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Before the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
February 16, 2023

Senator Slap, Representative Haddad, Senator Kelly, Representative Haines, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on a number of bills today on behalf of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities.

Proposed HB 5738 AN ACT CONCERNING STUDENT REPRESENTATION ON THE BOARD OF REGENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION.

The Board of Regents for Higher Education (BOR) is the governing board for the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) and is comprised of 15 voting members and 7 non-voting ex-officio members. Two of those 15 voting members of the BOR are our student Regents who are the chair and the vice chair of the Student Advisory Committee (SAC) to the BOR.

While the proposed bill before you seeks *to restore student representation on the Board of Regents for Higher Education and to increase student involvement in developing policies*, CSCU would like to clarify that student representation on the BOR has never been reduced or eliminated since the creation of the BOR and the CSCU system in 2011. In addition to the two voting student regents on the BOR who can voice their concern, propose policy, and vote on issues before the BOR, the SAC is a valuable tool for facilitating student input with the BOR.

The SAC is established in statute and is comprised of 16 members; one from each CSU, one from each community college, and one from Charter Oak State College. Additionally, students provide alternate members who can attend meetings to keep their peers updated on business before the SAC. We support the activities and involvement of the SAC by having dedicated support staff and an appointed BOR member at each SAC meeting. Additionally the SAC has annual meetings between the full SAC and the full BOR to discuss issues of importance to students, exchange ideas, and facilitate dialogue.

Proposed HB 5743 AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONNECTICUT AUTOMATIC ADMISSIONS PROGRAM.

The Connecticut Automatic Admissions Program (CAAP) was established in the June 2021 Special Session in PA 21-2 and offers eligible students automatic admission to participating Connecticut colleges and universities based on high school grade point average (CAAP GPA) and/or percentile class ranking, both calculated using the College Board's formula for calculating GPA. The minimum percentile class rank for admission through the program is established by the BOR and is not set in statute.

While CSCU appreciates the intent of this legislation in expanding access to the CAAP, we are concerned that this would represent a massive change to the program before it has even begun, and before we have any experiential data on how the program worked and how well these students were supported.

Currently, the minimum percentile class rank for admission through the CAAP is set at the 70th percentile (or the top 30%). Setting this threshold at the 50th percentile would nearly double the size of the

program before we have any idea if it is meeting our goals and serving students well. It is worth noting, that at the 70th percentile, CAAP is the most expansive single factor automatic admissions program in the country. Other states use multifactor standards including a requirement that students demonstrate academic competencies in certain subjects, complete a preparatory program, or have a minimum GPA or standardized test score in addition to their class rank.

We share the goal of this legislation in wanting to create as expansive a program as we can to increase access to our institutions while making sure those students are properly supported in their academic pursuits. However, this program is already a heavy lift, and we have been working collaboratively with our colleagues at the State Department of Education, the Office of Workforce Strategy, and the private colleges participating in the program to find ways to stand up and improve the program. We would welcome the conversation with interested legislators and would like to revisit this issue once we have some data and experience on the program to look at.

Our other concern with this proposal is that in 2021 we all purposely decided that the threshold should be set by the BOR and not in statute so that we can be responsive to the experience of the program and can evolve and move that threshold as the data informs us.

HB 6566 AN ACT CONCERNING REPORTING FOR THE DEBT-FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAM.

This is legislation that CSCU has requested and which we strongly support to move the fall semester reporting deadline for the PACT debt free community college program out one month to better align with fall financial aid awards and our ability to submit accurate and complete data.

Currently the fall semester reporting deadline is established in statute as October 1. However of the five data points required for us to submit, the information on 1) # of recipients of the minimum grant award 2) # of recipients of the unpaid portion award, and 3) the average award amount are not finalized and accounted for until roughly the middle of October. The other incomplete data point (complete rates for recipients) is not available until the first cohorts of students have graduated.

Moving the deadline to November 1 should provide our staff with sufficient time to finalize the information and submit one complete report on PACT for the fall, and provide actionable information to the General Assembly well ahead of the next legislative session. Of note, we do not have this issue for our Spring semester report which is due March 1, because that is late enough into the semester that awards have been released and most appeals have been completed by that time, so we are not seeking a change in the Spring report deadline.

SB 922 AN ACT PROHIBITING AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION FROM WITHHOLDING TRANSCRIPTS.

This bill would prohibit institutions of higher education from withholding student transcripts from employers, prospective employers or any branch of the military service of the United States as a means to collect a student debt. As we supported the same language in SB 17 last legislative session, CSCU is proud to stand in support of this legislation again today. The language before you represents a collaborative effort among the public and private higher education institutions in this state, advocates, and legislators to craft legislation that would curtail the use of transcript holds in ways that may damage a students earning or career potentials but still allow institutions to use this as a less harmful tool prior to sending students to a debt collection agency.