

# Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-1043

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING THE ROBERTA B. WILLIS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM.

**Vote Date:** 3/7/2023

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 2/23/2023

**File No.:**

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee.

### REASONS FOR BILL:

This legislation updates terminology incorporating the use of 'Student Aid Index (SAI)' rather than 'Expected Family Contribution' (EFC) to determine eligibility for the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship Program to match upcoming terminology changes in the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and requires the Office of Higher Education to submit an annual report beginning January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024, detailing how many students receive grants from the program. Implementing these changes will ensure that the program funds are administered in accordance with eligibility changes made to FAFSA. Further, it will ensure transparency of data on how many students from each of the State's institutions of higher education, are receiving grant money from the program and provide actionable information to the legislature on the program's efficacy.

### RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Connecticut State Colleges and Universities \(CSCU\) President, Terrence Cheng](#): supports the intent of the bill, but has concerns about language changes and suggests incorporating certain solutions to address the barriers that limit the dispersal of Roberta Willis Scholarship Program (RWSP) funds to meet the needs of Connecticut students. It was stated that Connecticut's investment in student grant aid ranks last in the region, and although nearly 40,000 eligible students are enrolled in Connecticut's higher education institutions, only 11,000 students receive a grant annually. To make the Willis program more student-friendly and achieve state goals of retaining more young people for college and expanding the workforce pipeline, it was recommended that the Committee prospectively funds the program,

budget two years out, re-designing RWSP, and provide greater flexibility for use of RWSP funds. It was also stated that while the bill seeks to require a report on the program and incorporate the new federal student aid index (SAI), there are concerns about substituting EFC with SAI as FAFSA is changing in Fall 2023, and Pell Grant eligibility will no longer be charted out in relation to the SAI.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

[Connecticut General Assembly, House Republicans, Minority Leader, Representative Vincent Candelora](#) supports this bill on behalf of the Republican caucus and suggested that the Committee incorporate their requested bills expanding the Roberta Willis Scholarship Program, H.B. 5439 and H.B. 5440, into the Committee bill.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

See agency response.

[Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges, President, Jennifer Widness](#) testified jointly with Terrence Cheng and shares concerns about proposed language changes.

**Reported by: Arthur Newberg**

**Date: 3/14/23**