

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-922

AN ACT PROHIBITING AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION FROM

Title: WITHHOLDING TRANSCRIPTS.

Vote Date: 2/28/2023

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/16/2023

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee.

REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill would prohibit Connecticut's universities from withholding student transcripts from the military and employers as a means of collecting non-tuition debt. Currently, officials allow universities to withhold transcripts in such cases, potentially harming a student's career prospects and exacerbating their debt. This practice also appears to impact low-income families more severely. By granting employers and military branches access to transcripts, the bill seeks to improve students' employment opportunities, regardless of money owed while allowing universities to maintain financial holds on transcripts so they can collect outstanding debt.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None stated.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Connecticut General Assembly, 41st House District, Rep. Aundré Bumgardner](#); supports this bill stating that this would prohibit institutions of higher education in Connecticut from withholding student transcripts as a mechanism to collect student debt from employers and military branches. It was highlighted that the practice of Transcript Trapping, which prevents students from accessing their transcripts even if they have earned their degrees and credits, would hinder their job opportunities and academic pursuits. It was stated that the practice disproportionately affects low-income families and communities.

[The Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges \(CCIC\), President, Jennifer Widness;](#) supports this bill stating that transcript hold policies allow institutions to hold students accountable for debts owed without immediately going to collections, which can have a detrimental impact on a student's future. It is stated that the holds typically address debts of \$1,000 or more, and the elimination of this policy could result in increased tuition costs and this bill provides a compromise that allows institutions to continue to place holds on transcripts but requires that a transcript be shared for employment purposes.

[Connecticut State Colleges & Universities \(CSCU\), Senior Director of Government Relations, and External Affairs, Sean Bradbury;](#) supports this bill stating that it represents a collaborative effort among higher education institutions, advocates, and legislators to strike a balance between curbing the harmful effects of transcript holds on students' career potentials while still allowing institutions to use it as a tool before resorting to debt collection agencies.

[Education Reform Now CT, Amy Dowell, Executive Director;](#) supports this bill stating that it prevents students from pursuing educational opportunities or productive jobs, and disproportionately harms students of limited means. It is stated that this practice perpetuates cycles of poverty and is impractical, as students need a repayment plan, not a penalty.

[The Hartford Foundation, Senior Public Policy Officer, Chris Senecal;](#) supports this bill stating that that current practice disproportionately affects low-income students and those who do not complete their degrees, preventing them from continuing their education and obtaining jobs. It is also stated that the Hartford Foundation works to increase stable employment opportunities for adults and youth facing barriers to employment, including returning citizens and opportunity youth disconnected from school and work.

[Manchester Community College, Adjunct Professor, Sara Berry;](#) supports this bill stating, through personal experiences, that withholding transcripts prevents graduates from getting full-time jobs that would enable them to pay their debts, and they end up staying in debt indefinitely, contrary to the promise that education would be the pathway to financial stability.

[School and State Finance Project, Executive Director, Lisa Hammersley;](#) supports this bill stating that the current practice of withholding transcripts for any unpaid balance, regardless of size, is excessive, discriminatory, and counter-productive. It is stated that current practice creates financial hardships that prevent students from accessing job opportunities, pursuing further education, and contributing to Connecticut's economy. It is also stated that the impact of this practice is disproportionately felt by economically disadvantaged students, perpetuating cycles of poverty and limiting upward mobility.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

[University of Connecticut, Interim Associate Vice President of Financial Operations and Controller, Margaret McCarthy;](#) provides general comments on this bill. It is stated that the University has a responsibility to collect debts owed to the institution and understands that unpaid student debt can hinder a student's ability to obtain employment, repay what they owe, or transfer to other institutions. It is stated that the university has a robust communication plan to ensure students are aware of their financial obligations and offers payment plans to help those facing hardship. It is stated that withholding transcripts can be an effective measure for students who refuse to pay debts. It is noted that the university

would be willing to apply the exception for students requesting transcripts to provide the US military.

Reported by: Lukas Houle

Date: 3/1/2023