I would like to continue the conversation I think we started in Appropriations about including part-time students as part of this initiative, because as you know, part-time students make up the bulk of the folks that go to our community colleges. So, while I understand that we are trying to encourage people to go full-time and complete within three years, I would like to continue that conversation as the program moves on, And I would also like to point out that this legislation does not apply to undocumented students who last year, I believe, we started to give institutional financial aid to. And so, I'd like to have that conversation about possibly including them in the -- in the future.

I also would like to testify in favor of S.B. 303, IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TASK FORCE REGARDING THE PREVENTION AND TREATMENT OF MENTAL ILLNESS AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION. We were very supportive and have been an active participant in the task force since its inception in last year's S.B. 750. We have a member with us today of the task force from one of our universities who is able to answer any detailed questions you might have, as well as the Representative of my team who served on the task force from the system.

You know, many of our students cite access to mental and behavioral health as one of the top barriers to

academic success. When I began tenure as president and conducted one of my many 17 institution townhall journeys around the state, students approached me about the need for mental health services. And as you know, this was in addition to their concerns about food and also housing. And so, we've begun to take a look -- a holistic look at how we needed to provide all wraparound services to the students that we serve. I believe that this legislation aligns with efforts under way at the system level. We believe it's very important to identify core strategies and activities that are scaled at a system level when they are deployed by staff at the campus level and are tailored to meet local student needs.

I would request that the committee consider a few changes to the bill before you. One, that we include community mental health providers in the Campus Mental Health Coalition, as many are already working with our students and they are critical partners in service delivery while they are on campus and after graduation.

Second, that we ensure that an assessment tool is developed by proper collegiate mental health professionals and that the accountability measures vary by need of institution. That we include CSCU, UConn, the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges, in addition to the Office of Higher Education as the agencies that would work with DMHAS in development of the assessment tools and the evaluation. And that, last but not least, that funding is provided [laughter] to carry out these much needed recommendations.

We look forward to continuing this discussion around providing core services, and also look forward to continuing to work with the task force as it continues into the future.

And then, finally, 5353, would require CHESLA to establish a permanent endowment that would provide scholarship donations to the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship Program for undergraduate students. I believe this is a creative way of reaching out to the public at large to help fund the state's scholarship program, which benefits so many Connecticut students a year -- each year, while acknowledging their philanthropy through tax credits. We look forward to continuing the conversation as this bill moves forward on how it might be crafted to -- to best serve the needs of our students. Thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you very much, President Ojakian, for being here and sharing your thoughts on this important topic. We're -- we're appreciative of your time. Are there questions or comments from Committee members? Yes, Representative Haddad.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): Thank you very much. And thank you for your testimony. I've now shifted from the chair to -- to [laughter] to being ranked as well. But it gives me a chance to ask you a question, you, in particular around the, you know, H.B. 5353, which fully funds the PACT commitment that is outlined in the legislation that we passed last year. I mean there's lots of questions I could ask about this. But the one I want to sort of draw out of your today is -- is how this is linked to the overall fiscal

well-being of the system of community colleges that we have.

You know, we -- we spent much of the day last week talking about the Student's First Program and the -- the -- and that effort and today, this bill really, you know, in a lot of ways, it sort of lowers the barrier of students to -- to -- to be able to go to community college. But there's a commensurate increase in enrollment that, I think, is pretty important to the system as a whole in terms of maintaining it's -- it's -- it's sustainability. I wanted -- wanted to give you the opportunity to talk about what your projections are for the increase in enrollment and how that improves your sustainability?

MARK OJAKIAN: So, Representative, thank you -- thank you for that question. I -- I would say that PACT is a piece of the greater puzzle in terms of sustainability of the community college system into the future. We have estimated that in the first year, beginning in the fall of '20, if we're able to roll this out effectively, that we might see an increase of about \$2 million dollars in additional revenue as a result of new incoming students. We also believe that that amount would increase to about \$4 million dollars a year as time went on.

Now, it's -- it's sort difficult to estimate numbers, because we're not sure in the first year exactly how many students are going to take advantage of this. As you know, marketing's a big component of this, and the uncertainty around it, makes it a little bit difficult. Just know that there's been an incredible amount of interest from families, from school superintendents, from

principals and others as I travelled around the state.

But we do believe that, with our Guided Pathways Initiative and with the PACT program, that in the next couple of years, we could see a full-time enrollment number of about 32,000 students at our community colleges, which would help in the long-term fiscal viability of the system.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): Because without those -- this constellation of efforts, your -- you would project an enrollment decline in -- in community colleges?

MARK OJAKIAN: Correct. Correct.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): Yeah.

MARK OJAKIAN: We would -- we would see -- we would see not only enrollment declines, but we would continue to see students leaving and not staying. And as you know, retention is sort of the new enrollment. We have so many students that start in the fall and leave in the spring and then they come back in the fall or maybe not until the spring. And so, they're -- they're sort of in and out. So, the -- the best way to ensure stability, in terms of enrollment and financial viability, is to make sure that we have the advising necessary to keep folks in school.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): On -- on the second bill, I wanted to ask you about, S.B. 303, yeah, I -- I just wanted to ask -- I mean, you're -- you're the President of a number of institutions, some of them quite large and some of them quite small.

MARK OJAKIAN: Correct.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): As you look at the legislation, are there any concerns that you might have looking at it about whether or not the prescriptions that we offer, the mandates that we -- that we require in the bill, do they work as well with a -- with a small institution or are there other accommodations that we might seek to make?

As I understand it, you know, community colleges are particularly challenged with trying to provide these services on the -- the budget that they're currently allocated. And so, I just wanted to see if there was something that we could do that would help get those services to those campuses, but do it in a way that's reasonable.

MARK OJAKIAN: Yeah. I will -- I will just make a [cross talk] general comment, you know, and that is in -- in some of our institutions we have very -- very good programs that are working. We have to do a better job, I believe, in partnering with our not-for-profits in the community if we can't offer the full range of services with a full complement of staff on our on our individual campuses. But Leslie Mara, who has -- who led the efforts from the -- from the system office, will probably have a better insight than I do.

LESLIE MARA: I think that as far as the bill goes for us the --

REP. HADDAD (73RD): If -- if you could just first just identify yourself and your title, and that helps for us when we put the transcript together and then you can proceed with your comments.

LESLIE MARA: Sure, I'm Leslie Mara. I'm the Director of Strategic Initiatives, Sponsored

Research and Outreach at the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities. As far as the bill goes, I think our overwhelming support comes from the -- the overarching principles, that we acknowledge as a state, the tremendous need that it -- that this is not just for our students' well-being, but for the economy growth of our state. The one size does not fit all.

And so, I think, when we do an assessment of what might be needed in the northwest corner and how they could leverage the non-profit community, it -- it's going to inherently look different than what we do at Gateway Community College in an area as resource rich as New Haven. So, and -- and I think the assessment ensuring that we include student voice there, because we can devise the best program that is useless to our students.

And so, I think ensuring that we have an assessment tool -- we are proud to say that one of our colleges, Housatonic Community College has also embarked formally on the JED journey. And so, we have also been in touch with the foundation to see whether, what is normally a four-year period of their assessment and work, could be shortened to better meet the needs of community colleges and they're interested in having that discussion with us.

So, I think we are in support of the overarching principles and just would ask that -- that there be some attention to the idea that the students who commute to our various community colleges, the way we assess them and the kind of tool that we use, and the kind of services that might be most appropriate, would need to be tailored for them.

MARK OJAKIAN: Right. I think flexibility is what we're looking for in some ways, so we're not just making a cookie cutter sort of program.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you very much, Representative Haddad. Are there additional questions or comments from Committee members? I have just one, President Ojakian, that's -- but I noticed in your testimony concerning H.B. 5353 and S.B. 15, I -- you mentioned that there's been tremendous interest so far in the Community College Program. Can you talk a little bit about what that looks like on campuses and -- and sort of the threats that S.B. 15 if it -- if it is successful and sort of narrowing the qualifications, the impact that that would have on the families or the students that you've spoken to about the program?

MARK OJAKIAN: Well, the -- the interest has come from, quite honestly, high schools and from superintendents and from principals and from perspective students and parents reaching out through our website to get information. We've never had an initiative like this that has generated so much, you know, interest. We also are seeing, at the high school level, that there are students who never thought they could go to college, because they might be first-generation or they look at a sticker price of less than \$5000 dollars a year and think it might be prohibitive for them to go to school. But when you explain the program to them, they get very excited and these are many -- many of these students are students that could already go for free. So, we're not only generating, you know, middle class

families but also leveraging Federal Pell dollars that, I believe, are being left on the table.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): In other words, as -- as Representative Haddad touched upon, it is integral to the financial wealth -- to the fiscal well-being of the community college system to attract these new students, given the fact that for many of them intuition is already in fact covered by PACT.

MARK OJAKIAN: Correct.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you for clarifying that and -- and bringing that point to our Committee today. I think that's really crucial. Representative Turco has a question, followed by --

MARK OJAKIAN: Sure.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): -- Representative Doucette.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hello, President Ojakian.

MARK OJAKIAN: Hello.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Good to see you.

MARK OJAKIAN: Yeah.

REP. TURCO (27TH): I wanted to follow-up on a statement you said in regards to S.B. 15, and that is, that most of your first-time full-time students are not coming directly out of high school to start at a community college, they have some gap years for work or figure something's out before they decided to go to community college. Is that correct?

MARK OJAKIAN: That's correct. That's correct.

REP. TURCO (27TH): What would you say that -- when you say most, what would you say the -- that -- that percentage is?

MARK OJAKIAN: I don't know if I can give you an accurate percentage, you know, sitting right here, but -- but there's a few variables. One is many -- many come out of high school and -- and don't know what their educational path will be. So, they may take a course. They may take a couple courses. They may work first and then come to school. The -- the -- the percentage of full-time -- first-time full-time is very low.

So, what this would do under the original bill, you know, just allowing students to go for free if they were full-time. It would -- it would allow students to finish in a very -- very timely way. The research shows that students who go full-time finish their education period.

And so, I believe that if we -- if we don't go with the bill as it was originally passed, that says you have to come out of high school, you know, one year and then go to, you know, to community college to be able to avail yourself of this program that the program would not be successful and we wouldn't target the students who need the community college education the most.

REP. TURCO (27TH): So -- so, you -- let me make sure I'm understanding that correctly, you don't agree that if a student graduates high school, goes off in the workforce for a couple years, then decide they're going to go full-time to community college, you do not think they should be eligible for the debt-free?

MARK OJAKIAN: No, I think -- I think they should be eligible.

REP. TURCO (27TH): You do?

MARK OJAKIAN: I'm sorry.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Okay.

MARK OJAKIAN: Maybe I -- maybe I misspoke or you misheard me, but I've always been clear that I supported the legislation that was passed last year. And the legislation that was passed last year did not have a limitation on it at all in terms of a time period to be eligible for the program.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Right, because it sounds like with this limitation that's being -- that's proposed in S.B. 15, there's going to be a huge amount of students that won't be able to take advantage of a debt-free community college program. And in that case, they never go to community college. Is that correct?

MARK OJAKIAN: That's correct.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Okay. Thank you --

MARK OJAKIAN: They may not go to college at all.

REP. TURCO (27TH): Right. Thank you, President Ojakian.

MARK OJAKIAN: You're welcome.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you, Representative Turco. Representative Doucette.

REP. DOUCETTE (13TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Hello, Mr. President, good to see you again.

MARK OJAKIAN: Good to see you.

REP. DOUCETTE (13TH): Perhaps, it's not fair to ask you these questions, but I did want to dive in and I -- I don't know if anyone from the Governor's Office is -- is going to be here to testify on this today. But perhaps you can help me with a few questions on the finances of this. I'm particularly curious again and I've heard these numbers before, but perhaps you could help with this why, the figure of \$7500 dollars, what -- what that represents in terms of the finances of -- of that family or that student.

MARK OJAKIAN: Yeah, I don't -- first of all, I don't know why that threshold was -- was chosen; you'd have to ask the Governor's Office. We have estimated that would be about \$65,000 dollars a year family in terms of their income level. And so, we believe that that would disadvantage some middle class families that are struggling to send their -- their children to -- to school period.

REP. DOUCETTE (13TH): Uh-huh. And I see some nodding behind you, so I think you [laughter] -- I think you did -- did alright with that.

MARK OJAKIAN: Did I pass the test? [Laughter]

REP. DOUCETTE (13TH): So, then --

MARK OJAKIAN: Sometimes, I'm not so sure.

REP. DOUCETTE (13TH): As a follow-up to that, I wonder if you have any data on how many students in the community college system currently are receiving aid but -- and -- and would be excluded from the program, based on, again, whatever current data you may have available?

MARK OJAKIAN: I'm -- I'm not sure I understand the -- I can get you whatever data you need. But what I can tell you is -- is currently we have 60 percent of our students at our community colleges that go for free, through a variety of Pell grants, Roberta Willis Scholarship and institutional financial aid. But there's also a number of students who don't get any sort of support because they -- they fall within the cracks of the -- the federal, you know, system of assessing financial aid.

We believe that the way that the bill was originally crafted would attract many new students into the system who would not ordinarily think of going to community college.

REP. DOUCETTE (13TH): Right.

MARK OJAKIAN: So, I can provide you with whatever data you need.

REP. DOUCETTE (13TH): Yeah. So, I guess what I'm trying to get at, is I'm curious, you know, between those two populations you just described, the ones who currently have all of their -- are maxed out and are essentially attending community college for free, and then the other ones, you mentioned, who fall through the cracks who don't otherwise qualify, in between there, there are people who would presumably benefit from the Debt-Free Community College Program. So, the question is, as a subset of that population, how many people would be -- uh -- excluded who would otherwise be available if the program was to -- was to start up next year?

MARK OJAKIAN: Sure, I can -- [cross talk] we can provide that to you Representative.

REP. DOUCETTE (13TH): That -- that -- that I think gets to the root of the question for me, because, you know, I -- I -- I agree, we are perhaps unfairly excluding people from the -- the program which we have -- have, you know, promised and started to make strides toward rolling out and -- and now, we're -- we're backing off. So, that's a -- that's a concern, so. Thank you.

MARK OJAKIAN: No, thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you, Representative Doucette. Representative Haddad.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): Yeah. Just one follow-up question. You -- you might recall when we were discussing this legislation last year, that there was another proposal moving through the building to allow the Connecticut Lottery Corporation to sell lottery tickets through your cell phone; right? And the legislation that we passed last year asked the Governor if that revenue source would be sustainable -- would be enough to sustain this program.

And in fact, I think it's the intention in 5353 that what we do is we create a segregated fund and we take the additional revenue from those lottery sales and direct it directly into that fund, so that it can be used to defray the cost -- the potential cost to taxpayers of providing the Debt-Free College Program.

My recollection, I think, and, you know, there are lots of projections out there that the iLottery Program may be not in the first initial year or two, but eventually grows to be enough to fund -- substantially fund this program. There's always

going to be, I suppose a backstop would be necessary to make sure that we're delivering what we promised. But there's enormous sum of money eligible through iLottery. And I didn't know anything about iLottery before the end of last session. But now I guess I'm a fan of it. [Laughter] I guess they -- they -- they get -- only because I think that that provides, you know, a non-taxpayer revenue source to fund this program.

But would the -- would the other bill, S.B. 15, and with the budget suggestion made by the Governor's Office, I just want to be clear, that significantly reduces the costs of the program by limiting the number of enrollees.

But is it your understanding that those eligibility reequipments would expand over time as the money, that's been already identified, begins to be realized or -- or as I read S.B. 15, it -- it permanently limits the program unless legislature would act again? There's no -- there's no opportunity for us to include additional populations as the revenue increases. Is that your understanding?

MARK OJAKIAN: That's my understanding of the bill as it's currently drafted. And I've had no conversations to suggest otherwise.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): Thank you very much. I appreciate your answers.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): I just had a quick follow-up, President, Ojakian, if you don't mind --

MARK OJAKIAN: No.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): -- and that's I know that our neighbors in Rhode Island and New York have both rolled out community college programs with varying qualifications and with varying success levels. I wanted to know, from your perspective, in terms of recruiting students, if you think Connecticut is at a risk of losing students to our neighboring states which offer, either low or no-cost, community college programs?

MARK OJAKIAN: I think -- I think there's always a risk of losing students to other states when there's -- when there's competition for a limited number of students. And when you offer attractive alternatives and attractive alternatives are not only built on programming but on price and cost and how that relates to value, I think there's always a chance, especially in those sort of border, you know, areas which we have to protect, both on the Rhode Island border and on the New York border. So, we're always very keenly aware of competitive advantages that we need to have here. And I think this will help us in Connecticut keep -- keep the students we have, allow them to get a great education. And then do whatever they choose to do in the future in Connecticut.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you so much. Are there additional questions or comments from Committee members? Yes, Representative Mushinsky.

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): Mark, I wanted to ask you -- Mark, I wanted to ask you to elaborate on why we're leaving Pell money on the table and how much is it? And could we use that to -- we could somehow use that to reduce the number of people that have to pay out-of-pocket for community college?

MARK OJAKIAN: Sure, I'm -- I'm happy to address it. I think that, what this program allows us to do, is a couple of things. It's to provide debt-free college to many people who would not be able to afford to go to school, number one. Number two, it allows us to showcase the incredible opportunities that exist at our community colleges period and make all citizens and all perspective students aware that community college is an attractive opportunity for them.

As I travel to many high school districts, and I've been, you know, on the road with the program [laughter] sort of non-stop, and I talked to students who -- who tell me that they never thought that they could go to college period. The fact that now, we're offering free, even though they could go for free, already makes them excited, makes them apply, makes them understand that they could get full federal support to go. So, what I -- what I'm saying is we're not intentionally leaving money on the table, because federal Pell dollars that we can access by having a new cohort of students come to our community colleges under the umbrella of this initiative.

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): Okay. And then just follow-up on that, so you personally go, is that what you do? You personally go to the community college?

MARK OJAKIAN: Do I?

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): I mean high schools.

MARK OJAKIAN: Oh, I've been -- I've been to -- to Superintendent meetings. I've been to -- to high schools. I was at Manchester High School where I

talked to a group of students. I'm going to the Leadership of the AFL-CIO next week to talk to their members about marketing this to their, you know, families.

And what I've noticed is, when I travel to different regions, I was recently at the Northwest Chamber of Commerce meeting which is at Northwestern Community College, and there was two principals and two Superintendents there, who said that their families in their districts and in their schools were so excited about this opportunity, it was really invigorating sort of a new conversation about college and opportunities for college in their school districts.

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): Okay. And does anybody talk directly with the kids, for example, we -- a few of us went to Eli Whitney last week and there were some kids in an afterschool program that are on their way to a career. And they spent a few hours later in school than the other kids, and then they get credentials that they can use for their career. Is there anything like that where we can bridge high school kids with a possible community college future, where they get to do something after school that fits them into a community college path?

MARK OJAKIAN: Absolutely. And I just came from a meeting with the Commissioner of Education where we talked about how we can work together on dual -- on -- on better and more strategic dual enrollment opportunities between our high schools and our -- and our community colleges. We -- we have efforts in school districts and in community colleges, but we need to broaden them. And we need to scale them to best needs -- not only meet the needs of the high

school students but meet the needs of our employers as well. So, those conversations are -- are -- are ongoing and earnest.

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): [Waves hand].

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you very much, Representative Mushinsky. Are there any other questions or comments from Committee members? Seeing none, President Ojakian thank you --

MARK OJAKIAN: Thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): -- for spending time with us again.

MARK OJAKIAN: This is a short one. Thank you. [laughter].

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Up next is Senator Dan Champagne, after which will move to the students and members of the public, alternating with legislators, agency, municipal officials. Thanks for being here, Senator.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): I'd like to thank the Chairs and the -- and those in charge for Higher Education and Employment Advancement. I bring to you today S.B. 307. This involves -- I read the title, and it's kind of a little misleading, but this involves students that are adopted out of state, particularly Mass at this point and -- and bringing that -- and giving them the same opportunities as if they had stayed in their home state, and that's the education.

This was asked by a constituent who's going to speak later about a year ago. But it -- it brings it home a little more today, because in September, I brought in three foster kids into my home, ages two, four

and six. The only reason -- one of the main reasons I took 'em is nobody else would take 'em as a group. And when you have kids that don't have a place to go, you want to take off as much burden on the families that do adopt them. And this is a big part of that.

We have kids that -- that are out there, that are looking for homes, and some families just can't afford it. Obviously, I was in a position that I could help them, these three children, and sadly they went home Friday; good for them, but sad for myself, because you really grow attached to 'em. But yeah, we have families in the state of Connecticut when they were looking for kids that they could help and ended up finding kids over the -- over the line in Massachusetts, and by simply moving from Massachusetts into Connecticut, they no longer get, you know, some of those benefits, and one of them is the education. Whereas if they had adopted from Connecticut, which they couldn't find, you know, children in Connecticut, they would still have that or if they had stayed in Massachusetts they would've been able to do that. It'd be great if we could have a reciprocal agreement between Massachusetts and Connecticut or even the surrounding states, because the more children we can help the better.

But this is an opportunity to help these families and -- and any perspective families in -- in their decisions to adopt really takes some of the burden off of 'em. So, that's why I come here today to support this. And I hope you will, too. Thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you Senator Champagne for bringing this issue to our attention. Really

grateful for sharing your personal experience and -- and for elevating a topic in a population that probably doesn't receive the attention that it's due in this building. So, thank you very much.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Senator Hwang, I know, has a question.

SENATOR HWANG (28TH): Thank you Mr. Chair. And -- and with your indulgence, if your constituent, Mary, is she here?

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): My constituent is here.

SENATOR HWANG (28TH): If the Chair would not mind if she could just come up and join you and -- and be done with her testimony and collaborate with you, if she was going to testify?

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Here you go.

SENATOR HWANG (28TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. And -- and if I may just be able to have her introduce herself and --

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Absolutely.

LORI FORTUNA: I'm Lori Fortuna, and I'm the mom of two adopted children. We adopted them in June of 2017.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Ma'am, I know you'll be submitting -- that you signed up to testify and that you submitted testimony, as well, but if you wanted to use this opportunity alongside Senator Champagne to deliver your testimony, we'd welcome your thoughts.

LORI FORTUNA: Sure, absolutely. So -- so, I appreciate the opportunity to -- to -- to, you know, share our story with you. So, I submitted testimony for you to read the -- you know, the whole plan of what we were -- what we have been through. But I want to put faces to the story.

This is our son and daughter. We, you know, I'm -- and you know, as I said, my name is Lori Fortuna but I'm known to these two as mom. And ultimately, they have been through hell and back. This is their second adoption due to no fault of their own. They -- the longest they have ever been in any one home is three years. We just hit the three-year mark this past year and they're just getting settled in.

When they first came to us they hated school because they had -- missed so much along the way that they didn't have a solid foundation. They're now in the right place being supported. And now my son wants to be a teacher. And my daughter goes back and forth between being a teacher and wanting to be a singer. But they both know that they want to keep learning and growing.

And it was very sad. We live up in Stafford Springs, we live six -- seven miles from the border of Massachusetts. And because we fell in love with them and were -- we were over the border in another state, they -- they -- you know, they no longer qualify for what, you know, all the -- all the kids that stay in Massachusetts get, which is, you know, to attend a state school.

You know, my husband and I are in our 50s and ultimately, you know, all of our friends are, you know, empty nesters at this point and preparing to

retire. And you know, we've loving taken these kids into our home, and we wouldn't do it any other way. However, you know, to -- if we knew that we were going to have them come into our home, you know, it -- they came into our home when they were 7 and 8 years old, they're siblings, we would've started saving back when we -- when they -- when we knew we were going to have them, if they were biologically ours.

You know, and we did some calculations in preparation for this hearing, and right now, in order to prepare to send them to school, we would have to actually spend -- save \$1400 dollars a month to be able to do that. And right now we're a single -- single-income family because their needs have been so great because of what they've been through that, you know, my -- my business has -- has slowed to almost nothing because they're -- they're my -- our priority.

So, ultimately, you know, we just ask for your -- your, you know, to -- to consider the reciprocity or to possibly another option, you know, would be and someone will be speaking a little bit later to, you know, have them, you know, be acknowledged by Connecticut DCF, because then, they would actually be, you know, taken under the fold and being able to, you know, attend UConn or something similar to that.

They, you know -- they're so hungry to learn now that they're on the right path. And ironically it, you know, it's those folks that essentially, you know, the kids that don't get adopted that are the ones that, you know, don't have the encouragement to eventually become, you know, to -- to really want to

become something, because they don't build their confidence up. So, I thank you. I thank you for hearing me.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you for sharing your testimony and the tremendous service that you are providing. We're really so grateful that -- that you took the time to be here today and -- and share your perspective. Senator Hwang, did you have additional questions?

SENATOR HWANG (28TH): Yes, thank you. So, what I'm hearing is that Connecticut has a full tuition reimbursement for Connecticut children adopted through DCF, virtually an identical program to Massachusetts; correct? Or -- or the tuition reimbursement through children adopted through foster care and DCF. Would that be correct?

LORI FORTUNA: They have a program, it's -- it's -- it's similar. In -- in Massachusetts, what happens is, they're allowed to go to a state school, so they would have to go to one of the state schools in Massachusetts. We live close enough to the border to be able to do that. Here in Connecticut what it is, is that they could actually go to UConn or get the equivalent to be able -- amount of money if they went to UConn to be able to use it toward another school.

SENATOR HWANG (28TH): And this is not just your family, it's -- it's other families that have taken the initiative to adopt children through the DCF system that -- that would be able to benefit this to create a pathway for these children to lead successful lives. Would that be correct?

LORI FORTUNA: Absolutely. And I was remise in saying I'm not here just for them. I -- I just spoke to a -- a person who actually helped us with our home study yesterday, who is just in the process now of -- of placing four siblings in the same home with a family because they don't want to separate them. And -- and ultimately -- I mean how -- how would they be able to send all four of those children to school -- to -- to college. It would be prohibitive.

So, it -- it's, you know, whether it's one or four or -- you know, there are single parents that want to adopt. I mean, it just makes it -- and especially with the high cost of living here in Connecticut, it just -- for most it's really -- really challenging to be able to do that.

SENATOR HWANG (28TH): And you talked about the reciprocity system, if we were to go the other way, a Connecticut child getting adopted in Massachusetts would that Massachusetts adopted child be eligible for their tuition assistance?

LORI FORTUNA: To my knowledge, at this point, no. I don't believe we have to -- help me -- help me, yeah, no, not -- not at this point. We were hoping to be able to work something like out.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): At this -- at this point, I'm not sure.

SENATOR HWANG (28TH): Well, thank you. Well, thank you very much for being here. But I have to tell you, I learned about this from Senator Champagne, who, himself is a foster parent. And -- and the -- the -- the culmination, I must say, is the joy that was in your face. Ma'am, when you were showing off

the two pictures and the joy that I hear from Senator Champagne talking about creating a better opportunity for children that have gone through, in some cases hell and back, to be able to make a positive difference and truly, when you flashed those two pictures of -- of your two beautiful children, the joy that flashed over your face, I wish I could capture that. So, thank you for -- for doing that you're doing. And thank you for raising this bill, Senator Champagne. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you, Senator Hwang. Representative Arora.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Thank you, Senator Champagne. Thank you for -- thank you, Mary for -- for being here. I have a very quick question, the -- the number of such children, should be quite small. So, this is something we -- it is a moral imperative I feel that for folks like yourself are doing so much and, in some sense, it's such a great -- it's a really good situation we're talking about here for -- for -- for kids and for everyone in general, do you have an assessment of how big this population is who we are talking about?

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): We tried to find that, and we really couldn't. But I don't think it's big. You know, I think when the adoptions take place, a lot of people look into, can they afford it and where they should be if they did. I think people have the opportunity, if they're going to adopt in Massachusetts to actually move over the border, I think that'd make it a lot more difficult, especially when somebody's established in Connecticut.

So, this comes down to finding the right people to adopt the kids and -- and making it easier on them, because these children, like -- like she said, have been through quite a bit and you have to deal with a lot of -- a lot of times behavioral problems and -- and therapists and the rest of it, and really takes up a -- a large amount of time.

So, what we're looking -- you know, obviously, you know what we're looking for, but to give you the numbers I don't have those, so.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Yeah. It appears to be a -- from a -- considering how big our overall spending in some of these programs is, it -- it seems to be a small problem.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Yeah.

REP. ARORA (151ST): One -- one last question.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Yes.

REP. ARORA (151ST): This is only applicable for post-secondary, so after 12th grade, after -- so as long as -- and I'm just clarifying this, perhaps for my own benefit, that up to 12th grade in regular schools, there is not a issue -- there is no issue because they live here and so they go to their regular school district.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Right.

LORI FORTUNA: Right.

REP. ARORA (151ST): So, are we talking about primarily the college tuition or perhaps community colleges or any other technical programs?

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Right.

LORI FORTUNA: Right.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Thank you very much for bringing this up. This is -- this seems like a very strong moral imperative said for us to address this. And thank you, Senator Champagne for bringing it -- for -- for bringing up this legislation. And thank you.

LORI FORTUNA: Can I say one other thing? Can -- can I say one other --

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Absolutely.

LORI FORTUNA: So -- so, one thing that was pretty alarming to me and, of course, I -- I would -- we -- my husband and I would never have done this, if we kept them as foster children, which they had to have to come to our home and stay with us for six months technically as foster children, they would get this benefit. So, they wouldn't of taken our last name. They wouldn't of known that they were really Fortunas. They wouldn't of known -- you know, they wouldn't have been truly ours, and that wouldn't been the right thing, especially because this was this second adoption. They really didn't believe until coming into this year, once they marked that three-year mark that that this is different. They're not going to be taken away and put someplace else again. So, you know, unfortunately, the system is set up to, you know, unfortunately not help -- help do the right thing by these kids.

REP. ARORA (151ST): And thanks for pointing that, and I guess, we got to fix the system; right?

LORI FORTUNA: Yeah.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Thank you. Thank you, Dan.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you, Representative Arora. Yes, Representative Haddad.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): Yeah. I want to thank both Senator Champagne and also you, Mary, for coming in and offering your testimony. It's -- it's a really important issue and it's -- and actually -- it's actually been one that I've been interested in for a couple years and -- and the reciprocity agreement suggestion that Senator Champagne makes, I think, is a really strong one.

First, you know, those kids are really lucky to have, you know, someone like to serve -- willing to step up and take of them. And I know that Senator Champagne is a -- is a foster parent. We were talking at a breakfast a couple of weeks ago. I think those kids are really lucky, as well.

You know, these -- these kids, as you say are -- are people who, you know, without the generosity and the openness of hearts of people like you, yeah, I don't know where they would be; right? They would be permanently shuttled around in a foster care system that, you know, doesn't really serve them very well either. So, yeah, it's really -- it's really important, I think, that we have folks who are willing to sort of step up and take care of these -- these -- these kids.

I -- I did just want to say this as well, that, you know, as lucky as your -- as your kids are, there -- we need to remember that there's another segment of the population and it is this population that you just talked about of -- of kids who are timing out of the foster care system. They're wards of the

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state and they, really, when they graduate from the -- after they turn 18 and they -- they graduate out of the DCF system, they don't have a family at all. They may have friends, some other minimal support level, but they don't have parents or family in a traditional sense. And this program would apply to those kids, as well.

And so, I think it's important, as we discuss this issue, that we think, not just in terms of, I think, the -- the fortunate ones who have been adopted, but also the other kids, there's some special programming at UConn, there's a program called the Rising Stars Program. It is a fantastic program that provides the additional support necessary for kids in the foster care system who are new to college and helps them be successful young adults.

And I think that the suggestion here, that we should allow our kids, who are either have been adopted or timed out of foster care, to have -- to take their benefit and to be used -- right now they can their benefit and use it at any college or university. But in fact, because they only get the UConn rate, that's not enough for them to go anywhere else out-of-state. They're really limited just to public schools, unless they're really fortunate to get into a school that offers a large amount of financial aid in a different state.

And so, this would allow -- if we do a reciprocity agreement the correct way, we would pattern it after something that's called the Tuition Break Program that's run by the New England Board of Higher Education. That's why they're referenced in this legislation. That's a program where we -- we've agreed that if there's a not program available for

you in Connecticut, you can go to an out-of-state state school at an in-state rate to get a college degree. And we -- I think we could expand that to include all degree programs for this special set of kids. And my hope is that's the direction that the Department of Children and Families will go in and that -- that we can move in.

So, I wanted to compliment you on that. And thank you very much for the suggestion and for all that you do for the kids that you're caring for.

LORI FORTUNA: Thank you.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you very much, Representative Haddad. Are there other questions or comments from Committee members? Seeing none, thank you both for being here.

SENATOR CHAMPAGNE (35TH): Thank you so much.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Next we're going to move over to the students list and first on that list is Fabrizzio Cedeno? Is Fabrizzio here? Welcome, thanks for being here.

FABRIZZIO CEDENO: Good afternoon, members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. My name is Fabrizzio Cedeno. I'm an undocumented student from Central Connecticut State University. And I am speaking about H.B. 5353, AN ACT FUNDING THE DEBT-FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAM, which would fund Connecticut's Debt-Free Community College Program. I'm in support of debt-free college education, but I believe changes must be made to the overall program to help more students.

As a first-generation documented college student, I have experienced firsthand what it is really like to be intimidated and feel concerned about the cost of higher education. There have been times where I have had to choose between buying groceries and help my family pay medical bills or saving that money to put towards next semester's tuition, because every penny counts.

I'm currently in my second year of undergraduate studies, pursuing a double major in Graphic Design and Communications, but my constant worry of being able to afford to follow my passion and dreams every semester started two years ago, during my senior year of high school. I was aware of my status and how it created numerous limitations in terms of opportunities compared to my fellow classmates who's depiction of the American dream, that everyone appeared to want a piece of, seemed unreachable for me. I spent countless hours in my Guidance Counselor's office, for him to tell me that I would never have the chance to access higher education, given my status and the state policies. However, I was determined to get a college education despite the arduous path.

My plan was to go to a local community college for two years, work as many hours as I could to be able to afford tuition and possibly save up for the following two years at a four-year undergraduate state college. However, at the end of the my senior, I was immensely rewarded for my arduous work throughout high school, and was given the opportunity to go to a four-year college -- college through generous scholarships. I decided to follow through with my plan and stay in Connecticut by attending a four-year state college. Although I had

received enough scholarships to make it through my first semester, I was made aware that many scholarships were only available for first year freshmen. Therefore, pushing me to -- to go on a quest for scholarships every semester, which does not get easy with time.

Although I am able to pursue higher education at a four-year college, I have taken various courses at my local community college, which I consider remarkable higher education institutions, given their commitment with the community, helping people reach their goals, or get them a step closer at a -- at the very least and their affordability.

This -- this bill will strengthen this, providing the opportunity to pursue higher education to those who may not have it otherwise. However, the -- the exclusion of undocumented immigrants does not reflect the community nor the progressive values that the state aims to convey.

I ask that the Higher Education Committee includes the option for students to use the AACTUS in place of the FAFSA, because we, undocumented immigrants, are part of this community. And I believe that, by providing opportunities for people like me or some of my peers, we're creating a community that reflects the values that we believe in and fight for. Opportunities like this can radically change someone's life. Thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you very much for your testimony and for your -- your courage in speaking out on behalf of undocumented people here in Connecticut, specifically students. Really grateful for your perspective that you bring to this

Committee. Are there questions or comments from Committee members? Yes, Representative Haddad.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): Thank you very much for coming and testifying before us. I -- you might've said just in your testimony and I might've missed it, but where did you go to high school?

FABRIZZIO CEDENO: James Hillhouse High School, New Haven, Connecticut.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): And -- and so, when people ask you where you're from, what do you say?

FABRIZZIO CEDENO: I -- there -- there's two variations, right, because they could ask where I'm originally from, which, then I would say my home country, which is Ecuador.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): Yeah.

FABRIZZIO CEDENO: Or when they just ask where are you from? I say New Haven, Connecticut, because that's where I -- where I call home.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): Yeah. That's the important part, I think that is driving it, is where do you call home? And you know, I mean I -- I will say, that for me, as a single individual legislator, I support the change that you're suggesting that we make. I -- I think that, you know, what I learned from working so hard on the bill a couple of years ago that opened up institutional aid, that's the aid that you -- that -- that all students and dreamers included pay into system and we allowed you the access that same benefit program like every other student a couple years ago.

What I learned is that, all too often, you know, in -- in -- when we're talking to the -- you know,

students, you and other folks just like you, that you're just like every -- you're just like every other student who goes and graduates from a Connecticut high school. And the vast majority of the population, your home, is the state of Connecticut. And at a time when we're experiencing employment declines and work force needs, it's really important that we take advantage of all of the folks who are already here to make sure that you have the skills that are necessary to meet, you know, our own needs in -- in our economy. And so, I -- I appreciate the -- that you came and testified in front of us.

The last thing I'll just say, and I don't know if you've been following it all, but like, obviously immigration is a national program -- a problem and it needs to be dealt with in Washington. But my understanding about the most recent conversation that's been happening down there, is that there will be some merit -- there's very likely to be some merits requirements for -- to be eligible for to immigrate here for current folks who are undocumented in the state of Connecticut -- in -- in the United States.

And it just seems to me that allowing folks, like you, to earn your degree and to become -- to -- to build that merit case for citizenship, is probably the best thing that we can do for you absent of, you know, a national change on immigration policy. So, I guess, I don't have a question there. I'm going -- I'm going -- I'm going to start -- I'm going to start editing myself -- I'm going to start editing myself. [Laughter] I -- I mean, yeah, the Chair's looking at me as like, with narrow eyes. [Laughter] But -- but thank you very -- thank you

very much for your testimony. I appreciate you taking the --

FABRIZZIO CEDENO: Thank you.

REP. HADDAD (73RD): -- time to come here today.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you for your comment, Representative Haddad. [Laughter] Are there questions or comments from Committee members? [Laughter] Seeing none, thank you again for your testimony. I look forward to -- to continuing the conversation and hopefully in the direction that you're trying to move this bill in.

FABRIZZIO CEDENO: Thank you very much.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): [Laughter] Next is Janet -- I'm so sorry, having trouble reading, Speltore [phonetic], maybe?

JANET SPOLTORE: Close.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): [Laughter] Welcome. Thanks for being here.

JANET SPOLTORE: Sure. So, my name is Dr. Janet Spoltore. And [laughter] -- yeah, and I am the Director of Student Counseling and Health Services at Connecticut College. I've been there for 19 years. I'm also a psychologist times 40 years. I was a member of this Task Force that worked on some of these recommendations, Past President of International Accreditation of Counseling Services, and continue to be an international site visitor for colleges and their counseling centers. And our college is also a member of the JED Campus.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to share our views on S.B. 303, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TASK FORCE REGARDING THE PREVENTION AND TREATMENT OF MENTAL ILLNESS AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION. We commend the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee for their efforts to promote collegiate mental health. However, we have numerous concerns with this legislation as worded, largely due to the multiple mandates that would place an undue burden on college campuses, especially those lacking funding and resources. For that reason, Connecticut College is opposed to this legislation, in its current form.

I'm going to direct you to just review our written response, but I will briefly summarize my points here. First, we have concerns about the one size fits all approach to the legislation. There's much variability between and within public, private, and community institutions of higher education, and there is much variability in attention to mental health at these institutions. We need to appreciate this diversity in our legislative efforts.

Second, it's important that the legislation is budget neutral or that it includes specific state funding, so as to not place this undue burden on colleges that are already stressed by lean resources and shrinking budgets.

Third, we strongly support requiring colleges and universities to form a mental health coalition. Establishing this comprehensive campus approach to mental health with key stakeholders from across the campus and colleges, including faculty, staff, and students, also community partners is a critical requirement for all institutions of higher education.

This coalition should be tasked with providing a periodic, comprehensive campus assessment, not an evaluation as written in there, but an assessment, to identify campus strengths and weaknesses, supporting wellbeing, and mental health. The assessment will assist in creating a campus wide strategic plan with priorities to strengthen all aspects of mental health. This includes creating policies, creating procedures that support wellbeing, mental health awareness and suicide prevention. Enhancement of -- of services will include collaborations with community partners, although the Memorandums of Understanding are not a critical component of establishing these -- these partnerships. Moreover, this assessment should be created by collegiate mental health experts versus the Commissioner of Mental Health and -- and Addiction Services and the Executive Director of the Office of Higher Education.

And last -- last, this -- the Task Force should be tasked as consultants to the state process with the Task Force having strong representation of collegiate mental health experts.

While we applaud the spirit of the legislation, there are revisions necessary to make the legislation effective across Connecticut campuses in improving mental health of our state's students. We urge to not move this legislation forward without making some revisions. Thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you very much for your testimony and for your work on behalf of mental health and -- and student wellbeing on campus. You mentioned a few changes that you want to see in the legislation. And I think that this Committee, at

least, this member of the Committee is very open to exploring changes and -- and improvements in the bill. I note you mentioned a variety of things that you think should be -- be taken out or amended, is there anything that you think we -- we failed to address? Anything that you believe is an unmet need or with a section? If -- if you could add a section to this bill, what more would you like to see?

JANET SPOLTRE: Well, I think the main -- the main emphasis should be the campus wide approach, that we're not evaluating mental health services, per se on campus, we're -- we -- we are trying to promote the campus -- a campus wide participation and efforts to support and -- and create a sense of wellbeing on campus. So, I think that the focus is not on the treatment, the focus is on a comprehensive approach to mental health.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you for that answer. I appreciate it. Are there questions or comments from Committee members? Seeing none, thank you so much for being here and for --

JANET SPOLTRE: Thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): -- sharing your expertise.

JANET SPOLTRE: My pleasure. Thank you very much.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): We may be in touch about some of those revisions.

JANET SPOLTRE: I'd be happy to talk to you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): All right. Next is, I believe these folks are signed up together, Jean Cronin and Don DeVivo, from the Connecticut Bus Association. Welcome. Thanks for being here.

DON DEVIVO: Good afternoon.

JEAN CRONIN: Thank you. Good afternoon, Senator Haskell and Representative Hall and members of the Higher Education Committee. My name is Jean Cronin, and I'm the Executive Director of the Connecticut Bus Association, which is a statewide trade association representing Connecticut's charter bus companies. I'm here today to express opposition to S.B. 304, AN ACT CONCERNING TRANSPORTATION SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE DOT TO STUDENTS AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

This bill is very similar to a bill that has already been raised in the Transportation Committee that would expand the current U-Pass program that allows certain state university students to ride on public transportation in exchange for a per semester surcharge. That bill is S.B. 151, it's the DOT bill. That bill is limited to existing bus service and would not allow expanding bus or rail service unless approved by the Security of OPM. The reason for this determinant is the cost, as expansion of services would cost more than the subsidies from the students.

We're also considered about the existing contracts that many of our member companies have, as does, DATTCO, Don DeVivo, currently have with private colleges and universities to operate shuttle services around their campuses. This bill could jeopardize those services by allowing DOT to contract with these higher educational institutions to provide such services, which would then be contracted to Connecticut Transit. This bill would effectively eliminate the private sector contracts

and replace them with state contracts that are more costly and less efficient.

While most existing bus commuter routes have room for expansion of ridership, there is a great concern from DOT with adding students to the already overcrowded Metro-North train system. There are not enough rail cars for the commuters who take the system to and from work every day. Adding students who are paying a much reduced rate to this already overcrowded system would create havoc and result in some very angry commuters.

The Transportation Committee and DOT, in conjunction with OPM, are already reviewing the expansion of the U-Pass system, especially as it relates to cost and ridership availability. While we support the careful expansion of existing commuter bus routes, we strongly oppose allowing DOT to contract with institutions of higher education to provide other bus transportation that is currently being run by private providers as would be allowed in this bill. I'll let Don speak to a couple of things.

DON DEVIVO: Sure. Senators, members of the Committee, I -- I submitted testimony on raised bill 151 to the Transportation Committee. One of my colleagues from Peter Pan has submitted testimony to you on 304. And let me tell you about a situation that's already happened with the U-Pass program.

When this was put in place at UConn, Peter Pan bus was providing half hour service from the UConn campus into Hartford with connecting service to both Boston and New York. The DOT put in a new route called 913, which actually ran right over the top of another bus carrier, Post Road, which provided service from the UConn campus into Hartford.

So, if you go to the Vernon commuter lot at 8:07 in the morning, there is a Post Road bus and a Connecticut Transit bus right behind each other, both are being paid for by the state of Connecticut, and -- and they put in this new route, we're not sure why. The end result of that was, Peter Pan, who was operating half hour service off-campus, has now seen about a half million-dollar annual reduction in their ridership.

Students are now forced to have a bus pass that's paid for out of their student activity fee and they're taking the Connecticut Transit bus from -- from campus into Hartford now. And what we fear is, you know, this bill would allow negotiation with the private universities, and what we think is going to happen with that negotiation is going to be a quid pro quo. We'll -- we'll give you, you know, a portion of our student activity fee, if you take over our on-campus and off-campus transportation services.

Those services at colleges like Yale, which operates about 30 buses, Sacred Heart, which we operate has -- has 10 buses. You know, we think that those services are going to be negotiated as part of this arrangement with DOT, and DOT is going to just take over those services in a situation that's subsidized by the taxpayers, because you can't -- you know, you can't operate the service for the amount of the fair that's going to be collected. I'd be happy to answer any questions.

JEAN CRONIN: So, we -- we would argue to reject the S.B. 304 and allow the Transportation Committee to move ahead with S.B. 151, which is the DOT bill, which has oversight by OPM to look at the costs and

the other things before services are expanded.
Thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you very much for your testimony. I do have a few questions.

DONE DEVIVO: Sure.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): But I'll put it up to Committee members first. Are there questions or comments from members of the Committee?
Representative Hall.

REP. HALL (59TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I basically was going to ask the fiscal impact of the bill. So, you're saying that in Transportation, they have a very similar bill and they're looking at the cost of this to the state of Connecticut?

DON DEVIVO: So, I'm afraid the fiscal impact or the fiscal note is going to be deceiving, because what you're going to see on the fiscal note is only the income side and not the future expansion of DOT routes. And -- and perhaps if you ask the right questions, you'll get a different fiscal note. But I think, you know, what you're going to see is if we contract with the university and they give us \$20 dollars for each student out of their Transportation fee, that's going to be X dollars of income for the state. However, what -- what's -- I don't think is going to be shown is, we believe, that there's going to be an expansion of routes by DOT onto the -- on and off campuses of the universities that are willing to play ball with their -- their negotiation.

And therefore, you're going to have additional routes that won't pay for themselves. So, in -- in the end, it's going to be a different fiscal impact,

than is shown on the fiscal note. That's -- that's what our concern is. And that's why we think that the OPM protection before they expand service in this program is going to be valuable.

REP. HALL (59TH): Okay. And just one other question, the cost of the two different buses. So, you said there is a Post Bus and then there's the state bus.

DON DEVIVO: So -- so, the bus they added to 913, which is the bus from Hartford to Storrs, they're -- DOT's number is about \$800,000 dollars.

REP. HALL (59TH): Okay.

DON DEVIVO: That they've -- that they've expended to put that bus in service.

REP. HALL (59TH): So, how much does it cost the students to -- or -- is the cost to the students the same riding the state bus versus the private contracted bus?

DON DEVIVO: No. I think Peter Pan was charging \$5 -- \$5 dollars.

REP. HALL (59TH): A fare?

DON DEVIVO: Yeah. A fare of \$5 dollars for them to go from Hartford to -- to -- I'm sorry, from Storrs to Hartford. The -- the bus pass that they're receiving is \$20 dollars but it allows the UConn student to ride any Connecticut Transit bus plus Connecticut Rail.

REP. HALL (59TH): Okay. And that's unlimited?

DON DEVIVO: Yeah. [cross talk] And we have no problem with that part of it. What we're concerned about is the future expansion of -- you know, we

don't want them going to -- for example, Sacred Heart, who's my customer, and saying, hey, if you put this in place, we'll take over all your on-campus and -- and, you know, we run a shuttle from Sacred Heart University for example to Metro-North, that were paid for by the university. In -- in the situation where DOT is going to put in subsidized routes, you know, to replace the private carriers -- it's going to be a cost to the state, and we can't obviously --

REP. HALL (59TH): I --

DON DEVIVO: -- compete with that.

REP. HALL (59TH): -- understand.

DON DEVIVO: Yeah.

REP. HALL (59TH): Okay. All right. Thank you. Thank you so much for you both being here.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you. While we're on that topic regarding DOT route expansion, is there any evidence that DOT has actually expressed an interest in expanding routes? I mean, I -- I speak as a legislator who is desperately trying to get DOT to simply invest in the routes in my community that have long been overlooked.

DON DEVIVO: Yeah.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): So, it would astound me and actually contradict testimony that I heard in the Transportation Committee from the DOT that they have any interest in expanding routes.

DON DEVIVO: I can only speak to what's happened. And -- and what's happened is the 913 route, which literally was put in place right over the top of

Post Road. And -- and it makes no sense why they wouldn't have Post Road go one more exit in -- onto the UConn campus for a service that already exists, to put in a completely new service, which essentially wiped out Peter Pan's service. So, I mean, I guess I can't speak for the -- you know, the mindset of DOT, but I can speak to what they've already done. And -- and they've already spent \$800,000 dollars to put a Connecticut Transit bus on a route that already exists.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): I want to see clarification on one other issue, and that's you mentioned the issue of commuters. Of course, I've got a lot of commuters in my district who go back and forth to Manhattan every day to their desks. It's my understanding that this bill provides latitude to DOT to limit the -- the timing and -- and services that are available to U-Pass students. And the Transportation Committee, in fact, while this service is currently available to students at public schools to use during peak hours, it would actually limit that ability for both private school students and public school students to off peak hours. So, would that not address the concern that you're raising here today?

JEAN CRONIN: Well, we think that the bill, and I was in -- in Transportation for the DOT testimony and the other testimony on that bill. I think, right now, the way the rail system is, it's open, I think, to UConn students, Eastern students.

DON DEVIVO: And state university students.

JEAN CRONIN: So, they are -- because of their location, they are generally not going to be utilizing Metro-North in large numbers. But if you

open it up to private universities down, you know, you have Sacred Heart, you have Yale, you have a number of universities down on the 95 corridor, those kids are most likely going to be using the Metro-North to go into the city or whatever.

Now, while U-Pass only covers Connecticut, so once you get to the -- the Stamford line or the finish line rather, you would have to pay the difference to go into New York, because we cannot subsidize you in New York. But I think the concern was that adding students down there in that corridor would have an impact on Metro-North. But to your question, I think having OPM involved, which is part of the DOT bill, S.B. 151, makes more sense because it would look at those -- those fiscal issues.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): In other words, your opposition to the bill would be lessened so long as it were limited to off-peak hours, because that would not conflict with seats for commuters?

JEAN CRONIN: So, our -- the commuter issue, I think there's capacity on the Connecticut commuter runs to add students. I think there has been. I think what we're looking for from the bus side is a coordinated effort with DOT to look at the ridership on the existing routes. There's room for students on those routes. Use those existing routes before you even think of running another route over the top. To your Senate -- question, Senator, that would free up dollars like the \$800,000 dollars that's being spent on a double route to be able to put a route down in -- in your section of the state, which obviously is very much needed. So, we're asking for a coordinated approach, use the existing providers,

use the existing routes, and see where it makes the most sense to do expansion.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): In the scenario that you mentioned, where students were choosing the Connecticut Transit bus route as opposed to the Peter Pan bus route, why do you think students were making that choice?

DON DEVIVO: It's a dollar factor. Because they're -- they're forced. They don't have a choice whether or not to buy the bus pass. In other words, the -- the money is taken out of their student activity fee, they're given a bus pass. So, once that decision has been made for them, they essentially got a free ride now from Hartford or from Storrs to Hartford. And what's happening is, what -- what used to happen before, is the students would get on the bus, they would stay on that same bus for example all the way to New York City.

So, what's happening now, is they're riding the Connecticut Transit bus into Hartford and then picking up the -- the Peter Pan in Hartford, basically walking across the street with their bags and have to get on another bus because the fair is lower, they're -- they're going for the lower fair, and then they're getting on the bus for the rest of the trip from Hartford on. So, it's -- it's a monetary decision.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): In my conversations with the Transportation Commissioner, he's been thrilled about this program because it expands ridership and fills an empty seat, which of course, costs the DOT absolutely nothing.

DON DEVIVO: Well, it fills an empty seat on a bus that didn't exist. I mean, those -- those [cross talk].

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): With all due respect, I don't believe that -- that the DOT is in engaged in expansion of routes. I think that the DOT is simply -- has engaged in these contract -- entered into these contracts to -- to fill empty seats on routes that -- that already exist.

DON DEVIVO: No, the 913 is a brand new route. It didn't exist prior to the U-Pass program.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Well, my final question is, you mentioned that state transportation options are more costly and less efficient. It seems to me, in the example you mentioned, that the students are choosing it because it's less costly. And it seems also less costly to the taxpayer to have those -- those -- those routes of public transportation used, to have those empty seats filled. So, what evidence is there that it's less costly -- that it's more costly [cross talk] and less efficient.

DON DEVIVO: Only because -- well, the -- the Post Road service is about \$500,000 dollars versus the \$800,000 that Connecticut Transit is paying. It's less costly to the student, because they're forced to already have made the purchase of the bus pass. If it wasn't for that, it may not be less costly. If I'm only going to New York, you know, two or three times in my -- in my time at UConn, I'm only going to pay \$5 dollars per ride, where I'm paying \$20 dollars a month for the -- for the bus pass.

JEAN CRONIN: And another thing, Senator, the -- the -- the same route for a Connecticut Transit bus

versus a private provider being subsidized by DOT is quite different. And I think that's what you're getting, I think it's like \$500,000 dollars, as you said for a private provider versus \$800,000 dollars for Connecticut Transit. Connecticut Transit is, I guess, I'd would call it a quasi-public. Their drivers -- there's a heavy contract situation there with pay and benefits and other things that is very different than the private sector. So, those costs are much higher when Connecticut Transit runs it versus when a private provider runs it.

DON DEVIVO: And the end result now is Peter Pan is reducing service. So, the students now have fewer options because, you know, Peter Pan can't continue to operate without riders. So, they're -- they're not going to have that direct connection off campus anymore. They're going to have to take the -- the -- the Connecticut Transit route into Hartford because Peter Pan won't be on campus anymore.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Well --

JEAN CRONIN: So, I think we're -- we're supportive of the concept. We love the idea to have students taking mass transit and public transit. We think that's a great idea. We just would like the Department of Transportation to look closely at the existing routes that are out there and work within those routes and add routes where necessary rather than put a route over the top of one that's already operating, because it's not cost effective.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Well, thanks for being here. I broke my own promise of letting my colleagues go first. But I'll just wrap up my section by saying that I would be shocked to see the DOT expand routes when -- for reasons that go beyond

this room. They are cash strapped and we, as legislators, are just so desperate for them to invest in existing routes, whether it's rail or bus that have long been overlooked. So, perhaps we're on the same page of this, if the DOT really isn't going to expand routes. Senator Flexer. I know you had a question or two.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon.

JEAN CRONIN: Good afternoon.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): I just wanted to dig a little bit deeper, like Senator Haskell just was, with regard to your testimony where it talks about the support that you have for the careful expansion of existing commuter bus routes. Can you expand on that comment a little bit more? Where -- what kind of expansion do you support?

JEAN CRONIN: So, I think we were talking about, you know, the experience so far has been basically UConn, because that was the first university that was placed on the system of U-Pass. And as Don was explaining how there was already a route operating to UConn. They could have easily put more students on that route. And instead, the Department chose to run a second route, literally leaving minutes behind the first bus to -- to operate that same route. So -- so, that was a duplicity that didn't need to be done.

But in this case, if you were to sign up university students down in the Fairfield County area, down in the New Haven area, there are transit buses that run those routes to different places. Are they going to places where students need to be? I don't know.

That's something that maybe the Department could take a look at and see where the bus routes would need to be going and then put a new route out, if -- if it's not going to places where a vast majority of people want to be going. So, that's what we mean by the careful expansion. Look at the needs of the commuters, where they're going. I -- I think somebody talked about, in their written testimony, about students needing to go internships or -- or going to -- maybe they're going to different universities to take other courses or whatnot. But those types of activities.

DON DEVIVO: And I'll give you an example, as well. I mean, you know, I think people automatically think because we're bus operators we're opposed to train, for example. The Connecticut Rail situation between New Haven and -- and Springfield, I think has been a wonderful expansion. And I'd like to see them finish what they started. It's still not done from New Haven to Springfield. You know, we think any place you can mask people, is a good thing. Because that allows us options, as private operators, to -- to -- to connect to that.

What we're -- what we're concerned about is, you know, where we are already connecting to Metro-North and Connecticut Rail that, you know, DOT sees that as an opportunity to take over basically the routes we're already operating. But you know, we talk about careful expansion of -- of commuter options. I mean, the option that's been put in place with CT Rails has been great. You can get on a -- on a train in my town, Berlin, and be in New Haven in 24 minutes. I mean, it's -- it's -- it's great. And so, I think there are places where there -- there can be expansion, and there can be additional

service. But it's got to be -- we want the private operator to be considered in that, as opposed to DOT negotiating directly with colleges and -- and having no oversight to do that.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Okay. And I guess that's -- that's what I'm trying to -- to understand and, you know, just for a point of information, I was once a college student who took a bus to an internship here at this building from Danielson to Hartford. And it was a long ride every day.

DON DEVIVO: Uh-huh. Danielson to Hartford is a long ride.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): And it was \$11 dollars each way and that was 20 years ago. And -- and I grew up in a family where we didn't have a car. So, there was a bus, that was the only way we could get someplace. And just this morning, I was telling someone how my preferred method of transit to certain places is still the bus.

DON DEVIVO: We love that.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): [laughter] But --

JEAN CRONIN: We have Wi-Fi now. [Laughter]

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): That was -- that was my main point [laughter], the Wi-Fi is consistent unlike on the train. But I am just trying to understand the conversation here. I also represent more college students than any other member of the General Assembly, including all the students in Storrs and at Eastern Connecticut State University. And the Storrs students have told me how much they have appreciated the expansion of the 913 bus and how

that's made getting to an internship here, for example, much easier for them.

But I'm just trying to understand, you know, how, and I know this isn't the Transportation Committee, but I also know that in other parts of northeastern Connecticut, private bus service has been very much curtailed. And I represent a lot of people, like the family that I grew up in, they don't have a car. And you can no longer get from Danielson into Hartford on a bus. You can -- you can barely get from Willimantic to Hartford on a bus. So, when I see here that you are talking about the expansion of existing commuter bus routes, that's where we need it. That's where we're desperate for it. Those -- those communities, people -- having a car is incredibly expensive and -- and in places like -- like Willimantic and Danielson, I can't resist the opportunity to emphasize to you that, you know, sizeable portions of our residents don't have access to cars and that has been curtailed. And so, if you want a place to expand, that's it.

DON DEVIVO: So, let's be clear. We're not opposed to the expansion. We're not opposed to the service. What I am opposed to is you had Post Road that was -- actually they're a competitor of mine but that's irrelevant. They were running from Hartford to Vernon. To have them expand their current route to Storrs would have been a minimal dollar. But that's not what DOT did. DOT put a -- a completely separate route in and they're paying for the Post Road bus now. They put a completely separate route in from Storrs into Hartford.

If you go to the -- to the Vernon commuter lot, at, as I said, 8:07 in the morning, there's two buses

that are parked right behind each other and they're both doing the same route. So, take that money and use it in your district. Use it for something that's -- that's productive. You know, I think the goal is, let's expand Connecticut Transit, not let's think about how to best utilize the money and utilize the systems that are in place already. You had a Post Road service that was in place. Expand that route to UConn. Why put a new service in? And -- and that's what we're afraid is going to happen when there's no oversight of DOT, because they want to expand their own network as opposed to utilizing what's in place already.

JEAN CRONIN: So, Senator Flexer, that's -- that's a great point. And we have been told by DOT Bureau of Mass Transportation that they are looking at revising bus routes around the state. They're -- they're old. I mean, they've been out there a long time. People have changed. They move to different places, they're going to different places. So, they're looking at revising those routes and if it done, it's going to -- there's a limited amount of money. So, they should be using it in the best areas appropriate, not running two buses to the same place, but looking to expand service where it's really needed.

So, I would encourage you to talk to DOT about those bus routes expansions and certainly make your case for -- for -- eastern -- or eastern Connecticut.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Can I just ask, what -- who are the members of the Connecticut Bus Association?

DON DEVIVO: There's --

JEAN CRONIN: They're a charter bus company. So, it's Peter Pan, DATCO, New Britain Transportation.

DON DEVIVO: Land/Jet.

JEAN CRONIN: Land/Jet, ECS.

DON DEVIVO: New Britain Transportation.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): But not Greyhound?

JEAN CRONIN: No. Those are what we call line runs. They're -- well, Peter is -- yeah.

DON DEVIVO: Greyhound -- Greyhound is more of a -- a national carrier. These are all Connecticut based operators.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Okay. So, all of your members are Connecticut based companies who currently, many of them have contracts right now with higher education institutions?

DON DEVIVO: That's correct.

JEAN CRONIN: That's correct.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): And this would put that at risk?

DON DEVIVO: Correct.

JEAN CRONIN: It could. It could, the way it's drafted. Many of our running shuttle services on the university campuses for private --

DON DEVIVO: And from the campus to destinations. For example, we operate one from the University of Hartford to downtown west Hartford and that's for university students.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): But they're still -- the -- the example that you've given a few times about the

913 bus and the Post Road service. Post Road is continuing to provide that service, so there must be some sort of demand for it?

DON DEVIVO: Well, they're -- the odd this is DOT is subsidizing the Post Road route and the Connecticut Transit route.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): And why are they doing that?

DON DEVIVO: I don't know. I don't know.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Is there demand? That's what I would think. There must be demand for both of those lines of service.

DON DEVIVO: I --

JEAN CRONIN: I think -- I think there are contracts in place.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Okay. So, okay. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank -- thank you, Senator Flexer. Are there additional questions or comments from Committee members? Yes, Representative Mushinsky.

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Are your bus companies subsidized by the DOT?

DON DEVIVO: For some routes.

JEAN CRONIN: Yes.

DON DEVIVO: The Peter Pan route, that we talked about, is not subsidized by DOT. That was operated strictly from the Fairbox [phonetic]. The -- the Peter -- the Post Road situation from Vernon to Hartford, that is subsidized by DOT. So, it's a mix. We're not subsidized currently for any

university operations. Those are paid for by the colleges.

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): Okay.

DON DEVIVO: So, yes. The answer to your question, yes and no, depending on the service.

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): Okay. Do you -- you gave an example, the University of Hartford to West Hartford?

DON DEVIVO: Correct.

JEAN CRONIN: Uh-huh.

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): Is that subsidized by the DOT?

DON DEVIVO: It is not, not currently.

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): Okay. All right. Thank you.

DON DEVIVO: It's paid for by the university.

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): Okay. Thank you.

DON DEVIVO: Yeah.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you, Representative Mushinsky. Representative Arora.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, Senator. Thank you again for -- for testifying.

DON DEVIVO: Yeah.

REP. ARORA (151ST): I have a couple of questions.

DON DEVIVO: Sure.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Would you think -- would you say that by competing directly with private operators, the DOT is kind of driving private operators out of business or putting the business at risk?

DON DEVIVO: That's -- that's my opinion. But I don't have any facts to back that up. But yes, that's my opinion.

REP. ARORA (151ST): It's hurting their business?

DON DEVIVO: It is.

JEAN CRONIN: Yeah.

REP. ARORA (151ST): So, would you say that, over a period of time, less amount of private capital would be coming to transportation as a result of these policies? Folks who were thinking about putting up more bus services would say, oh, you never know when this thing is going to -- these policies are going to change. We're not going to invest anymore. Do you think -- would it be a good statement for me to say that this is a policy which is -- which is detracting private capital from our --

Don DEVIVO: Sure.

REP. ARORA (151ST): -- transportation?

DON DEVIVO: You see that in the Peter Pan example. They -- they had half hour service from Storrs campus into Hartford connecting to Boston and New York. They've curtailed that service, which is going to mean less, you know, Connecticut jobs, less Connecticut investment in -- in equipment, because if you don't have the routes, you're not going to invest in the equipment. So, yeah, that's -- the Peter Pan is a -- and -- and Peter Pan has submitted

testimony to this Committee. That's a perfect example of, you know, where you see that service being curtailed and the investment being curtailed.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Yeah. So, do you think the cost of this private services, in fact, or lawfully loaded cost is cheaper than the one which is being offered by the government or by the DOT?

DON DEVIVO: Well, I guess you have to define cheaper. Is the overall cost of the service cheaper? No, because it's being subsidized by the taxpayers. Is it --

REP. ARORA (151ST): No. No. The one by the private sector. The private sector has lesser costs --

DON DEVIVO: We --

REP. ARORA (151ST): -- than the government?

DON DEVIVO: The private -- the private sectors hourly rates, even the ones we charge DOT, are lower than Connecticut Transit's rates.

REP. ARORA (151ST): So, would you say that what's happening is that the -- we are making policy where we are choosing higher cost services offered by government over lower cost services which may be offered by the private sector?

DON DEVIVO: I think that's very accurate. Yes.

REP. ARORA (151ST): So, really we are -- we are hurting our residents and our community by choosing the high price options being paid by the taxpayer, and at the same time, hurting private enterprises and businesses which are hiring a lot of people and serving the people of this state?

DON DEVIVO: Yes, sir.

REP. ARORA (151ST): That looks like a pretty bad policy to me.

DON DEVIVO: That's -- that's our opinion. Yeah.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Let me ask you a couple other questions. Do you think that you -- in private sector, you're embracing new technologies, like offered by ride sharing and -- and -- and other -- and other new technologies which are coming around?

DON DEVIVO: Sure. We do everything we can to compete. All our buses have Wi-Fi. All our buses have GPS. All our buses have tracking systems that -- that, you know, the riders can tell where the bus is. So, yeah, I mean we're certainly -- technology helps us further our business.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Now, can you measure the number of people or monitor or -- or -- the usage system in a sense that some of these routes, when I see these are very expensive routes run by some of the CDOT, Connecticut DOT, and if you look at how many people are on it, you know, it's like nobody. The other day, we were playing a game with my son. I said, let's just spot every bus and see how -- which is more than half full. Where -- where we ended up was not counting it was half full, we were counting if it was -- had anybody on it. So, is there some analysis you will do versus the CDOT? Should we make the CDOT present for every single bus route what is the usage and curtail once or change or even offer to private sector those which are -- which are not being -- which routes which are being used very poorly?

DON DEVIVO: Yeah. And in defense of DOT, there are some reasons for having what I would call under, you know, underutilized buses. You don't want to have, obviously, a different size bus for the peak than you do for the off peak. And you also have communities or areas of communities that you want to serve for the public interest for, you know, the Senator's comment, they may not have cars. You know, inner city may have service where, you know, it may not be the -- the -- the most highly used, but you're providing that for the people that can't get to work.

So, you know, in DOT's defense, there are reasons for having -- for having buses that may not have as many passengers on them as you would like. However, we do have all the data. We've got ride -- we've got ride or passenger counters on all of our buses. We can tell you how many people are on that bus at any time. So, and -- and that's all electronically, you know [cross talk]. So -- so, we've got the data to do that analysis.

And I think, then you've got to look at the individual route and say, okay, why is this in place? Is it a low income community? Is it a place where people don't have cars? Is it an off peak route where I'm utilizing that bus somewhere more effectively in a -- in a high demand situation, so I don't want to have two vehicles? So, there -- there are reasons. But I think you need to do the analysis.

REP. ARORA (151ST): My -- my last question, you just mentioned your buses have Wi-Fi and all the technology?

DON DEVIVO: Correct.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Does the -- do the DOT buses also have similar level of technology and Wi-Fi?

DON DEVIVO: I don't know.

JEAN CRONIN: I think the commuter ones do, but not the one -- I don't know about the ones --

DON DEVIVO: I can't speak for that.

JEAN CRONIN: -- running around the city.

DON DEVIVO: I don't know.

JEAN CRONIN: But --

REP. ARORA (151ST): So, would you say that some of your -- many of your buses are actually much better than --

DON DEVIVO: I think DOT and again, I don't want to be, you know just bashing DOT. I think they do the best they can to have the best technology and to have, you know, have the amenities for the passengers. I -- I -- I can't knock them for that.

REP. ARORA (151ST): In -- in your -- in your assessment, in your private personal assessment, if we were to say, let's just take all the buses from DOT and -- and give them to private operators with the -- and keeping the same, you know, so everybody pays the same --

DON DEVIVO: Sure.

REP. ARORA (151ST): -- in terms of the consumer, do you think the service level would improve?

DON DEVIVO: In certain places. I mean, I think on the commuter services, the private operators can do it better than DOT. For certain transit operations, you know, they -- they have an expertise and they --

and they have, you know, they do inner city transportation fairly well.

So, I think the best thing is -- is not the extreme. It's not one or the other. I think it's a marriage of the two. And -- and finding out where we do things better and we have more efficiencies. You know, I can utilize a bus on a commuter run from -- from seven or six a.m. to nine a.m., and then go pick up a school group with it at nine a.m. and -- and double utilize that bus. The school group is done at two and I put it on the commuter run in the afternoon.

You know, I've got some efficiencies I can do with certain types of runs. You know, they're better at doing, you know, inner city transportation probably than we are, because that's what they do. So, I think the best thing is a marriage of the two and having us work --

REP. ARORA (151ST): Thank you.

DON DEVIVO: -- together.

REP. ARORA (151ST): Thank you. Listen, you know, we are really short of -- of infrastructure dollars and -- and -- and so we need all private dollars in.

DON DEVIVO: Uh-huh.

REP. ARORA (151ST): So, that's why I really have been asking these hard questions, because I think it's very important for us to attract more capital from private sector, so that we --

DON DEVIVO: Absolutely.

REP. ARORA (151ST): -- so -- so, rather than, you know, push it away. And that's an important aspect

so that's the reason. Thank you so much for --
for -- for your time and your answers. Thank you,
Mr. Chairman. I really appreciate the time you gave
me.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you Representative --

DON DEVIVO: Thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): -- Arora. Are there
additional questions or comments from Committee
members? Seeing none, thank you for being here
today.

JEAN CRONIN: Thank you so much --

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Representative Borer.

JEAN CRONIN: -- for your time.

DON DEVIVO: Thank you very much.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Yes, thank you.
Representative, thank you for your patience. I
apologize for the delay.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you for fitting me back
in. I was currently chairing Veterans. So, thank
you for having me, Senator Haskell, Senator Flexer,
Representative Hall, all the members of the
Committee. I want to thank you for raising bill
303, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE
TASK FORCE FOR MENTAL HEALTH AT OUR HIGHER
EDUCATIONS, of which I'm here to speak in support
of. And I want to thank the Task Force for all
their time and their due diligence in the work in
this very important area. We've spent a lot of time
talking about mental health in our building and
working on augmenting services and increasing

access. And certainly, our students are a vulnerable population that we need to address.

In particular, I just want to turn your attention to Section 6 of bill 303, Section 1, and it talks about the next steps of the Task Force. And there's a couple of areas that I would ask that you consider tweaking. And one of the first is that the Task Force is going to look at the manner in which institutions inform students of mental health programs. I would ask that we look at the timing of when our higher institutions let students know about the mental health programs. And the reason I say that, is because we give a lot of information at orientation time. But our students, when they're incoming freshmen, in particular, are overwhelmed. And I think there needs to be some sort of periodic follow-up to that.

And I also think the manner in which we reach out to the students can be modernized. I think that perhaps a block that goes across their cell phone, maybe a month into the program, a month into their semester, just saying, how you doing? Don't forget, we have mental health services that are available to you. I think we have to really start meeting the students where they're at, which is on their phone and on their computer. That's where they're getting their information and that's what they're paying attention to. You can give them all the pamphlets you want, but that's what -- that's what's going to get their attention.

The other section, the manner in which the students receive the mental health counseling, I would really like us to take a second look at the telehealth component of mental health counseling for our

students. Again, I think we need to meet them where they're at. If they have somebody that they reach out to, that can just come on and say, it's going to be okay, we're going to get you an appointment, maybe establish a relationship with them, I think we need to look at that as well.

One of the other -- I'm trying to read my own notes here, one of the items that was not mentioned in the bill for next steps for the study is, I'd like us to look at how quickly a student gets an appointment. I think we need to measure that as part of the Task Force.

When a student calls, when is their appointment? Is it three days? Is it three weeks? Is it -- is there a protocol within 24 hours? I don't know that we have that information. I think we need to gather that information so that we can increase -- we could step up the time a student receives assistance.

I also think we need to look at tracking for the Task Force. And I'd like to see more members from the students, student life, in particular, on the Task Force. If we want to know, when to get them mental health counseling, how to get the mental health counseling, we need to ask the students what's best. And I think residential life members would be very great at doing that.

I think -- I think that's it. I have a student who's a freshman and I also have the opportunity, I teach freshmen at another university. I'm an adjunct professor, and I certainly know firsthand some of these mental health challenges that our students are facing. And I think they just need to know that help is available, and we need to be very

proactive in letting them know that that help is available.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Well, thank you very much, Representative. I appreciate the perspective you bring, both of the -- the hat that you wear in this building, and -- and your other hat, as well. I, especially, appreciate your point concerning telehealth services. And we know that, for students who do leave to seek mental health services off campus, can be very difficult to re-assimilate and re-integrate into their existing social scene, their -- their support structure, once they return to campus. So, I think that's a really valuable point. And I will never oppose putting more students on a Task Force. So, are there any [laughter] other questions or comments from Committee members? Yes, Representative Betts.

REP. BETTS (78TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for that testimony. As you know, on public health, one of the things we found out about mental illness, is we have a very severe shortage of psychologists and psychiatrists. And whereas, I think it's important to give that information on where to go, I also think it's equally important not to build up false expectations in terms of just because you call or make a request, that there's going to be an immediate response, because it is going to be dependent upon who's available and -- and when, etcetera.

The telehealth is -- is a very useful way, I think, for trying to address that shortage. But what I was going to ask you is how do we know that colleges are not periodically updating students, even faculty about the availability of health services, including

mental health? Because I don't think they do just once and that's it.

REP. BORER (115TH): Yeah. That's a good question. And I would tell you that I recently had a meeting with, let me back up for a second. After learning about the death of the student at Southern, and that was related to substance, and one death is tragically terrible, and then we had a second one at Eastern. And then, we also had the suicide. And they were all within a couple of months.

So, I asked for a meeting of some of the mental health leaders, and I think some are here [laughter], and we got together. And I wanted to better understand what we're doing. And we have improved significantly in the area around mental health at our universities, but there's also opportunity to do more. And in those conversations, we talked about increasing the outreach and we also talked about resources and limited resources to be able to do that. But there's a lot of pilot programs that are being discussed. I just would like to see us, you know, pick up the pace.

REP. BETTS (78TH): Thank you. Do you happen to know or does anybody happen to know that these people, who have either committed suicide or had serious setbacks with their substance abuse, etcetera, do we have any data that shows that they have made an effort to reach out for help, or that if help had been provided, that we know that they would seek it?

REP. BORER (115TH): I think that's a -- a balance of privacy and information that we need to know to better improve our services. And I think the universities are better equipped to answer that.

REP. BETTS (78TH): Okay. Thank you very much.
Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): One last thing, if I may, on the tracking part of the bill. It talks about looking at substance and looking at, you know, is it anxiety or -- I'd like to see us drill down on that a little more, as well. If it's anxiety, what are the drivers of that? Is it financial? Is it peer pressure? What's causing the anxiety? If it's substance, what are those substances? I think we need to really get a lot more information so we can be more helpful for the students.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): I couldn't agree more.
Thank you so much, Representative.

REP. BORER (115TH): Okay.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): And I hope you'll continue to be involved in this bill as it works its way through the --

REP. BORER (115TH): Yes, I will.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): -- legislative process.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you. Next is Merrie Avallone. Hi. Thank you for being here.

MERRIE AVALLONE: Hi. Thank you for letting me sit here and speak my thoughts. I am sitting here on behalf of the S.B. 307, and I know Senator Champagne had already spoke. But I'm sitting here. I recently just learned about this bill. So, I drafted some thoughts about my current child who is currently in the foster care system from the state

of Massachusetts, living here in the state -- in Connecticut. So, my name is Merrie Avallone.

I am 51, recently married for the first time and in the final stages of adoption of our nine-year-old from Massachusetts. He's been in the DCF system since birth. We currently have ICPC with Massachusetts and our child is receiving Connecticut HUSKY, and is attending public schools; for all intents and purposes, our child is recognized as a Connecticut resident. And if you don't know what ICPC is, ICPC is when a -- a child goes from one state to another state from the foster care system and is identified in the current state, which would be here, Connecticut, they're recognized and receive services in the pre-adoptive stage before they are adopted. So, in all intents and purposes, our child receives all the same rights any other child would receive if they were a resident of the state.

Once the adoption goes through, our child will not qualify for free higher education tuition. If our child remained in Massachusetts's DCF system and/or was adopted in Massachusetts, our child would receive those benefits. Once a child moves from Massachusetts and is adopted in Connecticut, their tuition waiver is stripped.

Why would the state of Connecticut Administration create a financial burden by denying a child to a free higher education? A child from the foster care system already has been abandoned by their biological family and has been by no fault of their own, traumatized and is counting on the system to do them right.

I sit here before you as an advocate. I'm an advocate for all children. Today, I'm advocating

for my child and my child's future and our future. Our little kiddo is a bright eyed. He's bright eyed and looking forward, can you believe it? After nine years of being neglected, abandoned, abused, malnourished, emotionally challenged, and deprived, he wants a better life. He came to us medically challenged, biochemically altered, and being behind academically. We advocate, and we will continue to advocate. Why? Because in September, 2019 and February -- between September, 2019 and February, 2020, our child has excelled academically. He now reads well above his grade level and is on grade level in math. Medically, he's making huge improvements because he's supported and is freely given the tools for success. We emotionally support him and he is receiving psychiatric care and services paid by Connecticut in school and by individual therapists through HUSKY. This is what happens when an advocate in the state stands in.

This Committee has the power to advocate and provide the free tools to our Connecticut children and to our particular child. You can make a difference by choosing to advocate for free higher education for children coming from Massachusetts DCF or any DCF.

If our child stayed in Massachusetts, he would have the benefits of a free higher education from all 29 state community colleges and universities, but would he be able to seize these opportunities. What I have read, most children in the foster care system do not go to college, yet it's an opportunity freely given to them in Massachusetts. Here in Connecticut it's free, too, but not for all of our -- but not for our child because of the lack of reciprocity. Our child has a bright, supported, loving future. He is our future. He is your future, too. He has

been proficiently provided -- sorry, he has proficiently proven that achieving a higher education creates -- it has been proficiently proven that achieving a higher education creates a more independent, intelligent individual, who then is better able to participate in our worldly community, not just for our family, but for yours, too. We, as a society, invest in numerous things; why not invest in our children for a better tomorrow, as well as a better today.

I urge you, as a Committee, to look into this matter and support this bill. We need to ensure that we are including free funding to support Connecticut adoptive children for all postsecondary educational programs. Thank you for listening. I appreciate it. I welcome --

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Well --

MERRIE AVALONE: -- any questions.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Well, thank you very much for being here. Thank you for your testimony. And you've got a -- a wonderful champion on this issue in Senator Champagne. So --

MERRIE AVALONE: Terrific.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): We do appreciate your -- your perspective. Yes, Representative Mushinsky.

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): Thank you. Thank you for adopting the child. That was a wonderful thing to do. Did you ask DCF if they would do a reciprocal agreement? In other words, do we have to make 'em with this bill, or did they say no to you when you asked?

MERRIE AVALLONE: Well, what's really interesting is that it's an absolute flat out no. I've asked the courts. I've asked the lawyers. I've lost -- I've asked everybody who's on this case. When a child crosses the state line from the state of Massachusetts to Connecticut, they lose that -- they lose their right, their Massachusetts higher education. When they come to Connecticut and are accepted as a Connecticut resident in our home and part of our family, even though they have Connecticut HUSKY and they go to the Connecticut public schools, my child will not get that free higher education waiver.

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): Okay. So, even though we have reciprocal agreement with Massachusetts for our kids going there, DCF won't do it for reverse?

MERRIE AVALLONE: No. I'm not saying that there is reciprocity from Connecticut to Massachusetts. What I'm saying is, when a child crosses into the state of Connecticut, their right from whatever state, if their state does give them free higher education, Connecticut does not acknowledge that and will then not allow them to have free higher education. If a child -- if I adopted a child from the state of Connecticut, from DCF, my child would have free higher education.

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): No, I understand that --

MERRIE AVALLONE: But not coming from Massachusetts, that right is stripped --

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): Okay.

MERRIE AVALLONE: -- as soon as they cross the border.

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): I'm just trying to find out if we need to pass a bill, or if somebody has asked DCF if they would honor -- if they would enter into a [laughter] --

MERRIE AVALONE: That -- that --

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): -- reciprocity --

MERRIE AVALONE: -- reciprocity --

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): -- agreement?

MERRIE AVALONE: -- has been asked numerous times. I'm not the only family who's crossing state lines to then bring a child in. So, that reciprocity has been asked --

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): And they say --

MERRIE AVALONE: -- numerous times.

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): -- no?

MERRIE AVALONE: Flat out no.

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): Okay. I guess we need the bill, then.

MERRIE AVALONE: Yes. That's why I'm sitting before you to bring this awareness that children coming from any other states, coming in that reciprocity, if that state even has a free tuition, not all states do have free tuitions; Massachusetts does. Connecticut does, but they do not that aware -- that -- that privilege does not cross state -- state lines.

REP. MUSHINSKY (85TH): Okay. All right. Thank you.

MERRIE AVALONE: Thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you, Representative. Representative Betts.

REP. BETTS (78TH): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. But I want to pursue what Representative Mushinsky was doing. We have a new Commissioner now at DCF. Have you had any communication with her or her staff about this issue?

MERRIE AVALLONE: I have not had any personal contact with the -- that part of the administration. No. I -- all I can -- all the testimony and all the information that I received is from DCF.

REP. BETTS (78TH): Okay.

MERRIE AVALLONE: So, the ICPC is what's in control of that. If ICPC and the administration would like to change that -- those rules and include the reciprocity, not only are they giving reciprocity for health insurance and allowing the child to go to school, K through 12, but they're not continuing that reciprocity, obviously, through -- through college. So, that's really the issue at hand. If -- if -- if they're being recognized, you know as, we as a family are paying state taxes, why is our child being -- why is our child being penalized just because they came from the state of Massachusetts?

REP. BETTS (78TH): Right.

MERRIE AVALLONE: It seems absurd.

REP. BETTS (78TH): Would -- would you be open, because I'm still not clear in my own mind, whether we need a law or whether it could be done administratively here, but would you be open and

receptive if I set up a meeting with you and the Commissioner to kind of make her aware what's going on and see if, in fact, it could be accomplished without a law?

MERRIE AVALONE: I -- I appreciate those efforts. I certainly think that conversation needs to have -- to happen. But I'm not just speaking on behalf of my child. I'd like to see --

REP. BETTS (78TH): Oh, I understand.

MERRIE AVALONE: -- this, you know, like, if it could happen for all of -- you know, I have other -- my other friends are sitting here who are in the same boat we are, that we adopted, you know, a child from the state of Massachusetts and, yet, they're not given the same rights. So, I appreciate what you're saying. If a conversation could be had and we can move this forward, absolutely. But the -- really the big issue at hand is -- is that, regardless of what state the child comes from, from DCF, whether you're looking from Utah, Massachusetts, or whatever it is, we in the state of Connecticut, when a child comes from the state -- from DCF, they're automatically given that waiver -- tuition waiver.

So, I hear what you're saying. I think that the conversation needs to be open to all DCF children that are being adopted in this state regardless of where they're coming from and whether that particular state that they're coming from even has it on the plate to begin with. So, any child coming to -- to the state of Connecticut being adopted, should have the same privileges of any other child in the state of -- of -- in -- in Connecticut state from DCF.

REP. BETTS (78TH): No, I understand that.

MERRIE AVALONE: Okay.

REP. BETTS (78TH): I -- I'm --

MERRIE AVALONE: I just wanted --

REP. BETTS (78TH): -- not trying --

MERRIE AVALONE: -- to make myself clear that it's not just, you know, one --

REP. BETTS (78TH): I'm not trying to single out. I'm trying to --

MERRIE AVALONE: No. No. I realize that. Yeah.

REP. BETTS (78TH): I'm trying to get an understanding, because she is quite a good listener. And I'm not saying you're wrong, you may very well be right, and we made need to pass a bill. I'm just saying, as this process moves forward, it might be useful to have a discussion, and then find out what her response is to this situation which she may or may not be aware of, I'm not sure. But I -- I consider her to be a -- a good listener and she'll be very straight forward.

MERRIE AVALONE: I -- I --

REP. BETTS (78TH): You know, if they're --

MERRIE AVALONE: -- would be happy to --

REP. BETTS (78TH): -- not going to do it, they're not going to do it.

MERRIE AVALONE: I would be happy to have that conversation, and I think, you know, Senator Champagne would certainly be happy to sit in on --

on part of that, as he's spearheading this -- this, as well.

REP. BETTS (78TH): If you --

MERRIE AVALONE: I think that there needs to be a larger conversation about this.

REP. BETTS (78TH): Okay. If you could leave me or leave with the Clerk, your contact information, then I'll call you after this?

MERRIE AVALONE: Thank you.

REP. BETTS (78TH): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you, Representative Betts. Additional questions or comments from Committee members? Seeing none, thank you so much for being here.

MERRIE AVALONE: Thank you for listening.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Next is Joe DiChristina from Trinity.

JOE DICHRISTINA: Thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): There you go.

JOE DICHRISTINA: Yeah. Thank you. I appreciate listening to all of you today and the care and concern you've shown towards young people here in the state of Connecticut, both very young people and obviously college age population. My name is Joe DiChristina. I'm the Vice-President for Student Affairs at Trinity College, the Dean of Students there, then I was the Co-Chair on the Task Force to Study Policies and Procedures Adopted by

Institutions of Higher Education Regarding the Prevention and Treatment of Mental Illness.

So, I'm here to speak on S.B. 303. What are college and university presidents saying about mental health issues. Across the country every president of college universities are saying that the wellbeing and safety of their students is a primary concern. It is their top concern on college campuses.

What are college university counseling center directors saying? They document a significant increase in demand for mental health services. They have to manage a significant case load. Three of my colleagues are here today who were on the Task Force with me and can address that issue.

What do students report? When you look at all the surveys, surveys reporting some -- some students 85% of the students surveyed said, they felt overwhelmed by what they had to do, 53% report things are hopeless.

Factors that affect their academic work include, stress, 34% of the students, this is over 200,000 students responding to these surveys, anxiety-27% and depression-18%. I can go on and on about the -- the data that supports this. I contend that we're a rare moment here in the state of Connecticut for sure, and that there is widespread consensus and mutual agreement by all in higher education, all the constituents, all the professionals, the presidents, the administrators, the health providers, the faculty, staff, and students. And to put a smile on your face, that doesn't happen often on college campuses when all those constituents come together and agree on something.

There is a crisis on our campuses. And what our Task Force worked to do was to try to think through how do we bring unity to campuses? How do we even prove our services and implement what we refer to communities of care?

There is great momentum here to make change; right? And I see this as an investment in the future of all the students and, clearly an investment for our higher education communities. So, when you look at our Task Force recommendations, I'm going to boil it down to three things that we really were talking about. How do we create communities of support on college campuses? How do we mobilize institutions to share best practices, to learn from each other in efforts to reduce stress and improve student wellness, to foster belonging on college campus?

You heard it from the one student here earlier today. His own sense of belonging, right, and a sense of pride being on a college campus. And that, as the Dean from UConn talked about, how do we build out? How do we build a culture shift?

And this is the most important piece that I'd like to share and really emphasize today. And that is, we need to develop and invest, and I'd like to answer questions about that on the word invest in an assessment method for college universities to determine how best to approach a comprehensive plan that promotes the emotional wellbeing of students, with the goal to reduce suicide and substance abuse. It must be seen as a campus wide responsibility that emphasizes a culture of care and compassion. You heard that from my colleagues today. It does not mean that every time a student walks into an office, that they need to get a prescription medicine. It

is, how do we work together with these multi-constituent communities on our campus to create that -- that place where there is this emphasis on a culture of care and compassion; right? And we need to invest to help make that happen.

And I'd would like to talk about that word invest, perhaps through the questions.

The last thing that I will share with you very specifically, it was loud and clear to us in the Task Force, community colleges are struggling. I'm here to say, if I was to write a bill, I think we need to look at investing new monies in community college so they have at least one person who is designated on that campus helping students with mental health. Thank you very much.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions or comments from Committee members? Yes, Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT (8TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. So, you -- you talked a little bit about the Task Force. You talked a little bit about what your -- your -- your vision of a campus is. And you talked about the investing.

JOE DICHRISTINA: Yeah.

REP. ACKERT (8TH): So, I guess I'll give you the opportunity to elaborate. I think you mentioned three times, you'd like to elaborate --

JOE DICHRISTINA: Did --

REP. ACKERT (8TH): -- on investing.

JOE DICHRISTINA: Right. Yeah. I -- I do think that we need to have the funding in order for the

state to look at how are we setting up to do assessments, right, as -- as is written in here, to determine how to best approach a comprehension plan that promotes the emotional wellbeing of students.

I believe that there are any number of agencies that we could work with. You've heard the JED Foundation mentioned here that could help us look at how across the college campuses and university campuses in the state of Connecticut could we utilize money to be able to train people to be able to run these kind of assessments on campus, so that we know what's going on, how are the support services being offered, and what training is being done for people on the ground, working with students, like faculty who are working with students, and how are they responding to students. That's the kind of investment that I'm talking about.

REP. ACKERT (8TH): Thank you. And so, does this bill reflect what you believe needs to be done?

JOE DICHRISTINA: Yes.

REP. ACKERT (8TH): Is there sections that are -- we heard some of the beginning sections are very solid and then there's the sections in here that could be costly, or -- or are going to be costly to campuses? Is there -- I mean, have you identified areas of strong support?

I know that the -- the Chairman is very open to further dialog on this. And I'm not going to offer his time up because [laughter] -- but he mentioned it earlier. So, I just want to make sure that, you know, if, you know, you know, we may be able to accomplish this without a -- that Task Force if we can get it, you know, get the -- the good minds that

are working on this to create a -- a bill that reflects what -- what we need to start doing on our campuses. Or what -- I shouldn't say start, continue the good efforts on the campuses that are already taking place.

JOE DICHRISTINA: I -- I'm not -- I'm not critiquing the bill. You know, I'm -- I'm here to really -- really wanted to emphasize what I talked about in terms of the investment. We -- we wrote our recommendation by support. All those recommendations, I see a lot of those in -- in here. I believe strongly in those. I know people have different details that they want to maybe pull out of -- of there. But for me, I think the main thing I learned was this idea of a -- a campus assessment.

I'll just read from our recommendations. That we recommend the state of Connecticut invest in an assessment tool to help college universities determine success and weaknesses in their institutional comprehensive approach to student mental health and wellbeing; right? And how we -- how we would make that happen, you know, yet to be determined. I think a Task Force could help us figure out how to make that happen. Yes.

REP. ACKERT (8TH): Thank you. And I -- and I -- and I do want to -- I think many people mentioned it, I don't know if you agree, that it's not a one size fits all. [cross talk] Because we have very [laughter] very different campuses --

JOE DICHRISTINA: Right.

REP. ACKERT (8TH): -- in this state; very different.

JOE DICHRISTINA: Right.

REP. ACKERT (8TH): It's a small little state.

JOE DICHRISTINA: Right.

REP. ACKERT (8TH): Some very affluent, some very poor campuses. So, you know, I'm not sure -- each one has mental issues --

JOE DICHRISTINA: Right.

REP. ACKERT 9(8TH): -- that may vary quite drastically.

JOE DICHRISTINA: Yes. Yes. I recognize that. And we said that in our recommendations that we recognize what you're describing, Representative. Yes.

REP. ACKERT (8TH): Thank you for your time. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you, Representative. Seeing no additional questions or comments from Committee members, thanks for being here, sir. Next is Kirby Keith. Welcome.

KIRBY KEITH: Thank you. These are mine. Thank you. I'll be quick. Good afternoon. To members of the Committee and Higher Education, thank you for letting me speak today. My name is Kirby Keith and I'm here to provide my testimony in support of S.B. 307.

My husband and I have three adopted biracial children, all in the 6th grade; two came through DCF programs, one through Connecticut, and one through Massachusetts. It's the Massachusetts child who compels us to be here today. I call her amazing J because she is truly amazing. Amazing J was four years old when she was permanently removed from her

home and family in Massachusetts. At five, six, and seven, she moved from house to house, town to town, school to school. She had more than 15 placements from the age of four to age seven, including three failed adoptive placements, one being in Connecticut. That's 15 funny smelling beds, different foods, unfamiliar buildings, surrounded by strangers. I couldn't do it.

For four long years, no family of her own to comfort her, no school of her own to teach her, no community of her own to grow within her the compassion, the empathy, service, and leadership that we teach our little nutmeggers in our beautiful state of Connecticut.

At age eight, we found our beautiful amazing J and brought her home. She had no personal items and she was in third grade with a kindergarten level education. After years of intensive therapy and tutoring, she's now on track to be fully caught up in high school, just a few more years.

Right now, Connecticut and Massachusetts give foster/adoptive children access to funding for higher education. Our son, adopted through Connecticut DCF, has it. But not amazing J; she lost it because we lived across the state line. As state residents of Connecticut, you lose it. If I was a state resident of Massachusetts, we would have kept it. Connecticut does not allow it because she came from Massachusetts. Just by crossing the border, these amazing children lose this incredibly influential benefit. I believe it's one of the greatest tools in our ability to break the vicious cycle of families repeatedly returning into the foster care systems.

Amazing J is a third-generation DCF child. They lose a higher education benefit simply because they crossed a state line in their adoption process. And don't forget, these kids are encouraged to go across state lines. USKids.org, they are putting these kids out there. They are coming to Connecticut.

Amazing J came to us thinking she was not intelligent. College was never an option. She went to school for a warm lunch. She has spent every week since she came to us learning two paths simultaneously. She learns the teachings that she missed in her long years in foster care. At the same time, she's learning with her peers what she needs to be on track for sixth grade. [Laughter] Today her heart is set on Syracuse, although I'm pushing for UConn, her father's alma mater.

All she ever wanted was a family to love her. All her family today wants is to give her the opportunity we give to our other foster children. Give her access to a higher education worthy of her strength, her courage, her ability for forgiveness, and her incredible passion for learning. Please, give her back her higher education subsidy she lost simply because her devoted adoptive parents lived in the wrong state. And I thank you. And so, if anybody asks, that's -- that's amazing J, and these are her brothers.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you so much for your testimony, ma'am. I'm really grateful for the perspective that you and others have brought to this issue today. Are there questions or comments from Committee members? Yes, Representative Ackert.

KIRBY KEITH: [Laughter].

REP. ACKERT (8TH): Thank -- thank you for being here. And thank you for your love for your children, of course, and you what -- as -- all the parents are -- are trying to do here. Just a quick question. If a -- do they still have the rights to go to Massachusetts College?

KIRBY KEITH: No.

REP. ACKERT (8TH): They lost it?

KIRBY KEITH: It's a process --

REP. ACKERT (8TH): Unless they move -- what if you --

KIRBY KEITH: Nope.

REP. ACKERT (8TH): I don't want you to move and I don't want her to go to Syracuse, either. I want her to go to --

KIRBY KEITH: [Laughter].

REP. ACKERT: -- UConn. But -- so, when, she -- what happens in that transfer?

KIRBY KEITH: So, when you go from one state to another, regardless of whether it's a private or public adoption, you have to go through the ICPC with that council. When you go up through the ICPC in Massachusetts, you still have it. When you come down into the Connecticut ICPC, you lose it.

Now, there are other -- there are instances where it's granted. Our son came from Florida -- Florida DCF, which doesn't really have a DCF. He came in through the Connecticut DCF, and we were luckily enough for him to get it. It was hard, hard sell. To your point, what you were saying earlier, Representative Betts, is that yes it does depend on

who's -- who's in the office and who -- who allows it. In this case, it is that ICPC move that you lose it.

REP. ACKERT (8TH): Okay.

KIRBY KEITH: And the rule -- the law, as it's written in Massachusetts, says that, you either have to be a resident of the state of Massachusetts or a -- I'd have to be employed by a state, something within the state.

REP. ACKERT (8TH): Okay. Okay.

KIRBY KEITH: They would allow it. And Massachusetts, going back from Connecticut into Massachusetts, it doesn't really happen. We don't shop our kids.

REP. ACKERT (8TH): Okay. Thank you. Thank you for your time. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

KIRBY KEITH: And these numbers could grow because of what's happening on AdoptUSKids.org.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you very much, Representative. Representative Haddad.

REP. HADDAD (54TH): Thank you very much. And I just want to make sure that I'm -- I'm clear on how this works. If you're -- if you're adopted out of DCF in Connecticut, we give or you time out of DCF in Connecticut, we give those students a benefit that they can travel with? They get a -- it's -- it's -- it's -- it's based on the tuition and fees at the University of Connecticut. It's a grant that gets provided. And they can bring that grant anywhere they want?

KIRBY KEITH: Correct.

REP. HADDAD (54TH): Right?

KIRBY KEITH: So, if -- if room/board, tuition, fees of an in-dorm student, on-campus student at UConn for a year is -- I don't know what it is, let's say \$20,000 dollars. That \$20,000 dollars, the child can get as a waiver to apply to any college. In Massachusetts, you have to go to a Massachusetts state school.

REP. HADDAD (54TH): Right.

KIRBY KEITH: It's -- but how our rule works.

REP. HADDAD (54TH): Right. And so, we're -- I mean, I just want to be clear. Like we're -- I'm completely on board in working to make this happen. It's dependent somewhat on a change in rules in a different state; right?

KIRBY KEITH: Except for the fact that once these children come down into Connecticut, through the ICPC, they're seen as Connecticut children. They have HUSKY. They have access to all of the benefits that anything is provided for any of these foster children. Now, there's also an age thing, too, and how hard it is to place.

There's these criteria that these children have to make to hit certain things, over the age of eight, certain ethnicities. But when you look at two -- they're -- they're in the same grade. They are six months apart. Yeah, we have triplets. They -- they both came from out of the state of Connecticut and they even came in through the same adoption agency.

REP. HADDAD (54TH): Yeah.

KIRBY KEITH: One got the waiver and one didn't. And these kids lived in a world where kids don't go

to college. It took me a long time just to get them to understand, no you're not living at home, you're going to college. So, how -- they're -- they're -- they're 11 and 12 right now, they don't understand what's happening. I fear that, by the time they get to high school, and we're talking about this, and -- and L says, yeah, I'm -- I'm good. Mom's not stressed about how we're entering me in the system and getting financial aid. And J's like, well, how come you got it and I don't get it. You know I can do it with the cellphone. I can't -- I don't know how I can do it with a -- with an education subsidy.

REP. HADDAD (54TH): Right. I guess the reason why I asked the question the way I did, is that -- I mean, certainly I recognize that Connecticut could decide on its own to provide the benefit to any adoptive parent of a child who comes out of a child -- child welfare system in any state.

KIRBY KEITH: Right.

REP. HADDAD (54TH): Right? I --

KIRBY KEITH: Or we could require that the state of Massachusetts, when that child comes in through the ICPC provides that stipend.

REP. HADDAD (54TH): Well, that's -- well, that's the part that gets harder to do. Get like -- because I think that'd be a great outcome. But I don't -- I -- I -- I only wish that we could pass a law that would apply to [laughter] Massachusetts.

But here's [cross talk] -- but here's my -- but here's the -- but here's another thought. Senator Haskell and I and Representative Turco, a couple of other members of this Committee actually serve on something called, the Legislative Advisory Committee

of the New England Board of Higher Education. And it is a consortium of states that -- and we -- and I think our -- our next meeting is 11 days from now or something like that. I think it's [cross talk] a week -- a week -- a week from Monday or something like that in Massachusetts.

And what we do is we sit with legislators from other states and talk about things that are going on in the realm of higher education in Connecticut and in other states. One of the hallmarks of the New England Board of Higher Education, when it was first established in the 50s, was it -- it -- it -- it's a compact that says that we're going to agree to take students from other states at a reduced level of tuition if -- if the -- if they can't reach -- find that program in their own state.

And I -- I've already had a conversation with the New England Board of Higher Education about expanding the terms of that compact. And we can talk to our legislative colleagues in all of the other New England states to see if there's some interest in -- in expanding that compact to include reciprocity for kids who are adopted out of each other states, and also a reduced tuition that would apply to those kids if they decide not to go to the public school in their state but to a public school in another state.

And so, I think that's a promising way and I actually think it's a way of accomplishing the goal that wouldn't require us to take as much -- wouldn't require us to be essentially footing the bill for all the other states, but they would -- but they would -- their children would also realize the

benefit as well, if they happen to want to go to a Connecticut school.

KIRBY KEITH: Connecticut's is a better benefit.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Yes, Representative Betts.

REP. BETTS (78TH): Yes. You know, I think the Chairman has an excellent suggestion there, and I think that's a better route to go than to try and do it -- although, we'll still talk to the DCF Commissioner. But we do have reciprocity compact agreements in other areas. And that probably would accomplish what you're looking for, as well as avoid passing a law, because that can also be very challenging unless people really understand what the pros and cons are. So, I -- you know, I'd be interested to hear what you find out or what the feedback is at your next meeting, to see if we can do this without having to pass a law, because that can be pretty challenging. And hopefully, that will accomplish what both sides want.

KIRBY KEITH: I think the --

REP. BETTS (78TH): Thank you.

KIRBY KEITH: -- the goal is to -- is to treat the children equally. And with my two, it's the perfect example.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you, Representative Betts. Seeing no additional questions or comments from Committee members, thanks for being here today, ma'am.

KIRBY KEITH: Thank you all very much.

REP. BETTS (78TH): Mr. Chairman, I just want to ask, when you finish that meeting, if you could

maybe just send something to the Committee as to whether they're interested in it or whether --

KIRBY KEITH: Sure.

REP. BETTS (78TH): -- we need to pursue this.

REP. HADDAD (58TH): That'd be great.

REP. BETTS (78TH): Okay.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): We'd be more than happy to do so.

REP. BETTS (78TH): Thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thanks, Representative. Next is Steve from the National Association of Social Workers, Connecticut Chapter. If you wouldn't mind turning your mic on. There you go.

STEVE WANCZYK-KARP: Good afternoon. My name is Steven Wanczyk-Karp. I'm Executive Director for the National Association of Social Workers, Connecticut Chapter, and we're here in support of Bill 303. The beginning of my testimony talks a little bit about the needs, I don't need to go into that, that's clearly been said. But we do have three recommendations we'd like the Committee to consider.

First is, in establishing a Task Force for policies and procedures for each institution and also for a wider Task Force, we would like to see specifically written in the bill, that at least one member of that Task Force be a licensed clinical social worker. We say that because, roughly two-thirds of all mental health services in Connecticut, are provided by LCSWs. There are 10,000 licensed social workers in Connecticut, over 7,000 have a clinical LCSW level, and there are 3,000 at the master level.

That's actually more than the other master level trained in psychologists, if you add them all together, you wouldn't get to that number. So, we think it's very important, as the major provider of mental health services, that representation be on the Task Force.

We also would think in Section 3 of the bill that -- that -- that talks about at least one community-based mental health provider for the purposes of providing students with mental health services. We -- we think that the School-Based Healthcare Model or Health Center Model is actually something that maybe should be looked at for universities. I mean, school-based health centers are already in situations where they know how to deliver services in educational facilities, in schools, including high schools. And so, like, why start to invent -- reinvent wheels here.

So, we think that school-based health centers -- the nonprofit school-based health centers might replace that universities may want to turn to, to look towards delivering services at the campus level. Now, I have to say with full transparency, that my wife does work for a school-based health center. So, I'm -- I'm particularly familiar with their services. But I have been a strong supporter of school-based health centers for many years. And I think that's -- that's a way for us to -- way we may to go that way.

And my final comment has to do with the fact that we know at least that's UConn at Storrs and we don't know if other universities have done this, where they have brought in work study students and placed them in the counseling center to provide counseling

services. And we're a little troubled by that, because we don't know that those individuals necessarily have the skills and training to provide counseling.

So, we would feel that -- we strongly feel that any -- any mental health services that are happening at the university level, whether it's through a nonprofit or directly through the university, that those providers really do need to be licensed mental health clinicians, or they need to be graduate students of mental health field under supervision that are delivering services. Because, we know, and like I said, we know of at least one case where a work study student who is somewhat overwhelmed by the problems that they're seeing, mainly because they're simply not trained to do what they've been brought in as a work study student to do.

So, we do think that's very important that any mental health services in the colleges be provided by individuals that have the proper qualifications.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you very much, [cross talk] sir, for your testimony. And thank you and all the other social workers in Connecticut for the tremendous services that you provide. Are there questions or comments from Committee members? Yes, Representative Betts.

REP. BETTS (78TH): Thank you. And thank you for your testimony. And -- and -- and we're all keenly aware of the need for mental health services particularly at colleges and universities. Are you familiar with any college or any university in the state of Connecticut, much less anywhere else, that actually provides these services on campus?

STEVE WANCZYK-KARP: There are colleges that do have mental health services that are divided -- provided directly on campus. I'm sure that some of our universities here in Connecticut do that. There are counseling centers on some of the campuses. I know for instance, Sacred Heart University, I believe has a counseling center. Central Connecticut State University, I know someone who works in their counseling center. So, there definitely are centers on some of the universities. I think the community colleges tend to probably have less -- are less likely to have somebody on campus. And I think the larger campuses probably -- the larger universities probably do.

REP. BETTS (78TH): Thank you for that. And -- and the reason why I ask it is, I had the same concern in the hospitals who agree that it's a problem for them as well, particularly community hospitals. They are getting many, many more people coming in with mental illnesses, and people are thinking, well, okay, the place to go to is the hospital. Well, hospitals were not set up to deal with the treatment of seriously ill people. And it would require a completely different model than many of 'em have right now. I would suspect that would be something as challenging for universities and colleges, because they'd have probably be open 24/7, seven days a week. You have to have it staffed. You wonder how much money is going to be required to -- to provide that? Are they going to be expected to have pharmaceutical prescriptions available to give out, if they need to? My point is, they need the help. But we want to be realistic as to whether that help can be provided on or off the campus.

You mentioned having one person -- one person for any kind of college or university. Well, that's -- I think that's completely unrealistic. I would be totally overwhelmed if I had to deal with all the problems with just any college. So, I like the idea we were talking about before about telehealth. But if I'm hearing you right and some of the other people, what you're looking for is going to require a very substantial investment as well -- as well as a pretty sizable sum of money to be able to maintain it. Where do you think that money would be coming from or do you think it should be added into tuition or how -- how do you propose? I have no idea what the money would be, but it would be sizable.

STEVE WANCZYK-KARP: So, I -- I think you're right. So -- so, universities have to invest as one of the speakers said, they have to invest in their students. If a university is putting money into a student, whether it's through scholarships, admitting that student, all the cost of educating that student, and then you have a student, because of mental health issues become a barrier for that student to successfully complete that university studies, then I think the university does have a responsibility to -- to look at that and try to help with that. The state of Connecticut also probably does have some -- at least for our public universities, I think the state of Connecticut has a responsibility, also. So, they're probably financially a shared responsibility.

I mean, most campuses, if not all, have some kind of health centers. I mean, I know when I went to college, I usually got my allergy shots at -- at the health center. If you have a health center, why can't you have mental health services within the

health center. And that's to me, it seems like -- I mean, if -- if we don't separate mental health from the rest of health and we think of mental health and health as one piece, then it seems like there should be better services available for the mind and body combined.

REP. BETTS (78TH): I -- I would agree with that. But just a -- a word of caution in -- in my mind, any way, it's easy to say we need this and the state should do it and the university should do it. Remember, universities and colleges were originally set up to provide education, you know, to provide some kind of physical activity to, you know, help you with the development as you become an adult. If we start adding another component to it, okay, does that dilute from what its mission is or has its mission become expanded. And in order to be able to pay for that expansion -- and we all know mental health is long-term, and you have short-term and long-term crisis, again, it's not one-size fits all. Not all universities and colleges have the ability to be able to produce this. Are we not better off referring people to outside the campus or through telehealth as opposed to having it on the campus?

STEVE WANCYZK-KARP: So, I agree. Telehealth is an excellent avenue to go. Not all students necessarily are going to have access to get off campus and to get those services. Someone talked earlier about transportation, you know. So, that, I think that's an issue. Availability is also an issue and access is an issue and whether students feel comfortable going outside of that campus.

So, you're right. So, basically the bottom line is, we need to do it all, somehow. We need to have more

services available, more contracts between schools and private providers in the community. I think we need to have health centers that include mental health services on the campus. And I think you need telehealth. So, it's really -- it has to be a combination of things. But ultimately, if we want students to succeed and we want them to get that degree and, hopefully move on and have successful careers, then we need to address a significantly growing trend of students with mental health needs that are -- are failing on the campuses because of that. So --

REP. BETTS (78TH): Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you, Representative. Seeing no additional questions or comments, thank you very much, sir.

STEVE WANCZYK-KARP: Thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Next is Valerie Lepoutre from NAMI.

VALERIE LEPOUTRE: Good afternoon and to all the members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. My name is Valerie Lepoutre and I am the Statewide Peer Recovery Manager at NAMI Connecticut. I'm also a person in recovery. NAMI is the National Alliance of Mental Illness. It's an organization that dedicates to building better lives for individuals affected by mental health conditions. Some of my responsibilities for this organization includes overseeing our suicide prevention programs, as well as, our youth and young adult recovery programs. I have submitted written

testimony, so I'll just summarize some of the most important points.

We all know that there's been a rising demand for mental health services on Connecticut's colleges and universities. Many students are struggling to find adequate supports on campus, and some of the reported obstacles are including lack of awareness of services and skepticism about effectiveness of treatment.

As we all know, every campus is different. Some provide clinical services, while others do not. For students who are able to seek clinical support, they're limited with the length and frequency of treatment. There are also a variety of treatment modalities that may or may not support the needs of each student. In a perfect world, each student will find and connect with a clinician that can provide the type of treatment needed. But unfortunately, that's not the case and it turns people off from services.

Students are also looking to their peers and prefer for the guidance and support and from their advice. So, if we're looking at the JED Model of Comprehensive Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention, some of the key recommendations for -- for the model includes promoting social connectedness and supporting life skills education.

At NAMI Connecticut we are supporting these efforts with Young Adult Connection Community, which is available on college campuses. This is a peer-run initiative and support network for students. In addition to our facilitator training that we offer with this program, students who lead the group also

receive suicide prevention and gatekeeper training [inaudible 3:00:11].

Our recovery models help students manage mental wellness with activities, goal planning, and supportive discussion, and development of stronger interpersonal and life skills, which promote mental wellness. This cost-effective program works as an adjunct to existing mental health services. I just want to clarify it's not to replace.

So, it's supporting those who are uncertain about seeking clinical treatment or those who are unable to receive the quality and consistent treatment that they need. We also have a position that we were able to launch and pilot on Central Connecticut State University's campus called The Student Wellness Navigator, which engages students into services and promotes help-seeking behavior. This position was developed by a student themselves because they were looking for services that they might have needed and they were able to navigate with other students to help them figure out a system in how to figure out how to get the services they need on campus. And of course, the position worked directly with the Counseling & Wellness Center and the Disability Services under our supervision at NAMI.

So, I'm asking you to consider with embedding into the -- the bill to support the evaluation of the current clinicians that are available on campus, as well as making sure that they have the proper education skills for assessing and managing suicide risks, as well as making sure all campus staff are -- have received some type of suicide gatekeeper training. And work with community organizations

including putting them on the -- the Health Coalition.

I understand the policies, procedures, and budgets may differ for each institution of higher education across Connecticut. But at the same time, we need to unify our approach on promoting the emotional wellbeing of students and preventing suicide. Because every student deserves an opportunity to thrive by having access to quality, life-promoting programs and services, regardless of the school an individual attends. Thank you for your time and attention.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you so much, Valerie, not only for being here, but for the excellent work that NAMI does. I've had the opportunity to go to a few events in my district and in the surrounding towns, and I'm so inspired by that work. So, thank you so much.

VALERIE LEPOTURE: Thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Are there questions or comments from Committee members? Seeing none --

VALERIE LEPOUTRE: Thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): -- thank you. Finally we have Stefan Neller from Connecticut Students for a Dream. Welcome.

STEFAN NELLER: Thank you. Yeah. So, as was stated, my name is Stefan Neller and I'm a College Access Manager with Connecticut Students for a Dream. And I really appreciate the opportunity to testify here today. I'm testifying in regards to the H.B. 5353. You heard from one of our students before, Fabrizzio, so I'm just going to kind of

summarize a few things, because, obviously the stories of our students are the most impactful and you already kind of heard the impact of college costs for undocumented students from him. But just a couple things to highlight. As Fabrizzio mentioned, we're talking about the exclusion of undocumented students from the -- the PACT, right -- the debt-free community college. And one of the things for us, right, that's really important, I think to -- to recognize, is that as our relationships doing this work in this building since 2011, when we first passed in-state tuition. Some of you on the Committee were very supportive and helpful in -- in doing that for many years, right. And in 2018, passing institutional aid.

So, I think one of the most disappointing things for us is that, after all those years, we would hope that in this building that folks would consider undocumented students any kind of like further legislation that would kind of provide equity for students at the community college and the state college level.

So, the seized undocumented students not included in the conversation and us as an organization not really included in-conversations how those bills came about. It's really disappointing for us because we've been here for so long fighting for these bills. Actually, I wore the shirt today from 2015. So, it's been a little while that I've been involved as well, fighting for these things.

And also, because it's such an easy kind of like route to include in terms of just process oriented. As Fabrizzio stated during his testimony, there is [inaudible 3:04:31] institutional a law that we

passed in 2018, there is a separate process besides the FAFSA, right, which is one of the requirements to fill out to prove need for students in order to qualify for the Debt-Free Community College that has been created, called the AACTUS at the Connecticut community college level and the state schools and then UConn has their own separate process for doing that.

So, there wouldn't be -- need to be like a separate process creation for this, because it already exists. Really, all that would need to be included is the ability for undocumented students to fill out that form to receive institutional aid. I think an example of like this process, helping to support other initiatives, is that UConn's Connecticut commitment that they're starting for the next semester, undocumented students qualify because they already had a process, and that form already existed. So, it made it very easy for UConn to include undocumented students through that Connecticut commitment.

We're seeing huge impacts from institutional aid; right? There are many students that are going to community college are receiving aid. Some of them even meeting close to full need; right? So, the -- that was a huge piece of legislation, that definitely is fully supporting many undocumented students. But still obviously folks are -- are left out. So, this Debt-Free Community College having undocumented students included would, obviously, allow for even more students to be able access these institutions; right? And again, I think one of the points that I emphasize, that I just want to repeat, is like including Connecticut Students for a Dream undocumented students in the conversation; right?

Because we're here for so long and fighting for so long, like I said, many of you, we've seen many times.

So, for us, it just shows like, you know, like reciprocity in terms of the work that we've done to be included in those spaces and to really be able to have those conversations. So, I appreciate ya'lls time in hearing us out. And you know, we'll be around. [Laughter]. So, for further conversations, we're happy to have those with anyone interested in talking about how we can have undocumented students included in this policy and I'm sure future policies that ya'll will think about to make the college process more equitable for all students. So, thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you very much for bringing this perspective today, and I look forward to continuing that conversation with you. Are there questions or comments from Committee members? Yes, Representative Doucette.

REP. DOUCETTE (13TH): Thank you. So, just to clarify, what specific changes would you like to see to the 5353?

STEFAN NELLER: Yeah. So, I -- I think it would be, like in terms of just 5353 specifically, right, we know that's just kind of like the money behind kind of like the process; right? So, it would be difficult specifically in 5353 as a piece of legislation without, like, I think like an addendum or something being added. So, the -- the change that we feel like that would be the easiest to make would -- so part of the legislation includes like how students would qualify, which includes the FAFSA, as far as the requirements?

REP. DOUCETTE (13TH): Correct.

STEFAN NELLER: So, for example, in the Connecticut Commitment, the -- the language reads FAFSA or the institutional aid application for undocumented students. Obviously, there's also like funding considerations and things beyond that, that I think obviously would have to be talked about. But that would be in terms of the process, that would be the change that would happen.

REP. DOUCETTE (13TH): Yeah. That's exactly what I was asking. I just wanted -- I just wanted that stated for the record what you were asking for.

STEFAN NELLER: No, thank you. I appreciate that.

REP. DOUCETTE (13TH): And -- and certainly we can, it's not an addendum, we can -- we can amend the language out of this Committee or even subsequently after that. So, that's why -- that's why I asked.

STEFAN NELLER: No, thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Thank you very much, Representative. Are there any other questions or comments from Committee members? Seeing none, thank you so much.

STEFAN NELLER: Thank you.

SENATOR HASKELL (26TH): Are there any other members of the public who would like to testify and have not had an opportunity to do so? Asking again, are there any members of the public? Seeing none, I will adjourn the public hearing and remind members that our meeting from earlier today remains in recess.