

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6773

AN ACT CONCERNING THE NEEDS OF HOUSING INSECURE STUDENTS AT

Title: PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

Vote Date: 3/7/2023

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/2/2023

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee.

REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill mandates public institutions of higher education to conduct evaluations and take appropriate measures to cater to the necessities of students who are experiencing housing insecurity, which refers to the lack of stable and adequate housing. Housing insecurity is a wide-spread issue at Connecticut's public colleges and universities; public testimony from advocacy groups and agencies highlighted that approximately 15% of CT college students are facing housing insecurity, and even more are living in unsafe environments. Further testimony demonstrated how housing insecurity may negatively impact a student's ability to succeed in higher education.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The proposed substitution modifies the language of Section D, Items 4-7 of the bill to indicate that the university liaison tasked with identifying available housing and mental health services options and the liaison for LGBTQ should be a current university staff member to avoid the costs of additional employment.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Connecticut State Colleges and Universities \(CSCU\), President, Terrance Cheng](#): shares the committee's concerns about homelessness and housing insecurity among students, citing housing insecurity, food insecurity, mental and physical health challenges, and transportation as significant obstacles to education. It is stated that while appreciative of the legislation's intent to address student housing issues, CSCU recommends dedicated funding for the

CSCU system to work with students on housing supports, grants, and referrals. It is also stated that the bill should seek to build on successful programs that the colleges and universities have piloted with state agencies and others in the area, including rent stabilization and rapid rehousing funding. It is further stated that including survey questions on housing insecurity within existing student surveys rather than mandating a standalone survey could produce more robust data by avoiding student survey fatigue.

[The University of Connecticut \(UConn\), Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Policies and Strategic Initiatives, Mona Lucas:](#) is supportive of the overall intent of the bill as UConn plans to use the survey results to develop strategies to address the specific needs of housing-insecure students. It is stated that changes should be made to improve the implementation of the bill, such as using existing resources to establish a team or designate existing staff members responsible for working with and supporting homeless or housing-insecure students. It is also stated that UConn is concerned about potential financial ramifications of this bill, as the budgetary challenge facing UConn could limit their ability to provide grants and other financial aid to cover all direct and indirect educational expenses.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[The Congress of CT Community Colleges \(The 4Cs\) SEIU 1973, President, Seth Freeman:](#) supports this bill as it ideally reduces the financial burden on students by providing greater access to affordable housing. It is stated that in a 2021 nationwide community college survey of student engagement, 14% of students identified as housing insecure, making this bill an important step addressing the needs of Connecticut's college students.

[Norwalk Community College, Professor, William Key:](#) supports this bill because according to a 2018 report by the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness and CSCU found 15% of surveyed students were experiencing homelessness or housing instability. It is stated that many respondents were unable to stay in their current accommodations for as long as needed and were staying in unsafe conditions. Additionally, it is stated that 10% of students between 18-24 years old report being encouraged, pressured, or forced to exchange sexual acts for basic needs, with 44% currently experiencing this. It is also stated that homelessness and housing instability affects students from both urban and suburban areas across Connecticut.

[Connecticut State University Chapter of the American Association of University Professors \(CSU-AAUP\), Chair, Equity for All Part-Time Faculty Caucus, Michelle Stochr-McCarthy:](#) supports this bill because of reports, indicating that students who are experiencing homelessness are just as dedicated to college as their peers but are hindered by difficulties that prevent them from succeeding. It is stated that only a small proportion of young people facing homelessness in Connecticut are taking part in college courses, which underlines the importance of providing on-campus support. It is also stated that every student, including those dealing with housing insecurity, should have the opportunity to thrive and develop alongside their classmates.

[Connecticut State University Chapter of the American Association of University Professors \(CSU-AAUP\), Social Work Professor, Karen McLean:](#) supports this bill, citing a 2018 report on Connecticut students, which shows that nearly one-fourth of respondents weren't staying in a safe place, 15 percent were homeless or living in unstable housing, and more than one-

third couldn't stay in one place for long, indicating they were likely couch surfing. It is stated that she has personal experience negotiating with the university to allow a graduating student to stay in the dorm until alternative housing could be secured, highlighting the impact of housing insecurity on students' academic and mental well-being. It is also stated that this bill aims to require public institutions to develop plans, run surveys, and make grants and financial assistance available which would help alleviate this problem.

[Norwalk Community College, English Professor, Lauren S. Peterson](#): supports this bill because of examples of students struggling with housing insecurity, including a young woman who needed to exit an abusive household and students who were essentially homeless. It is stated that the issue of housing insecurity is particularly salient in Fairfield County where Ms. Peterson works and lives. It is also stated that providing access to affordable housing would not only alleviate financial burdens but also increase their chances of graduation and becoming engaged citizens and productive members of the Connecticut economy.

[Stephen Monroe Tomczak, Professor and Leader, Southern Connecticut State University Chapter of the American Association of University Professors \(SCSU-AAUP\)](#): supports this bills because the rising cost of tuition, which has put economic pressure on students. It is stated that studies show housing insecurity is a significant problem among students at public universities; for example, 23% of college students are not "staying in a safe place", 15% are "homeless or had unstable housing" and 31% answered that they couldn't remain "where they were for as long as they needed." It is also stated this insecurity has negative academic and mental health impacts. It is further stated that this bill should include funding for potentially mandated programs to avoid placing unbudgeted costs on universities.

An additional six pieces of written testimony were submitted in support of [H.B. 6773](#):

[Civil Service Employees Association – Service Employees International Union Local 2001 \(CSEA-SEIU 2001\), President, Travis Woodward - Supports](#)

[CT Community College, Adjunct Faculty, Anonymous - Supports](#)

[Gateway Community College, Associate Professor and Faculty Advisory Committee to CT Board of Regents for Higher Ed, Chair, Dr. Colena Sesanker - Supports](#)

[Manchester Community College, English Department Faculty, Patrick Sullivan - Supports](#)

[Middlesex Community College, Part-Time Faculty, Christy Pyatt - Supports](#)

[Quinebaug Community College, Faculty Member, Elizabeth Dubofsky-Porter - Supports](#)

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Expressed.

Reported by: Lukas Houle

Date: 3/13/2023