

**Statement of Jeremiah Quinlan
Dean of Admissions, Yale University
Concerning HB 5034, “An Act Prohibiting an Institution of Higher Education
from Considering Legacy Preferences in the Admissions Process”**

Senator Slap, Representative Elliott, Senator Witkos, Representative Haines, and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to express Yale University’s serious concern about HB 5034, “An Act Prohibiting an Institution of Higher Education from Considering Legacy Preferences in the Admissions Process.”

I am Jeremiah Quinlan, Dean of Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid at Yale University. Yale agrees with the central aim of HB 5034 – admitting more low-income and first-generation students and helping them gain the full, life-changing benefits of a college education. Indeed, I have personally made that a goal since becoming Dean of Undergraduate Admissions in 2013. However, Yale disagrees strongly with the approach of HB 5034 because the state should not dictate how colleges and universities make admissions decisions, just as the state should not dictate whom we hire as faculty or what we teach in the curriculum. Moreover, HB 5034 does not address the real challenge – providing the resources to prepare less-advantaged students to attend college and graduate on time.

Yale’s Approach to Recruiting and Graduating Low-Income and First-Generation Students.

Yale’s Office of Undergraduate Admissions strives to assemble a group of the most promising students from the most diverse collection of backgrounds. Yale’s need-based financial aid policies support this goal by making a Yale College education affordable for everyone. Yale is one of only six colleges and universities in the country with a need-blind admissions policy (that is, does not consider a family’s ability to pay in the selection process) for all applicants, regardless of citizenship or immigration status, and a commitment to meeting every student’s full demonstrated financial need.

Every Yale undergraduate from a family that cannot afford the full cost of attendance receives a financial aid award that meets the full cost of attendance, including tuition, housing, the meal plan, travel, books, and personal expenses, without requiring a student or their parents to take out loans. For families with especially high levels of need, Yale also provides free health insurance and a \$2,000 startup grant.

In academic year 2019-20, 53% of undergraduates received scholarships from Yale, with an average annual award of more than \$55,000. Families whose total gross income is less than \$75,000 (with typical assets) are not expected to make any financial contribution towards their child’s Yale education. For families earning less than \$110,000, Yale is the least expensive four-year school in Connecticut.

Yale has significantly increased its investments in undergraduate aid and has expanded outreach and recruitment efforts for students from lower-income backgrounds. As a result of these efforts, between 2006 and 2020, the average price paid by families receiving financial aid fell by 17% in nominal dollars and by 35% when adjusted for inflation. In 2005, 43% of Yale College students graduated with loan debt; last year only 15% of graduating seniors opted to take out a loan. Since 2006, the annual budget for Yale College financial aid has more than tripled to over \$218 million. Every dollar of that budget was awarded on the basis of financial need alone.

In 2017, Yale opened two new residential colleges which allowed for an expansion in undergraduate enrollment by 15%. Yale has also developed and invested in programs to ensure the success of first-generation and low-income students. The First-Year Scholars at Yale (FSY) program offers a free five-week summer residential program in writing and math to incoming low-income students from under-resourced high schools. Online Experiences for Yale Scholars (ONEXYS) provides a larger cohort of incoming students with a personalized preparatory curriculum in mathematics. Students on financial aid can apply for emergency financial assistance for unanticipated expenses. Academic advisors and subject expert tutors are affiliated with each of Yale's 14 small residential colleges and are accessible through academic departments, cultural houses, and the innovative Poorvu Center for Teacher and Learning, where all students have free access to writing and math tutors.

For the cohort of students who started at Yale in 2013, the six-year graduation rate for Pell Grant recipients was 96% – among the highest in the nation, and virtually equal to Yale's overall six-year graduation rate of 97%.

In our view, these are the types of strategies and investments that are needed to increase the number of low-income, first-generation, or other underrepresented students who are admitted to Connecticut colleges and universities – and, equally important, who graduate.

The State Should Not Dictate Who Is Admitted to College. The process for selecting students for admission, together with the processes for hiring faculty and deciding which courses to offer, defines a campus community and culture. Accordingly, federal and state policy and Supreme Court precedent have long respected the autonomy of educational institutions in these most fundamental mission-driven policies and practices. We urge the General Assembly to exercise restraint and avoid intruding into the academic decision-making of Connecticut's public and private institutions of higher education.

The US Supreme Court has held repeatedly that academic freedom is protected by the First Amendment, and landmark cases have recognized that, "The freedom of a university to make its own judgments as to education includes the selection of its student body." *Regents of Univ. of California v. Bakke*, 438 U.S. 265, 312 (1978). Just as every Connecticut college or university teaches different classes in different ways in fulfillment of its educational mission, each institution should likewise be allowed to assemble a student body that promotes its educational goals through diversity, community, and tradition. A university may make a voluntary decision

to forgo consideration of legacy status in the application process, but a state law dictating that decision would be unprecedented and would open the door to other intrusions on academic freedom.

An Alternative. We are skeptical that a ban on legacy preferences in admissions would have a material effect on representation of low-income, first-generation, or under-represented students. Indeed, Yale has already realized a dramatic increase in the representation of these students on our campus in the past decade, without eliminating other admissions preferences.

Even without such a preference, students with more resources will still have an advantage in college admissions, just as they have an advantage in securing a good job and in many other aspects of daily life. Instead, the state should support schools in their efforts to identify, recruit, and graduate low-income and first-generation students. The General Assembly could offer this support by:

- Providing the resources to help all Connecticut colleges and universities implement recruitment and outreach strategies directed at low-income, first-generation, and under-represented students.
- Funding evidence-based academic enrichment programs for high school students in less-advantaged circumstances to build their academic credentials and be more competitive with students from more advantaged circumstances.
- Fully funding the Roberta Willis Scholarship Program to enable all students, regardless of family circumstances, to complete college in a timely manner.
- Providing the resources to assist all Connecticut colleges and universities, public or private, to implement a college completion strategy patterned after the comprehensive approaches to student success (CASS) model recommended by The Institute for College Access and Success.

Conclusion. We commend the Committee for raising the important topic of increasing access to higher education among first-generation, low-income, and under-represented students. This is a priority for Yale and has been a focus of my efforts as Dean of Undergraduate Admissions. A state statute banning legacy admissions would not address the crucial challenges of preparing students for college, recruiting them, and ensuring that they graduate. Moreover, such a ban would undermine academic freedom by intruding on the autonomy of all colleges and universities in Connecticut, public or private, religious-affiliated or secular, to shape their campus culture and community. We urge the Committee not to advance HB 5034 and to instead provide resources to assist colleges and universities in meeting their goals for diversity and inclusion.