

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-17

AN ACT REQUIRING THE COMPLETION OF THE FREE APPLICATION FOR

Title: FEDERAL STUDENT AID.

Vote Date: 3/3/2020

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/13/2020

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill seeks to help increase college accessibility and affordability by legally require all high school students to complete either a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form or a FAFSA waiver form indicating an understanding of the purpose of completing a FAFSA form. This bill also includes students without legal immigration status and the form they complete.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Timothy Larson, Executive Director, Office of Higher Education: The Office of Higher Education feels that this bill will help students and their parents make an informed decision on financing their higher education. They stated that there are millions of dollars in federal aid being left untouched that can be utilized by students enrolling in college, especially students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. They also argue that a student who completes a FAFSA form is 127% more likely to enroll into a college.

Miguel Cardona, Commissioner, CT Department of Education: The Department of Education believes that requiring completion of a FAFSA form will help many students realize that they can afford the cost of college and prevent them from abandoning their higher education goals. Commissioner Cardona makes the case that legislation requiring FAFSA completion has already been passed and implemented in Louisiana, Illinois, and Texas, and that Louisiana, as an example given, has seen a marked increase in high school students completing FAFSA forms after passing such legislation.

Alexandra Pilon, Director of Government Relations, Connecticut State Colleges and Universities:

CSCU writes that they appreciate the Higher Education Committee's recognition of the importance of high school students completing FAFSA forms as well as the importance of undocumented students in Connecticut completing the Application for CT Undocumented Students (AACTUS).

Nathan Fuerst, Vice President, UConn Office of Enrollment Planning and Management:

The University of Connecticut writes that it fully supports the intent of this bill and emphasizes the university's own commitment to ensuring that every student who is academically qualified to attend UConn can afford to attend the institution and that this bill is similar to the university's financial aid program, Connecticut Commitment, in assisting prospective students with college affordability and access.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Garrett Moran, Chair, Governor's Workforce Council: Mr. Moran submitted testimony in support of the bill on behalf of the Governor's Workforce Council. They note that one of Governor Lamont's top priorities is ensuring that Connecticut has a high-quality, skilled workforce. They believe that this bill is a critical step in meeting such a goal because increasing FAFSA completion among high school students will increase the number of students who enroll in and graduate from institutions of higher education. They argue that 90% of FAFSA completers enroll in college while only 55% of FAFSA non-completers enroll in college.

Hamish MacPhail, Policy and Research Director, Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement (ConnCAN):

Mr. MacPhail submitted testimony in support of the bill on behalf of ConnCAN. They feel that completing a FAFSA form as a condition for high school graduation will simplify and demystify the college application process for students and their parents. They are concerned about the bill not including language which provides for giving adequate support to students and their families for learning how to accurately complete a FAFSA form given the lack of financial literacy and poor math performance by many students and former students in the State of Connecticut. They suggest that this bill include language that ensures families who require support in completing a FAFSA receive such support. They also suggest that the bill include language that provides for tracking the acceptance, matriculation, and completion rates of college students receiving FAFSA aid.

Yale University: Submitted testimony in support of the bill. The university argues that FAFSA completion should be universal across Connecticut because requiring high school students to complete a FAFSA form increases their likelihood of attending college by 30%. The university suggests the General Assembly consider students who may need assistance completing a FAFSA form and the possible necessity of recruiting and training volunteers to assist in the completion of FAFSA forms.

Dr. Chaka Felder-McEntire, Executive Director, Higher Heights Youth Empowerment Programs, Inc. (HHYEP):

Dr. Felder-McEntire submitted testimony in support of the bill on behalf of HHYEP. They feel that FAFSA completion is strongly associated with postsecondary school enrollment and would particularly aid students from the poorest economic backgrounds and state that FAFSA completers are 127% more likely to enroll in a college. They also recommend amending the bill so that it includes language that ensures

that high school students receive information about all of their postsecondary education options. They suggest the bill's language should also include a waiver for parents of students who do not want to complete the parent sections of FAFSA forms.

Amy Dowell, Connecticut State Director, Education Reform Now CT: Ms. Dowell submitted testimony in support of the bill. She feels that this bill would help many students realize they can afford to attend college. She points to the success of similar legislation implemented in Louisiana. She adds that such legislation in Louisiana coincided with other financial aid legislation, including the establishment of Financial Aid Working Group and the Louisiana Counselor Assistance Center, and adds that the state coordinates FAFSA workshops with local school systems. She also urges the state to also provide funding for this bill if it passes.

Jennifer Widness, President, Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges (CCIC): Ms. Widness submitted testimony in support of the bill on behalf of CCIC. They feel it is important to do more to educate high school students on their financial aid eligibility and close the post-secondary degree attainment gap between Caucasian and minority students.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Paul Angelucci, Vice President, State Vocational Federation of Teachers: Mr. Angelucci submitted testimony in opposition to the bill. He feels that requiring high school students to complete a FAFSA form sends the wrong message that attending a college is the only acceptable path for higher/post-secondary education as opposed to attending a trade or technical school. He also feels that high school students should not have to disclose their parent's income to the high school they attend, and adds that there are many school districts moving to provide free lunch for all students so that they do not need to disclose their parents' income.

Michelle Catucci, Director of School Counseling, Cheshire High School: Ms. Catucci submitted testimony in opposition to the bill. She feels that this legislation runs contradictory to the State of Connecticut's commitment to present students with more post-secondary education options beyond 4-year colleges and build a skilled workforce. She also feels that requiring FAFSA completion of all high school students will negatively impact students who most need financial aid. She also expresses concern for families of students who may not feel comfortable disclosing their income to their child's school.

Members of the Fairfield Board of Education Policy Committee: The members of the Fairfield BOE Policy Committee submitted testimony in opposition to the bill. They feel that completing a FAFSA form should not be required for high school students before graduation because not all high school students intend to attend college, the bill creates a sole determinant for graduation in violation of state statute, not all students would be eligible for a FAFSA waiver in the bill's current language, the bill could contribute to the student debt crisis since not all students will be eligible for federal aid money, and needing financial support may factor into a student's chances of being admitted into a college.

Virginia A. DeLong, School Counselor, Lebanon Middle School: Ms. DeLong submitted testimony in opposition to the bill. She expressed concern that the bill does not specify who would be responsible for carrying out the FAFSA completion mandate in Connecticut's high

schools. She worries that this bill could burden school counselors with an increased workload, especially because school counselors are not trained financial planners and are not necessarily qualified to give financial advice to students. She also expresses concern for families who may not be willing to disclose their financial information to their student's school. She also feels that this bill may lead students to believe that they should be attending college after graduating high school. Overall, she feels that this legislation is not in the best interest of all students.

Suzanne Niemic, Guidance Counselor, Wilcox Technical High School: Ms. Niemic submitted testimony in opposition to the bill. She feels that this bill is demeaning to students and their families who have made the choice to attend a trade school instead of a college. She is also concerned that this legislation will increase the workload of school guidance counselors and leave them with less time to work one-on-one with each individual student.

Reported by: Justin Boutin, Assistant Clerk

Date: March 4, 2020