

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-203

AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONSIDERATION OF FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIP
DURING THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS BY AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER

Title: EDUCATION.

Vote Date: 3/14/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/29/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill aims to eliminate the practice of legacy-based preference in the college admissions process at both private and public universities throughout the state of Connecticut. The legislation, effective as of July 1, 2024, seeks to rectify systemic inequities within college admissions by abolishing preferential treatment based on familial connections rather than individual merit. Critics of the practice say legacy-based preference perpetuates a cycle of privilege and gives a significant advantage to certain students at the expense of others. By eradicating this practice, the bill promotes fairness and equal opportunity for all students, regardless of their familial history with the institution.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language eliminates a relationship to a donor as a consideration factor in the admissions process. Additionally, it specifies that information regarding the specified relationships shall only be disclosed to and known by the university or college after the conclusion of the admissions process.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Terrence Cheng, Chancellor, Connecticut State Colleges and Universities](#): Supports this bill, stating that "all four CSCU's confirm that they no longer utilize legacy preference." He also stated that CCSU "applaud the intent of this legislation."

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Evelyn Alonso, Student](#): Supports this bill stating that this bill would make the admissions process more equitable. She shared her perspective as a first-generation low-income student. She stated her belief that since the elimination of affirmative action in the college admission process, this bill, while maintaining legacy admissions, is inherently unfair and "contradicts the concept of an equitable playing field" during the college admissions process.

[Ryan Cielikowski, Class Action Lead Organizer and co-founder](#): Supports this bill stating that it's "a necessary step to increase equity in higher education in Connecticut and America. Mr. Cieslikoski also stated that legacy consideration in the admissions process gives wealthy students an advantage. Mr. Cieslikoski also stated the belief that schools represent themselves as bastions of diversity and social good" and that they "could not possibly live up to those ambitions while legacy preference exists."

[Amy Dowell, Executive Director of Education Reform Now CT](#): Supports this bill stating that that legacy preference is a barrier "perpetuating racial and socio-economic inequities." She points out that "more than one-quarter of Connecticut institutions of higher education explicitly use legacy weights in admissions." She also shares a statistic from a Pew survey that found "75% of Americans believe family members should not be a consideration in college admissions." She closes with a call to remove this "barrier."

[Seth Freeman, President of the Congress of Community Colleges \(4Cs\) SEIU 1973](#): Supports this bill stating that it would address equity in college admissions and because it would "guarantee that all applicants are assessed solely on their merits and their potential to enrich the academic community." Mr. Freeman also states his belief that "it promotes fairness and transparency in admissions practices, fostering a more inclusive higher education system."

[Birkiti Kahsai, The Yale College Council](#): Supports this bill stating that the concept of legacy is inherently exclusionary. She stated that "legacy-preferential admissions was implemented with the intention of upholding the social exclusivity of prestigious institutions." She also went on to state that "those who benefit such preferences have remained disproportionately White and Wealthy." She would go on to call the practice "archaic."

[James Murphy, Director of Postsecondary Policy, Education Reform Now](#): Supports this bill because of his belief that the practice of legacy preferences is "wrong" as well as "unethical and anti-American." Mr. Murphy would go on to state that Yale was wrong when they "started using legacy preferences almost a century ago in order to limit the enrollment of Jews." He also brought up the importance of this measure now given the fact that the Supreme Court banned the consideration of race in admissions last June.

[Viet Nguyen, Executive Director, EdMobilizer](#): Supports this bill, stating that "Legacy admissions perpetuate social and economic inequalities" which often results "in a disproportionate representation of privileged individuals in higher education. She would go on to point out that the practice "undermines the principles of meritocracy and denies countless deserving students" especially those who come from "low-income backgrounds" She would go on to say with the passage of this bill Connecticut has "the opportunity to level the playing field and create a fairer system for all students" she also stated that the elimination of these

preferences would "empower first-generation college students and those for low-income backgrounds."

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

[Greg Eichhorn, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Success, University of New Haven](#): Stated that while at his institution, University of New Haven does not consider an applicant's legacy status in the admissions process they still oppose this legislation. Mr. Eichhorn would go on to state that "the State would be best served by prioritizing pathways and opportunities that create new opportunities to invest in aspiring college students."

[Mark R. Nemec, President and Professor of Politics, Fairfield University](#): Opposes this bill Stating that Fairfield University opposes this bill because it would be "detrimental to our community and the principles of higher education." Mr. Nemec stated that Fairfield University has the belief that as a private entity the state should not have the ability to "intervene in the admissions process" and that this legislation would be an infringement on their autonomy. Mr. Nemec goes on to point out that a one-size-fits-all doesn't work and undermines and "overlooks the complexity of the process and the myriad of factors" considered in the admissions process.

[John Petillo, President, Sacred Heart University](#): Opposes this bill, stating that while this legislation is "well intentioned" it allows the state to "dictate that admission policies of private institutions" Mr. Petillo shared the sentiment that more needs to be done to allow access to higher education however he stated that "this is not the answer." Mr. Petillo also stated that there are bigger issues than legacy admissions, stating the high cost of higher education in Connecticut, he goes on to state that the "estimated state grant per undergraduate enrollment, at \$268" trailed the "national average of \$1058" Mr. Petillo would go on to state that private institutions "must be allowed to set their own standards and policies for admittance without government intervention. He concluded by warning of the "adverse effects on students who meet or exceed a school's admission standards but risk being rejected because their parents or siblings attended the same school, and admissions cannot appear to be in violation of the legacy law."

[Jeremiah Quinlan, Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, Yale University](#): Opposes this bill, in his testimony he stated his goal of enrolling low income and first-generation students since he became Dean of Undergraduate Admissions in 2013. He also stated that this bill "does not address the real challenge." He goes on to state that "the state should not dictate who is admitted to college." He proceeded to call on the General Assembly to support their efforts of providing higher education to low-income and first-generation students by encouraging Connecticut colleges to "implement recruitment and outreach strategies directed at low-income, first-generation, and under-represented students", supporting "promise programs", and "fully funding the Roberta Willis Scholarship Program."

[Joanne Berger-Sweeney, President, Trinity College](#): Opposes this bill, stating that "awareness of an applicant's familial relationship does not make otherwise inadmissible or unqualified student admissible." Ms. Berger would go on to state that this bill "attempts to address a policy that does not exist as some assume" and that "proposals like this are a continuation of government unproductively interfering with college admissions practice."

[Jennifer Widness, President, Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges](#): Opposes this bill, because "institutions are in the best position to determine the criteria that will help them build a diverse admissions class with an appropriate range of talent, background, and interests." Ms. Widness would go on to state that no all of her consider legacy in their admissions process. She would go on to call for a fund increase in the "Roberta Willis Scholarship Program." She concluded by stating "no state in the country prohibits independent colleges from considering legacy preference in the admissions process."

[Danielle Wilken, President, University of Bridgeport](#): Opposes the bills stating that while the University of Bridgeport "supports the intent of this bill" they oppose what this bill seeks to accomplish this goal by "interfering with institutional autonomy." Ms. Wilken would go on to state that the University of Bridgeport has "made a strong commitment to equity and access in education." Ms. Wilken would conclude by asking the committee to "consider taking less intrusive and more impactful action towards accomplishing the goal of promoting access and diversity in post-secondary education by reinvesting in need based financial aid."

Reported by: Chris Peritore

Date: 4/1/2024