

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-15

AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

Title: CONCERNING HIGHER EDUCATION.

Vote Date: 3/10/2020

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/3/2020

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill appropriates up to \$2,130,842 to the Board of Regents in FY 21 for more academic advisors at community colleges. It also repeals the statute creating the Higher Education Coordinating Council.

Substitute language for this bill removes language limiting eligibility for the debt-free college program to those who (1) graduated high school within the past year and (2) have an expected family contribution of \$7,500 or less. It also removes language allowing BOR to spend up to \$500,000 to support debt-free college marketing beginning in FY 21.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Mark Ojakian, President, CSCU: Mr. Ojakian submitted testimony in partial support of this bill. While the proposed budget invests \$2 million in PACT scholarships and \$500,000 in marketing, Mr. Ojakian expressed concerns over changes that would limit access to the PACT program, such as family contributions and students who have graduated from high school more than a year prior. Mr. Ojakian notes that a marketing campaign has already begun and has convinced many potential students to attend community college. He also suggests changing this legislation to include undocumented students.

Melissa McCaw, Secretary, State of Connecticut Office of Policy and Management:

Secretary McCaw submitted testimony in support of this bill. She notes that the Governor believes that the PACT program should focus on students with the most financial need, but the program needs to be adjusted to remove the funding gap. By limiting eligibility to students

who either graduated from a Connecticut high school within the past year and to students with greater financial need, the cost of this program can be feasibly managed. The Office of Policy and Management urges an incremental approach as this new program begins.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

See responses from agencies.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

[Jennifer Widness, President, CCIC](#): Ms. Widness submitted testimony in opposition of this bill. While the CCIC supports Debt-Free Community College, they note fiscal contrast between this bill and HB5353. SB15 would narrow eligibility requirements, but HB5353 makes no eligibility changes and would require the legislature to appropriate \$16 million to the program. The CCIC believes that promoting access and affordability in higher education is critical to ensuring a talent pipeline needed for our economy to grow, and to close equity gaps in our state.

Reported by: Assistant Clerk Krystin DeLucia Date: March 16, 2020