



Testimony for the  
Appropriations Committee  
Victoria A. McNeil, University Director of Financial Aid  
Quinnipiac University  
March 7, 2022

On behalf of Quinnipiac University, I am writing to request that the state legislature and governmental administration make significant investments and changes to the state's financial aid program for Connecticut students: the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship program. These changes are referenced under bills HB 5037 and HB 5137.

Though we are grateful for the recent infusion of ARPA funds to assist with students eligible for Roberta B. Willis scholarships this year and next, the reality is that Connecticut is lagging far behind our peers across the nation in funding for state financial aid programs. A 2020 report from the National Association of State Student Grant Aid Programs (NASSGAP) showed 43 states with higher percentages of state funding spent on grant funding than Connecticut. This is especially impactful given that Connecticut is one of the highest exporters of high school students in the nation, with 42% of our high school graduates leaving the state for college. Funding students at a higher rate would give them more incentive to stay in-state to attend one of our excellent colleges or universities.

In addition to the underinvestment in our college-going students, another concern is the timing of notifications of the Roberta B. Willis awards. Currently, institutions do not become aware of the availability of funding until late summer. As incoming students need to submit their enrollment deposits before this date, not informing students of their eligibility earlier may dissuade students from enrolling in their first-choice college, or even at enrolling at all. With undergraduate enrollment continuing to decline, it is more important now than ever in recent years to invest in students' education and provide financial aid awards early enough to impact their enrollment decisions. A redesign of the Roberta B. Willis program under the proposed bills referenced above would signal the commitment of the state of Connecticut to helping its students enroll and stay in Connecticut.

At Quinnipiac, we educate over 2,000 undergraduate students from Connecticut annually. Of those students, we only had enough Roberta B. Willis funds to assist **105** students with awards, in addition to the 34 students the CT Office of Higher Education offered Roberta B. Willis need-merit scholarships. Though 139 Quinnipiac students were assisted with state financial aid, **496 additional students were eligible but did not receive any state scholarships due to insufficient funding**. These otherwise eligible Connecticut residents have an average family income of \$45,000. These students would greatly benefit from educational support from the state.

Thank you in advance for voting to increase funding for the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship program and to hire a consultant to re-design the program to make it work better for the students of Connecticut.