



TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE

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Education Reform Now Connecticut

March 2, 2021

Re: S.B. 881: An Act Concerning Workforce Development

Chairmen Elliot and Haskell, Vice Chairs Flexer and Turco, Ranking Members Haines and Witkos, and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony **in support of S.B. No. 881**.

In 2019, Education Reform Now CT (ERN CT) released a report titled "[Less for More: Low Rates of Completion and High Costs at Connecticut's Four-Year Colleges](#)," which identified that too many programs of higher education in Connecticut have low graduation rates, too many have high costs relative to peer schools in other states, and some even have both. As a matter of equity and to ensure the state's economic future, Connecticut can and should do better for its students. If our state's well-being depends upon developing a skilled workforce, then we must prioritize making higher education more affordable and accessible for students.

The Governor's proposal works towards that goal. In particular, we support making completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) a requirement for high school graduation. A 2019 survey by the National College Access Network identified that, for students in the lowest economic quintile nationally, FAFSA completion increased their likelihood of entering college by 127%. Here in Connecticut, making FAFSA completion a graduation requirement would increase college affordability for many students who might not know about these available federal resources. At a minimum, this policy would make sure all students are aware of the possibility.

This bill also creates the Connecticut Automatic Admissions Program at the Connecticut State Universities, which will simplify the applications process for students who are academically prepared. We support this measure because—for high-achieving students making decisions about their futures after high school, automatic admission to an affordable, in-state college could flag an opportunity that they may not have otherwise considered.

Lastly, although not the subject of this bill, we hope that Connecticut will continue to tackle the preK-12 conditions and opportunity gaps that result in too many students needing costly and time-consuming remediation when they enter into programs of higher education. Higher

Education will only be affordable and accessible when students are able to build upon a strong academic foundation in a timely manner. As a state, we must commit to addressing institutional racism and segregation in our public school districts, and to building equitable, high-quality educational experiences for all students. That's what our students deserve and what our state needs.



About Education Reform Now CT

The state chapter of a national organization, Education Reform Now CT is a 501(c)(3) that operates as a think tank and policy advocate, promoting great educational opportunities and achievement for all by increasing equity, protecting civil rights, and strengthening the social safety net.