

Statement of Jeremiah Quinlan
Dean of Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid, Yale University
Concerning SB 203, “An Act Concerning the Consideration of Familial Relationship During the Admissions Process by an Institution of Higher Education”

Senator Slap, Representative Haddad, Senator Kelly, Representative Haines, and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to express Yale University’s serious concern about SB 203, “An Act Concerning the Consideration of Familial Relationship During the Admissions Process by an Institution of Higher Education.”

I am Jeremiah Quinlan, Dean of Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid at Yale University. Yale agrees with the central aim of SB 203 – enrolling more low-income and first-generation students and helping them gain the full, life-changing benefits of a college education. Indeed, I have personally made that a goal since becoming Dean of Undergraduate Admissions in 2013. However, Yale disagrees strongly with the approach of SB 203 because the state should not dictate how colleges and universities make admissions decisions, just as the state should not dictate whom we hire as faculty or what we teach in the curriculum. Moreover, SB 203 does not address the real challenge – providing less-advantaged Connecticut students with the resources necessary to prepare for college and to graduate on time.

There is ample evidence that providing first-generation and low-income students with an education from a rigorous and well-resourced university such as Yale is a powerful tool in fostering economic and social mobility. It is one of the reasons Yale has strived, through a combination of aggressive recruitment and outreach and the most generous financial aid in the country, to enroll the most diverse student body in its history. In the class of students who started studies this fall, 22% are eligible for a Pell Grant, and 21% are the first generation in their family to attend college.

Furthermore, 59% of the first-year class are US citizens or permanent residents who identify as a member of a minority racial or ethnic group. The number of Yale students who are eligible for the Pell Grant is nearly twice as high as it was a decade ago, and the numbers of undergraduates who identify as people of color, and those who will be the first in their families to attend college, have both increased by more than 60% over the past ten years.

Yale’s Approach to Recruiting and Graduating Low-Income and First-Generation Students. Yale’s Office of Undergraduate Admissions strives to assemble a group of the most promising students from the most diverse collection of backgrounds. Yale’s need-based financial aid policies support this goal by making a Yale College education affordable for everyone. Yale is one of only eight American colleges and universities that do not consider any family’s ability to pay when making admissions decisions and that meet every student’s full demonstrated financial need without requiring loans.

Every Yale undergraduate from a family that cannot afford the full cost of attendance receives a need-based scholarship that helps them meet the full cost of attendance, including tuition, housing, the meal plan, travel, books, and personal expenses.

Families with incomes below \$75,000 (with typical assets) are not expected to make any financial contribution towards their child’s Yale education. These families’ awards also include free health insurance and a \$2,000 startup grant. For the current academic year, 53% of undergraduates receive

Yale scholarships, with an average annual award of more than \$66,500. For families earning less than \$110,000, Yale is the least expensive four-year school in Connecticut.

Between 2006 and 2020, the average price paid by families receiving financial aid fell by 17% in nominal dollars and by 35% when adjusted for inflation. In 2005, 43% of Yale College students graduated with loan debt; last year only 15% did. Since 2006, the annual budget for Yale College financial aid has more than tripled to over \$241 million. Yale awarded every dollar of that budget on the basis of financial need alone.

Since 2017 Yale College has expanded undergraduate enrollment to provide more opportunity to more promising students. Enrollment this year is 25% higher than it was prior to expansion, and more than 1,300 additional undergraduates are receiving a Yale education this year compared with a decade ago.

Yale has also developed new programs to ensure the success of first-generation and low-income students. The First-Year Scholars at Yale (FSY) program offers a free five-week summer residential program in writing and math to incoming low-income students from under-resourced high schools. Online Experiences for Yale Scholars (ONEXYS) provides a larger cohort of incoming students with a personalized preparatory curriculum in mathematics. Students on financial aid can apply for emergency financial assistance for unanticipated expenses. Academic advisors and subject expert tutors are affiliated with each of Yale's 14 small residential colleges and are accessible through academic departments, cultural houses, and the innovative Poorvu Center for Teacher and Learning, where all students have free access to writing and math tutors.

Thanks to these investments, the six-year graduation rate for Pell Grant recipients who began in Fall 2016 was 94% – among the highest in the nation.

In Yale's view, these are the types of strategies and investments that are needed to increase the number of low-income, first-generation, or other underrepresented students who are admitted to Connecticut colleges and universities – and, equally important, who graduate.

The State Should Not Dictate Who Is Admitted to College. The process and criteria for selecting students for admission, together with the processes and criteria for hiring faculty and deciding which courses to offer, defines an academic campus community and culture. Accordingly, federal and state policy and Supreme Court precedent have long respected the autonomy of educational institutions in these most fundamental mission-driven policies and practices. We urge the General Assembly to exercise restraint and avoid intruding into the academic and mission-driven decision-making of Connecticut's public and private institutions of higher education.

Just as every Connecticut college or university teaches different classes in different ways in fulfillment of its educational mission, each institution should likewise be allowed to assemble a student body that promotes its educational goals. A university may make a voluntary decision to forgo consideration of legacy status in the application process, but a Connecticut state law dictating that decision for independent colleges and universities would be unprecedented and would invite future legislatures to impose their own views on who should be admitted in ways that threaten academic freedom.

An Alternative. We are skeptical that a ban on legacy preferences in admissions would have a material effect on representation of low-income, first-generation, or under-represented students. Indeed, Yale

has already realized a dramatic increase in the representation of these students on our campus in the past decade, without eliminating other admissions preferences.

I share with the General Assembly the belief that a student body that is diverse along many dimensions provides a better learning experience for everyone. I am proud of the [initiatives Yale has launched](#) in response to the 2023 Supreme Court ruling on race in admissions, and the [progress we have made in just a few months](#). These initiatives are designed to expand Yale's outreach, build new talent pipelines, and support a culture of belonging in Yale College.

Building on initiatives such as those at Yale, the state should support schools in their efforts to identify, recruit, and graduate low-income and first-generation students. The General Assembly could offer this support by:

- Encouraging Connecticut colleges and universities to implement recruitment and outreach strategies directed at low-income, first-generation, and under-represented students. Yale supports legislation before the Committee, HB 5239, that would expand the Connecticut Collegiate Awareness and Preparation Program.
- Supporting Promise programs and other evidence-based academic enrichment programs for high school students in less-advantaged circumstances to build their academic credentials and be more competitive with students from more advantaged circumstances.
- Fully funding the Roberta Willis Scholarship Program to enable all students, regardless of family circumstances, to complete college in a timely manner.

Conclusion. We commend the Committee for raising the important topic of increasing access to higher education among first-generation, low-income, and under-represented students. This is a priority for Yale and has been a focus of my efforts as Dean of Undergraduate Admissions. A state statute banning legacy admissions would not address the crucial challenges of preparing students for college, recruiting them, and ensuring that they graduate. Moreover, such a ban would undermine the autonomy of colleges and universities in Connecticut, public or private, religious-affiliated or secular, to shape their campus culture and community in accordance with their different missions and academic judgment. We urge the Committee not to advance SB 203 and instead to provide resources to assist colleges and universities in meeting their goals for diversity and inclusion.