

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-881

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.

Vote Date: 3/22/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/2/2021

File No.:

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

SPONSORS OF BILL:

Governor Lamont

REASONS FOR BILL:

To implement the Governor's budget recommendations.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Susan Bysiewicz, Lieutenant Governor, State of Connecticut:](#)

Submitted written testimony in support. Lt. Gov. Bysiewicz says, "this legislation expands access to education and supports workforce development." She emphasizes the U-Pass program and says, "Transportation should not be a barrier to educational or employment opportunities."

[Mohit Agrawal, Deputy Policy Director, Office of Gov. Lamont:](#)

Submitted written testimony in support with a section-by-section summary of the bill. Mr. Agrawal says, "workforce development is the key to opportunity." The Governor proposes an Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS) to coordinate resources, investments, data, and training. The Governor proposes several initiatives to support OWS: a credential registry; the Connecticut Automatic Admissions Program; and funding for the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) and OWS.

[Scott Gaul, Chief Data Officer, Office of Policy and Management:](#)

Submitted written testimony in support. Mr. Gaul specifically supports, "the recommendations concerning measurement and evaluation of outcomes for education and workforce programs, the development of a credential database, the collection of data on private occupational schools and the development of 'enhanced' wage records." He explains what those sections

will accomplish and how the P20 WIN system will form the backbone of data collection efforts.

Bill Villano, President/CEO, Workforce Alliance; Chair, Connecticut Workforce Development Council (CWDC)

Submitted written testimony in support. Mr. Villano says, "We support the Governor's efforts to increase access to demand-driven workforce training programs for Connecticut residents, to ensure data-driven decision-making, to prepare Connecticut residents for in-demand 21st Century jobs, and to provide Connecticut employers with access to the workforce talent they need to thrive. ... During the February 25 meeting [with the Office of the Governor], members of the Governor's team assured CWDC members that our feedback would be integrated into the next iterations of both Senate Bill No. 881 and Senate Bill No. 885. Assuming that this occurs, the CWDC will enthusiastically endorse the final version of Senate Bill No. 881 (and, later, Senate Bill No. 885)..."

Kelli Vallieres, Executive Director of the Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS), Vice Chair of the Governor's Workforce Council (GWC):

Submitted written testimony in support. Ms. Vallieres explains how OWS was and is organized and provides background for this legislation. She explains how SB 881 advances the workforce development plan's goals through short term training programs, improving access to post-secondary education, increasing student FAFSA completion, and increased data collection.

Timothy D. Larson, Executive Director, Connecticut Office of Higher Education:

Submitted written testimony in support. Mr. Larson says, "The strategic plan of the Governor's Workforce Council proposes that the state establish a credential registry." To that end, "OHE will work with postsecondary institutions and workforce training providers to collect program information in accordance with the minimum data policy set by the New England Board of Higher Education's High Value Credential initiative in the CTDL format. ... The bill language also authorizes the Office of Higher Education to collect student data from private postsecondary occupational schools. This will allow the Office of Higher Education and other key stakeholders to better understand the outcomes of students that enroll in these schools, assess the overall quality of such programs, and facilitates OHE's regulatory role regarding the retention of student records."

Charlene Russell-Tucker, Deputy Commissioner, Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE)

Submitted written testimony in support with substitute language.

Section 9

- Ms. Russell-Tucker explains how the section would work and suggests the language be amended to "require that districts develop an implementation plan for the following school year, or if implementation may not be possible, 'indicate specific steps required to successfully implement the Provision' in the following school year.

Section 12

- CSDE believes this section will increase student participation in rigorous coursework and requests it be amended "to note that writing is assessed as part of the English Language Arts assessment, and is not a separate mastery test."

Sections 13-15, 18

- Ms. Russell-Tucker says that Connecticut already benefits from a high FAFSA completion rate but there is still room to improve and learn from other states with higher rates. CSDE launched a FAFSA Completion Dashboard in January with real-time completion data. They eagerly await the effects of new federal legislation to simplify the FAFSA and increase Pell grants. Ms. Russell-Tucker says, "Passing this bill would be an important step toward Connecticut replicating or surpassing the success of higher achieving states and providing greater opportunities for our students."

Sections 16-17

- "...require a student to stay in school until age 18, unless they receive a high school diploma at an earlier age. The CSDE is in full support of this change in law and believes it will help to further increase high school graduation rates in Connecticut."

Sections 20-21

- "...require the Board of Regents to create the Connecticut Automatic Admissions Program. This program will guarantee admission to any high school senior who is ranked above a certain threshold in their high school class into any of the four Connecticut State Universities, without requiring application fees. The CSDE is in favor of this proposal and stands ready to partner with the State Universities to support this work."

Thomas J. Saadi, Commissioner, Department of Veterans Affairs

Submitted written testimony in support. Mr. Saadi says, "By collecting [workforce] data, the State will be able to assess the types of jobs in which Veterans are working after their service, how their pay compares to non-veterans and what new programs the state could provide to improve transition from active duty to the workforce. Data driven coordination and improved programing in the area of workforce development will benefit many segments of society including our Veterans and those still serving in the National Guard and Reserve components through more effective integration and re-integration into the civilian workforce that also promotes the recognition of their job skills developed while serving in the military and providing retraining opportunities when needed."

Rich Andreski, Bureau Chief of Public Transportation, Connecticut Department of Transportation (DOT):

Submitted written testimony in support. Mr. Andreski says one barrier to "school, training, or work is unaffordable and inaccessible transportation options." Section 22's bulk ride transit pass, modeled after UConn and CSCU's U-Pass program, provides subsidies for individuals participating in programs within any of those three areas.

Nathan Fuerst, Vice-President for Enrollment Planning & Management, UConn:

Submitted written testimony in support. Mr. Fuerst applauds the FAFSA completion provision and says, "There is extensive research that demonstrates increases in college enrollment among students who submit the FAFSA. Among minority and firstgeneration students, rate of college enrollment are further amplified through participation in financial assistant and literacy programs." Mr. Fuerst says, "I am glad that the proposed bill acknowledges our undocumented students, who are ineligible to receive federal higher education financial aid

and thus completion of FAFSA is unfeasible." While UConn offers the institutional aid application, he says, "We must take care that we do not further marginalize our undocumented students with this proposed high school requirement." Mr. Fuerst notes that the state has experienced brain drain, but after receiving support from the Higher Education Committee, UConn is celebrating record applications and enrollment.

Jeanette W. Weldon Executive Director, CHESLA:

Submitted written testimony in support. "As the economy and workforce requirements change, we believe it is important to explore financial assistance programs that can address a range of post-secondary educational needs. We believe developing new methods for financing these opportunities not only plays a critical role in expanding access to post-secondary education for all Connecticut residents, but it is also a critical component of workforce development in the State."

Leticia Colon de Mejias, Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Advisory Board Interim-Chair, Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, and Opportunity (CWCSEO):

Submitted written testimony in support. Ms. Colon de Mejias says Connecticut must ensure that its workforce pipeline is agile and aligned with the Latine population, "which is the fastest growing segment of the population in our State," by utilizing "culturally and linguistically appropriate curricula and programming that is responsive to the needs of the 21st century economy." She presents several questions for how to improve economic development efforts and says the Commission feels, "that for people to be meaningfully engaged in planning for a sustainable resilient future they must have access to information that is understandable, accessible, engaging, and that empowers them to make educated choices and to support plans for a stable safe future." She makes recommendations for addressing sustainability, equity and inclusion, fostering entrepreneurialism, and data availability.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Rep. Mary Mushinsky, 85th District:

Submitted written testimony in support with substitute language. Rep. Mushinsky says, as part of her work on the Program Review and Investigation (PRI) Committee, " We found employees need to retrain throughout their lives to stay relevant in the job market. SB 881 addresses many of these needs but should be amended to include oversight of the proposed workforce office and to avoid damage to certain outstanding workforce training programs." She specifically notes paid apprenticeships and Platform to Employment (P2E). The latter program, she says, "produced an astonishing 94% placement rate in new jobs that paid an average of \$54,000/year ... and they continue to out-perform all other job retraining programs to this day. They received national recognition on the news program "60 Minutes." Rep. Mushinsky also makes four recommended changes in detail for the implementation of the plan based on PRI reports.

Anthony Barroso:

Submitted written testimony in support. As a DACA recipient, Mr. Barroso supports expanding higher education access for all, but has concerns about certain sections, "given the lack of capacity and training for school counselors to support students and families in completing the FAFSA and institutional financial aid application..." Although Mr. Barroso has spent his life in Connecticut since the age of seven, he did not pursue a degree in psychology after high school due to the risk of deportation for his family, personal shame, and the large

financial burden of higher education. After becoming a father, he applied to a Bachelor's of Social Work program at SCSU and was accepted, but was forced to withdraw because his legal status presented no options other than taking on "ridiculous amounts of debt." Mr. Barroso wants, "more information on what funding and capacity building the State will provide to districts and/or community organizations in order to better support students and families in increasing college and career readiness and financial literacy and completing the FAFSA and institutional aid paperwork." He also says, "the State must give careful consideration to establishing clear guidelines for the waiver option to prevent students with marginalized identities (i.e. students with disabilities, ESOL students, etc.) getting pressured to opt out, especially in Alliance districts. The current language is very broad and I am concerned about giving districts too much discretion given the reality of racial bias within a majority white, monolingual English speaking field."

Libuse Binder, Former Executive Director, Stand for Children in Washington State:

Submitted written testimony in support. Ms. Binder says she championed similar legislation in Washington that "saw dramatic gains in enrollment of students of color and low-income students... Over the next 5 years, more than 50 urban, suburban, and rural districts around the state would adopt an Academic Acceleration policy, and a 2019 analysis showed that of those districts, nearly 2/3 of them had either reached parity, meaning the advanced classes were now demographically representative of their schools, or they had made significant progress towards achieving that goal."

Althea Marshall Brooks, M.S., M.Div., Executive Director, Bridge to Success:

Submitted written testimony in support. Ms. Brooks says SB 881 will help their efforts to expand college enrollment among students from alliance districts. She explains that "31% of Connecticut's class of 2018 did not complete a FAFSA, leaving 17.6 million dollars in federal pell grant funding on the table."

Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA):

Submitted written testimony in support. CAFCA explains the role Connecticut's nine Community Action Agencies (CAAs) serve in addressing poverty and its effects across the state. CAFCA believes the Office of Workforce Strategy will provide more opportunities to lift people out of poverty and in the wake of the Pandemic "is a huge step in the right direction to help get our state's workforce back on track..."

Michael Cerulli, UConn Student, President, College Democrats of Connecticut:

Submitted written testimony in support. Mr. Cerulli says, "SB 881 will provide countless students across Connecticut with expanded opportunities to pursue higher education." He believes the bill will expand college enrollment, particularly among underprivileged students. Mr. Cerulli also praises the U-Pass program and expects it to have a positive impact if expanded statewide.

Scott Cheney, CEO of Credential Engine:

Submitted written testimony in support. Mr. Cheney says, "With this legislation the State of Connecticut is establishing a clear leadership role in workforce and education services..." His organization recently issued a report that found nearly 1,000,000 certifications nationwide. "With so many credentials in the market," he says, "it's hard to find reliable, comparable, and valuable information about them. And without widespread adoption of standards for

describing and evaluating them—people get lost and lose out on opportunities. This legislation will take important steps to address these shortcomings."

Virginia A. DeLong, Director of Counseling & Admissions, Norwich Technical HS, Government Relations & Advocacy Chairman, Connecticut School Counselor Association:

Submitted written testimony in support.

Section 10 (2)(A)(B)

- "Student success plans are an important component of a student's academic career. ... Having electronic portfolios would be incredibly beneficial as they would more easily transfer, however, there is currently no universal electronic program being used by school districts and this could pose to be problematic in transferring to postsecondary institutions as well as between districts when students transfer from one district to another. It would be in the best interest of students if the State of Connecticut invested funding in creating a robust career exploration and planning system that could be used by school districts throughout the state and could include an electronic Student Success Portfolio system that would easily transfer between schools and postsecondary institutions.

Section 11

- "We agree that there should be fewer barriers within districts so that there is greater access and equity within CTE, work based learning, service learning, dual enrollment, dual credit, ECE, AP and IB programs for students. Creating greater access to these programs will ensure that all students who wish to pursue these pathways as part of their educational career will be able to do so."

Amy Dowell, Connecticut State Director Education Reform Now Connecticut:

Submitted written testimony in support. Ms. Dowell says this bill will help address higher education graduation rates, costs, equity concerns and promote economic development.

Noah Frank, Director of External Affairs, UConn's Undergraduate Student Government (USG):

Submitted written testimony in support. Mr. Frank says, "S.B. 881 will undoubtedly help bolster access to higher education and the opportunities afforded by it, and I am especially encouraged by the provisions that will improve cooperation and transparency between our state agencies as they perform critical functions in ensuring student success."

Rhona C. Free, President, University of Saint Joseph (USJ):

Submitted written testimony in support with substitute language. Ms. Free says, "USJ is eager to partner with the newly-established Office of Workforce Strategies ..." and asks, "legislators to ensure that any language creating programs or opportunities for funding are flexible enough for private, non-profit colleges to participate."

Regarding academic program approval, Ms. Free says, "While it is unlikely that USJ would intend to add more than 12 programs in one year, having the flexibility to do so would be beneficial given the need to respond quickly to workforce changes." USJ asks, "that the bill be amended to remove the 12-program cap on our program approval exemption to better

position private, nonprofit colleges to respond to the needs of the state's employers in developing new programs."

USJ "strongly supports" the FAFSA completion provision, calling it an "important component of closing the vast opportunity gap that exists in Connecticut."

USJ says of the Auto Admit provision, "We appreciate that the bill facilitates the opportunity for independent institutions to participate in this program but would ask that interested independent institutions be permitted to participate in the program from the beginning – rather than being prohibited from participating until the summer of 2023 – and that the fee associated with participation be lowered from \$50,000 per institution."

[Ashley Gibson Director, Government Relations, College Board:](#)

Submitted written testimony in support with substitute language. Ms. Gibson says over a third of Connecticut 2020 high school graduates took an AP test during their high school career and scored above a 3. She says, "students who take AP Exams are more likely to enroll in a four-year college, more likely to return for a second year once enrolled in college, and more likely to graduate college on time than similar students who did not take AP." She sees opportunity for growth and applauds Section 11 for "removing barriers to advanced courses," but, regarding Section 12, she "suggests amending this to provide multiple ways to identify students."

Ms. Gibson also applauds Connecticut's wide adoption of College Board's SAT and PSAT testing products, explaining that "Research from the University of Connecticut found that students who take college entrance exams in states that administer them during the school day see higher college attendance rates—and low-income students benefit the most." She recommends using College Board's free, Web-based PSAT tools to assess "AP Potential."

[Hartford Foundation for Public Giving:](#)

Submitted written testimony in support. The Hartford Foundation says of Greater Hartford, "there is misalignment between the skillsets required and the skills of the current workforce." The Hartford Foundation supports the bill's "efforts to create a better pipeline between high school and postsecondary education, increasing access to workforce training programs, and improving use and collection of workforce data." They say the OWS will help coordinate these efforts, which will result in reduced barriers to higher education, high school graduation rates, and early exposure to career pathways, especially among Black and Latine populations.

[Michael Hernández, President of the UConn Undergraduate Student Government:](#)

Submitted written testimony in support. Mr. Hernández says, "S.B. 881 will help realize the aspirations of countless Connecticut students just like me," by requiring completion of the FAFSA and ensuring automatic enrollment for state colleges.

[Lesley Hirsch, Assistant Commissioner of Research, New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development \(NJDOL\):](#)

Submitted written testimony in support. Ms. Hirsch says that Connecticut must "avail its workers of high-quality education and training opportunities that are aligned with industry demand," in order to meet projected economic needs by 2025. Her office maintains the state's Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). She says, "By statute in New Jersey, federal or state funding for job training can only go to a program on the ETPL." New Jersey is moving

this data to Credential Engine's Credential Registry to make data about credentials, " readily accessible, usable, understandable, and actionable for students, workers, parents, counselors, employers, educators, and policy makers.

Phillip Lovell, Vice President, Policy Development and Government Relations, Alliance for Excellent Education:

Submitted written testimony in support. Mr. Lovell says, "S.B. 881 is an important policy proposal that will help to address the mismatch between student outcomes and economic demands through several policy changes, including a new Challenging Curriculum Policy, a requirement and support for students to complete and submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and the Connecticut Automatic Admissions Program." He then expands on the impacts of these three initiatives and promotes the "Fast Track To and Through College Act" as a supplement.

Gary Macnamara, Executive Director, Public Safety & Governmental Affairs, Sacred Heart University:

Submitted written testimony in support with substitute language. Mr. Macnamara applauds the creation of the GWC and OWS, and he looks forward to the implementation of the state strategic plan. However, he says, "One of the barriers that continues to be in place for independent colleges is the requirement that private, nonprofit institutions of higher education must submit new programs for approval to the Office of Higher Education when they reach the limit of the current statutory exemption of 12 programs annually. This arbitrary limit on new programs is inconsistent with the call for higher education institutions to be responsive to changing economy and employers need and to attract and retain talent in the state. ... Connecticut remains one of few states in the country to continue to require private, nonprofit colleges to go through this level of review. ... We would ask that the bill be amended to remove the 12- program cap for private nonprofit colleges and allow us the flexibility we need to respond to the needs of the state's employers in developing new programs."

Sacred Heart strongly supports the FAFSA and U-Pass provisions, which will make school attendance more accessible.

They also express concerns for the implementation of the credential registry and the Automatic Admission program. Specifically, "the mandate in the bill that every institution in the state must upload at least 12 data points on every single program that they offer," and their exclusion from participation from the beginning. They ask to not be forced to wait and that associated fees be lowered from \$50,000.

Shannon Marimón, Executive Director, ReadyCT:

Submitted written testimony in support with substitute language. Ms. Marimón says ReadyCT strongly supports the bill over all. She details that support section by section and offers caveats for sections 10 and 13. She calls section 10's requirements too narrow, offering substitute language. Regarding section 13, she says, "it is unclear the extent to which any surveyed student in the NCES survey had additional enrollment support. ... For maximum impact, Connecticut must make investments in postsecondary planning beyond a standalone FAFSA high school graduation requirement, e.g., programs like Student 5.0."

Meaghan McGeary, Max Scalf, Sara Siwiecki, Vatsal Patel, and Carson Bryant, Yale Graduate Students:

Submitted written testimony in support with substitute language. Ms. McGeary and her colleagues applaud the bill and request the UPass expansion be extended to include the Yale campus. They provide a 3-page analysis of the benefits of expanding the program to Yale and a Joint Resolution in Support from the Yale Graduate Student Assembly.

Mag Morelli, President, LeadingAge Connecticut:

Submitted written testimony asking that the Committee "consider the growing need within the field of aging services as you address the state's workforce issues."

Christopher Norio Avery, Roy E. Larsen Professor of Public Policy and Management, Harvard University:

Submitted written testimony in support. Dr. Avery strongly supports sections 8, 13-15, and 18. Regarding section 8, he says, " Enhanced wage records will make it possible for track participants in CareerConneCT and to conduct a similar evaluation of the effect of that program." Regarding the FAFSA sections, he says,

"The gold standard study in this area is "The Role of Simplification and Information in College Decisions: Results from the H&R Block FAFSA Experiment." This study reports the results of a randomized controlled trial that offered additional help at random to a subset of clients who had hired H&R Block for assistance with federal tax forms, finding a 15 percentage point increase in FAFSA submission for those who were randomly offered this support.

One finding of that study is especially relevant for HR 881:

'Interestingly, filing rates were much higher for those who agreed to have H&R Block submit for them. For those who agreed, the filing rate was 87.2 percent (not 100 percent due to the need for additional information that our Call Center was unable to get). For those who opted instead to first have their FAFSA sent to them, the filing rate was 16.5 percent.'

In other words, even a small impediment can discourage many from completing the FAFSA, which leads me to favor making FAFSA completion a requirement for high school graduation."

He also expresses "enthusiastic" support for the Automatic Admission Program, and says, " small changes in costs can have substantive effects on college applications and enrollment decisions."

Judy Olian, President, Quinnipiac University:

Submitted written testimony in support with substitute language. Ms. Olian supports the bill generally, specifically applauding the FAFSA Completion mandate and UPass expansion, and offers substitute language for language inclusivity, removing the cap on program approval, the Credential Registry, and auto-admit program.

Eleni Papadakis, Executive Director, Washington's Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board)

Submitted written testimony in support. Ms. Papadakis says Washington launched a similar state credential registry in 2009 during the heart of the Great Recession, which "immediately became a go-to tool at Washington's employment centers whose customers were looking for career-focused training to get back to work." She says their Career Bridge site received over 6 million pageviews last year and provides frequently used tools, as well as accountability, to

the state's education and training programs. Washington also partnered with D.C. non-profit Credential Engine last year. Ms. Papadakis says this has brought "transparency at the national level" and has "[helped] consumers make informed choices about their education and career pathways."

"What has been missing, until recently," she says, "is a drill-down to record-level (worker-specific), occupation data. Without that data point, performance evaluation on Career Bridge (and Credential Engine) has been limited to providing the industry where participants went to work." Ms. Papadakis says this changed last year after passing an occupational data bill modeled after legislation from Indiana and Alaska. She values their assistance and is excited to see Connecticut is on a similar path. She says, "We would be happy to work with you on implementation if this proposal moves forward, as we will be about a year ahead in our efforts, and can share lessons learned, strategies in communicating with our employers, and more."

Molly Polk, Vice President, Marketing and Enrollment, University of Hartford

Submitted written testimony in support with substitute language. Ms. Polk comments on the following sections:

Academic Program Approval

- Ms. Polk asks, "that the bill be amended to remove the 12-program cap on our program approval exemption to better position private, non-profit colleges to respond to the needs of the state's employers in developing new programs."

FAFSA Completion

- "The University of Hartford strongly supports the provision in this bill which seeks to require high school students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) prior to graduation, starting with the class of 2024. ... We strongly believe this process will help to close the opportunity gap that exists in Connecticut by helping students realize that access to higher education is not financially out of reach for both private and public institutions."

UPASS

- Ms. Polk requests that the bill be extended to all colleges and says, "While some students will have their own personal means of transportation, the UPASS program would provide an easy, safe, and affordable alternative for students to make these important connections and cultivate a relationship with the area around them. With this, we would ask for further consideration on the requirement that a pass must be purchased for every enrolled student. This program should shine as a tremendous opportunity for students to access the state's public transportation and not as a financial burden to those students that may not need it."

Automatic Admission

- Ms. Polk requests, "that interested independent institutions be permitted to participate in this program earlier than the summer of 2023 as noted in the bill. ... Further, the proposed institutional fee of \$50,000 for participation serves as an additional barrier. We are asking that this fee threshold be drastically reduced, if not eliminated."

Christine Siegel, PhD, Provost Fairfield University:

Submitted written testimony in support with substitute language. Dr. Siegel comments on the following sections:

Academic Program Approval

- Dr. Siegel asks, "that the bill be amended to remove the 12-program cap on our program approval exemption to better position private, non-profit colleges to respond to the needs of the state's employers in developing new programs."

FAFSA Completion

- Fairfield University says, "We strongly support the provision in this bill which seeks to require high school students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) prior to graduation, starting with the class of 2024. ... One important component of closing the vast opportunity gap that exists in Connecticut is to do more to educate high school students about what their eligibility for financial aid might be and to help them understand that higher education – at a public or private college – is more accessible than they might think."

UPASS

- Dr. Siegel requests that the bill be extended to all colleges and believes, "Expanding UPASS will provide greater access for our students to attend class, work and participate in internships in the state."

Credential Registry

- Dr. Siegel asks, "that participation in this credential registry be voluntary for independent institutions and that independent institutions have an appointment on the Advisory Council working with the Office of Higher Education to create this new database."

Automatic Admission

- Dr. Siegel requests, "that interested independent institutions be permitted to participate in the program from the beginning – rather than being prohibited from participating until the summer of 2023 --- and that the fee associated with participation be lowered from \$50,000 per institution."

[Jennifer Widness, President, Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges \(CCIC\):](#)

Submitted written testimony in support with substitute language. Ms. Widness comments on the following sections:

Academic Program Approval

- "We would ask that Section 5 of the bill be amended to remove the 12-program cap on our program approval exemption to better position private, non-profit colleges to respond to the needs of the state's employers in developing new programs in alignment with the Workforce Council's Strategic Plan." Draft language is provided.

FAFSA Completion

- CCIC says, "We strongly support the provision in this bill which seeks to require high school students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) prior to graduation, starting with the class of 2024. ... One important component of closing the [achievement] gap is to do more to educate high school students about what their eligibility for financial aid might be and to help them understand that higher education – at a public or private college – is more accessible than they might think."

UPASS

- Ms. Widness requests that the bill be extended to all colleges and believes, "Expanding UPASS will provide greater access for our students to attend class, work and participate in internships in the state."

Credential Registry

- "We would ask that the bill afford some flexibility for participation by independent institutions and that independent institutions have an appointment on the Advisory Council working with the Office of Higher Education to create this new database."

Automatic Admission

- Ms. Widness requests, "that the bill language be amended so that interested independent institutions be permitted to participate when the program launches – rather than being prohibited from participating until the summer of 2023 --- and that the \$50,000 per institution fee associated with participation be eliminated or reduced."

Yale University

Submitted written testimony in support with substitute language. They comment on the following sections:

FAFSA Completion

- Yale, "supports section 13 of the bill which would require high school students to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) ... Completing the FAFSA helps to dispel students' and families' misimpressions about the affordability of college; in addition, research has shown that providing families assistance in completing the FAFSA significantly raises the chances that a student will enroll in college. ... We recognize that some high schools across the state may be challenged to meet this mandate if it is enacted. In addition to providing a phase-in period, the General Assembly should consider how to treat students who make a good faith effort to complete the FAFSA but cannot find the assistance they may require. It may also be necessary to recruit and train volunteers who would assist high school students in completing the FAFSA."

UPASS

- Yale requests that the bill be extended to all colleges and says, " There is strong interest among Yale students, especially graduate and professional students, in having access to a program like UPASS."

Credential Registry

- "Yale University agrees that prospective students would benefit from having consistent information about options for postsecondary education through NEBHE's High Value Credential Registry initiative (section 3 of SB 881). In other states, participation in the credential registry is voluntary, and we recommend the participation in this credential registry be voluntary for independent institutions in Connecticut. Finally, we recommend that independent higher education institutions have an appointment on the Advisory Council working with the Office of Higher Education to create this new database."

Ashley Zane, Government Affairs Associate, CBIA:

Submitted written testimony in support. Ms. Zane says, " CBIA strongly encourages the OWS to create clear and transparent measurements for evaluating outcomes. CBIA acknowledges the expansive and herculean charge this office is tasked with, and strongly encourages the OWS to maintain open lines of communication with entities that have institutional knowledge

and a track record of successful programs." She says the credential database is crucial to workforce development, and strongly supports sections 13 and 22, but expresses concerns about section 8. "CBIA requests that any new information collected as a result of this section be made available to the public in aggregate. CBIA would also request that the Department of Labor in conjunction with relevant agencies like the OWS, implement increased notification and outreach measures to make sure businesses are aware of new reporting responsibilities."

ADDITIONAL TESTIMONY:

[Akeisha Latch, Student, Clark University](#)

[Sumreen Moughal, Student, Wilby High School](#)

[Candice Peterkin](#)

[Deb Polun, Executive Director, Connecticut Association for Community Action \(CAFCA\)](#)

[Joshua Rodriguez, Director of Public Policy and Economic Development, Waterbury Regional Chamber](#)

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

[Paul Angelucci, Vice President, State Vocational Federation of Teachers:](#)

Submitted written testimony in regarding section 13. Mr. Angelucci says his journeyman's license, "provided me the opportunity to raise my family, build and pay off my own home, and provide my children far different than the one I had growing up. ... How are students to believe that choosing a career working in the trades is a valuable decision when they are required to fill out a FAFSA form for graduation? The message being sent is that the only acceptable path forward is to attend college. Our system, and my life, has shown the fallacy of that belief." Mr. Angelucci also believes that parts of the bill "[stand] in opposition to the values of our state. Students should not have to disclose to their schools the income of their parents in order to graduate. This bill requires all students to provide information to their schools that the school has no need to have. Many school districts have moved to provide free lunch for all students so that students do not need to share their parents' income. This law runs against that trend." He explains that he has nothing against going to college, and in fact went himself to earn a certification as a teacher, but his parents' FAFSA information from 1982 was not relevant to his studies at fifty years of age.

[Cameron Champlin, Plumbers and Pipefitters Local Union 777:](#)

Submitted written testimony in opposition to all sections "that transfer the programs for employment from the Department of Labor to a committee that is in its infancy." "The DOL," he continues, "has administered these programs for many years and have personnel with the experience that will be invaluable in guiding Connecticut to a healthier economy. We don't believe this is the time to abandon the department that has been very effective in the past to implement opportunities for employment in all labor related fields."

[Virginia A. DeLong, Director of Counseling & Admissions, Norwich Technical HS, Government Relations & Advocacy Chairman, Connecticut School Counselor Association:](#)

Submitted written testimony regarding Section 10 (2)(A)(B); Sections 11-14; Section 20 with substitute language. Ms. DeLong says that a greater issue with this legislation is that many of its provisions would be implemented by school counselors, "However, we rank 37th in the state for school counselor to student ratios (1:457 in CT) with some of our urban districts with even higher ratios than that. This means that not all students have access to a school counselor, which creates a barrier for students in and of itself, to the program areas ..."

Section 10 (2)(A)(B)

- Ms. DeLong says, "Student success plans are an important component of a student's academic career. ... Having electronic portfolios would be incredibly beneficial as they would more easily transfer, however, there is currently no universal electronic program being used by school districts and this could pose to be problematic in transferring to postsecondary institutions as well as between districts when students transfer from one district to another. It would be in the best interest of students if the State of Connecticut invested funding in creating a robust career exploration and planning system that could be used by school districts throughout the state and could include an electronic Student Success Portfolio system that would easily transfer between schools and postsecondary institutions."

Section 11

- " We agree that there should be fewer barriers within districts so that there is greater access and equity within CTE, work based learning, service learning, dual enrollment, dual credit, ECE, AP and IB programs for students. Creating greater access to these programs will ensure that all students who wish to pursue these pathways as part of their educational career will be able to do so."

Section 12

- While students may have the potential for AP course work, they may not be able to manage the workload. This makes "automatic enrollment" problematic, while "guaranteed enrollment" implies choice.
- Testing as the only qualifying criteria has inherent equity concerns. Further, "There is also concern about the reliability and validity of using our state's assessment as a measure for whether a student is ready for advanced level courses. A level 3 means that a student has met proficiency but does not necessarily mean that students are ready for advanced level courses."

Sections 13 & 14

- While school funding through FAFSA is important, requiring students fill out the FAFSA before graduation, "sends a message to students and families that college is the only path and that more emphasis is placed on getting more students to college than working on a plan to fill all of Connecticut's workforce, including areas like manufacturing."
- There are also concerns of the impact of "poor" reporting rates and who is in charge of ensuring students meet this requirement.

Sections 20 & 21

- "We are in support of a program that would allow student automatic enrollment into our CT State College System. Our greatest concern is the use of class rank as a measure. Not all CT high schools use class rank as many colleges and universities no longer use it. Other measures should be established."

Liz Demsky, School Counselor, Wilbur Cross High School, New Haven:

Submitted written testimony regarding sections 13-18. Ms. Demsky says while she supports all efforts to expand access to higher education, "given the lack of capacity and training for school staff to support students and families in completing the FAFSA and institutional financial aid application," she has some concerns with the legislation. She says, "I fear that schools, especially where the majority of students are low-income and staff are already overburdened, will not be able to fulfill this task without the proper support in place." These problems are compounded when assisting immigrant and undocumented families. She encourages the State to "give careful consideration" to creating inclusive environments and guidelines.

Angelica Idrovo, Connecticut Students for a Dream (C4D):

Submitted written testimony regarding sections 13-18. C4D supports efforts to expand access to higher education for all students, however, they have concerns about the bill's implementation "given the lack of capacity and training for school counselors to support students and families..."

- "First, Increasing FAFSA and institutional aid completion alone will not eliminate inequities in access to higher education..."
- "Second, this bill doesn't provide for additional funding and capacity building to districts and/or community organizations in order to better support students and families in increasing college and career readiness and financial literacy and completing the FAFSA and institutional aid paperwork..."
- "Third, the State must give careful consideration to establishing clear guidelines for the waiver option to prevent students with marginalized identities (i.e. students with disabilities, ESOL students, etc.) getting pressured to opt out, especially in Alliance districts."

Ms. Idrovo says, "We appreciate that this bill recognizes that undocumented students cannot fill out the FAFSA and includes the alternative institutional aid form for undocumented students." However, C4D has several concerns regarding "the Commission of Education, the Office of Workforce Strategy, and any task force that is created to offer recommendations," and how their strategies will impact undocumented students.

- Funding for institutional financial aid is too limited
- The bill does not account for or fully appreciate the challenges inherent in an undocumented student revealing their status.
- Guidance counselors need training to support undocumented students.
- Schools need guidelines for supporting undocumented students and protecting their status.
- Schools need guidelines to avoid status assumptions and mislabeling of students.
- Institutional aid forms provided only in English are a systemic barrier to non-native English speakers, and requirements to notarize and mail the application are an additional barrier, and health risk during the Pandemic.

- Not all colleges accept the institutional aid form. "In this case, a student can request a waiver, but guidance counselors should be trained to help students identify other forms of aid that may be available to them."

Stefan Keller, Member and Former College Access Program Manager, CT Students for a Dream (C4D):

Submitted written testimony regarding sections 13-18. While he supports efforts to expand access to higher education for all students, Mr. Keller is concerned that sections 13-18 are insufficient to "close gaps in college admissions and retention for low-income, black, brown, and undocumented students..." He says,

"Most undocumented students do not have parents that went to college in the United States, meaning most rely on adults in their schools like school counselors to guide them through the process. Unfortunately, undocumented students are more likely to go to schools that are under resourced and that have higher student-to-counselor ratios, meaning counselors have less time to support students that have higher needs. School counselors are also not trained to fill out financial aid paperwork, especially not paperwork for undocumented students. In fact, filling out paperwork with an undocumented student may take hours because they need to answer questions about their family and finances that are uncomfortable or that may take time and conversations with parents to figure out. Without more resources put into underfunded schools, we are afraid that many students may be pushed to sign a waiver or be left on their own to try and navigate a system they don't understand, which could actually end up doing more harm than good."

He is further concerned that the FAFSA requirement will impact undocumented students because it will raise questions as to why they cannot complete it, placing students and their families at risk. He says, "If these situations are not handled delicately and with care and understanding, it can leave undocumented students feeling isolated, shameful, and alone. ... Policies such as this have the potential to create more equity for students historically left out of the process. However, for that to be realized, low-income, black, brown, and undocumented students need to be centered at every step of the process and in the policy that is eventually passed and implemented. Unfortunately, there is a long history of policies passing that are intended to create more equity for these populations but the impact ends up being the exact opposite."

Yoselyn A. Luna-Romani

Submitted written testimony regarding sections 13-18. Ms. Luna-Romani says, "I support all efforts to expand higher education access and equity for all students in Connecticut regardless of race, class, and immigration status." However, she is concerned the implementation of the bill will contradict its intent, "given the lack of capacity and training for school counselors to support students and families in completing the FAFSA and institutional financial aid application..." She shares the story of her challenges achieving her dream of becoming a history teacher as a former undocumented student. She says, "I never want students to feel that they can't or deserve their right to an education and what resources are there for them."

Suzanne Niemiec, Guidance Counselor, Wilcox THS

Submitted written testimony in opposition to section 13. Ms. Niemiec says, "This bill is based on the belief that college is the necessary and inevitable next step after high school. Our

entire system, the CT Technical Education and Career System, is built on the knowledge that college is not a requirement for a middle-class life. Like all the schools in our system, every year, Wilcox Tech graduates students who will build productive, successful lives by working in the trade they have studied in high school. ... Our students do not need to fill out FAFSA forms for cosmetology school, because they can graduate from high school already licensed hairdressers. Requiring our students to fill out a FAFSA form as a graduation requirement only reinforces old stereotypes that the trades are only for people who cannot succeed in college. ... Requiring students and families to fill out forms for college aid is not only useless for students who plan to enter the skilled trades; it is demeaning to the choice they and their families have made about their future."

She also says, "For me or any counselor to spend hour after hour with students who would only be filling out the form to complete a graduation requirement means I would have less time to do perhaps the most important part of my job: checking in with students who are dealing with personal, family, or emotional issues that are affecting their ability to be successful in school. In my nearly 20-year career, I have seen the number of students who enter our schools dealing with trauma or other forms of emotional distress increase dramatically. ... For us as guidance counselors to take time away from the necessary work of helping our students deal with these issues and instead work on a new graduation requirement would have a real human cost. I believe Section 13 of Governor's Bill 881, while well-meaning, would create far more problems than it would solve. I ask you to reject this section of the bill."

Mary Yordon, AFTCT Divisional Vice President and President Norwalk Federation of Teachers:

Submitted written testimony in opposition of section 13. Ms. Yordon says, "There should be a focus at the high school level to assist students (especially those more disenfranchised students) with the FAFSA process, as it has been shown to increase collegiate matriculation rates, however, we absolutely do not think that it should be tied into a graduation requirement." To do so, she says, potentially harms students, especially those from immigrant populations, lower socio-economic backgrounds, with strained/unsupportive/uninvolved parent relationships, and who don't plan to attend college right out of high school.

"Would we actually want to prevent a student from graduating if they didn't complete the form? If scared about their immigration status, would we really force a student to apply to a college and ask for aid? How is it ethical to withhold a diploma that has been otherwise rightfully earned, especially if the student has no immediate desire to continue onto college or trade school? When a public education system is required to be free and appropriate, FAFSA completion does not seem an appropriate task for all."

Ms. Yordon also believes that staffing this requirement would be problematic and says counselors, "would need some serious training as we currently only provide very superficial assistance with this task."

Reported by: Jeremy Salyer

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