



**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE  
HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE**  
February 17, 2022

Amy Dowell,  
State Director, Education Reform Now CT

**Re: H.B. No. 5034, An Act Prohibiting an Institution of Higher Education from  
Considering Legacy Preferences in the Admissions Process**

Chairpersons Elliot and Slap, 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 H.B. No. 5034**. My name is Amy Dowell, and I am the State Director of Education Reform Now CT (ERN CT), 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.

Legacy Preference, the practice of giving an advantage during the admissions process to children with family members who are alumni, is discriminatory and perpetuates racial and socio-economic inequities. It creates a structural disadvantage that harms those who, historically, have not been privileged with family connections to the institutions of higher education in our state. By its very definition, it disadvantages first-generation college applicants. Furthermore, research shows that legacy students are more likely to be wealthy and white than their peers.<sup>1</sup> They are also more than three times as likely to be admitted than non-legacy applicants.<sup>2</sup>

In short, this practice is both unfair and a relic of a past from which we must move on. Those who defend its use sometimes argue that showing favor to the family of alumni is helpful for fundraising. In fact, research has shown a lack of evidence that there is a statistically significant relationship between legacy preference policies and alumni donations.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Arcidiacono, P., Kinsler, J., Ransom, T. (2020). "Legacy and Athlete Preferences at Harvard." Retrieved December, 2021 [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> Hurwitz, M. (Economics of Education Review, 2007). "The impact of legacy status on undergraduate admissions at elite colleges and universities." Retrieved December 2021 [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> Coffman, C., O'Neil, T., Starr, B. (Affirmative Action for the Rich, 2010). "An Empirical Analysis of the Impact of Legacy Preferences on Alumni Giving at Top Universities." Retrieved December 2021 [here](#).

Given the obvious immoral implications of this practice, it's no wonder that there's a nationwide trend to end it—following in the footsteps of independent schools like Johns Hopkins, Pomona College, and Amherst College. Recent national polling conducted by ERN found that 67% of voters support prohibiting the legacy preference at both private and public colleges and universities.<sup>4</sup> The state of Colorado banned the practice for all public colleges and universities this year, becoming the first in the nation to accomplish the goal at the state level. US Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and Representative Jamaal Bowman (D-NY) also [introduced federal legislation](#) this year that would ban institutions from using legacy preferences if they participate in federal student aid programs.

Our state should be next. Using information from the Common Data Set, we have identified that over half of Connecticut's not-for-profit, four-year colleges expressly report that they consider alumni relationships during admissions. The list includes private colleges; but it also includes public colleges like Central Connecticut State University, Eastern Connecticut State University, and the University of Connecticut—each reporting in official documents that they use this practice. By passing this bill, Connecticut is poised to become a national leader on making college admissions more equitable because this legislation has implications for all Connecticut colleges, public and private.

I urge you to pass this bill to protect the growing number of students who are disadvantaged by an unfair admissions practice that is a tradition that does not stand the test of time. Based on information that was self-reported on the 2021 SAT, at least a quarter (over 26%) of Connecticut's prospective college students are first generation applicants.<sup>5</sup> Thank you for protecting their equal opportunity to be admitted to a college based on their merits and pursue their dreams.



#### **About Education Reform Now CT**

The state chapter of a national organization and affiliate of DFER CT, 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.

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<sup>4</sup> Education Reform Now Press Statement (2021). "ERN Partners with EdMobilizer to End Legacy Admissions in Higher Ed." Retrieved December 2021 [here](#).

<sup>5</sup> In 2021, 26% of students who took the SAT indicated that their parents' highest level of education was either "no high school diploma" or "high school diploma". (See College Board (2021). SAT Suite of assessments Annual Report: Connecticut. Retrieved December 2021 [here](#).)