

Chair Haskell, Chair Elliot, Ranking Member Witkos, Ranking Member Haines, and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on **House Bill 5467: An Act Establishing A "Free-Free Day"** at the Public Institutions of Higher Education for High School Students Who Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. My name is John Board, a graduate of the Connecticut State College and University System and former member of the Student Advisory Committee of the Board of Regents. I am testifying as the "citizen advocate" of this legislation.

Passage and implementation of this policy will *provide relief to our students and will boost enrollment at our public institutions of higher education*. For the last three years, the State of Colorado has hosted a "Fee-Free Application Day" where prospective students' application fees were waived. Colorado sets the requirements for this program as simply as, "All [state] residents qualify for Free Application Day". As long as a resident submits their online application and any other required personal statement/essays by the prescribed date, any supplemental documents can be submitted at a later date.

According to the Colorado Department of Higher Education and Governor Jared Polis in the 2020 Fee Free Application Day:

- Students submitted more than 57,000 applications, saving more than 2.3 million dollars.
- 28% increase over the previous year's FFAD.
- Nearly  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the applications were submitted by first-generation students.

If we want to make a serious effort to erase equity gaps - the racial disparities in enrollment and graduation - this is the way to complete that task! Nearly half the applications from Colorado's Fee Free Application Day were submitted by students of color.

I have also spoken with the Education Committee out in Colorado and staff is willing to assist with providing additional supplemental research relating to budgetary impact all the way through implementation.

Lastly, I want to take a moment to respond to both Vice President Fuerst and Mr. Bradbury's testimony.

When I submitted this concept to Ranking Member Haines it was not tied to completion of a FAFSA, if that is the only hurdle which UCONN has, hopefully the committee could clear that up and UCONN would be willing to support.

As it relates to Mr. Bradbury's concerns from CSCU - This is your answer. I would say instead of "working with the Governor's office", work with your legislative partners, working with your students, work with your alumni to find a solution. This program has been successful out in Colorado, and I am confident it would be successful here in Connecticut!

I thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy and prepared to answer any questions which the committee may have.