



**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE  
HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE**

March 8, 2022

Amy Dowell,

State Director, Education Reform Now CT

**Re: S.B. 17 An Act Prohibiting an Institution of Higher Education from Withholding Transcripts**

Co-Chairs Elliott 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 **S.B. 17, *An Act Prohibiting an Institution of Higher Education from Withholding Transcripts***. My name is Amy Dowell, and I am the State Director of Education Reform Now CT (ERN CT).

This bill would finally ban the unfair, impractical, discriminatory, and all-too-common practice of withholding college transcripts from students as a debt collection tactic in Connecticut.

Although institutions of higher education can withhold transcripts for even small amounts of both academic and non-academic debt, the practice unevenly causes tremendous hardship for students. Withholding transcripts can both prevent students from pursuing further educational opportunities and impede their ability to secure gainful employment. The practice is especially unjust in Connecticut’s community colleges, which offer themselves as being affordable and transfer-friendly. But in any school that is supposed to be a vehicle of upward mobility, the use of withholding transcripts for credits that a student has already earned is highly unfair.

It is also impractical. When a student accumulates debt, an institution of higher education should adopt a plan that might eventually lead to payment—not make it harder still for a student to make restitution. Withholding information that might help a student to get out of debt creates an illogically vicious cycle, sometimes appropriately referred to as a “transcript trap.”

Lastly, this practice of withholding transcripts is highly discriminatory because it disproportionately harms students from low-income families. By targeting students with debt, it perpetuates the cycle of poverty, taking punitive measures against those who need to accumulate debts in order to invest in their futures.

For all three reasons—because withholding transcripts is unfair, impractical, and discriminatory—I write in support of S.B. 17. This is a broad problem across all of Connecticut that needs your

urgent attention. In fact, my organization, Education Reform Now CT, [researched all 34 institutions of higher education in Connecticut](#). Thirty of them expressly noted that they participate in this practice in their websites or catalogs, or via email to us. Four did not respond to requests for information. In other words, we are not aware of a single school in this state that has yet taken steps to end this practice of its own volition.

The language before you in S.B. 17 is similar to that which was passed in California in 2019, Washington State in 2020, and which is also currently being considered by the Virginia legislature.

To protect the interests of students who are attempting to make brighter futures for themselves, please pass S.B. 17. Thank you for your work on behalf of all students.



#### **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.