

Testimony on H.B. 05550
March 18, 2026

To the members of the hearing committee:

Thank you for your time in reading my testimony. My name is Drew Michael McWeeney, and I am an Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education and program chairperson of the early childhood education department at CT State Community College – Norwalk. I am also a Ph.D. candidate in Education at the University of Hartford.

I am writing to oppose **H.B. 05550: An Act Concerning A Technical Change Concerning Government Administration and Exempting Course Syllabi From Disclosure Under The Freedom Of Information Act.**

Public institutions exist to serve the public, and materials that define the instruction that students receive, such as course syllabi, should remain accessible to taxpayers, parents and students.

At an institution of higher education, a syllabus is defined as: an academic document that outlines the following including, but not limited to: course objectives, standards, the assigned readings, grading criteria, expectations, institution policies, course policies and structures, assignments, and instructional schedules.

A syllabus is given to students at the beginning of a course and acts like a legal contract because it does not give students the opportunity to fight a professor and claim something otherwise when that professor's syllabus was very clear as to what the expectations are and how the course(s) will run. Of course, there are always faculty members that are not just incompetent but also can not write a syllabi correctly. However, in one instance since I started teaching college, it helped me avoid penalties in a discrimination concern that arose. A syllabus is highly important because it is part of a student's course of study – and it is part of the documentation that indicates how a student is meeting the requirements for their degree that he or she is pursuing. And, the institutions that are awarding degrees are being funded by taxpayers and tuition-paying families. Therefore, when tax dollars support an institution, they have a right to know what is being taught.

In many states, syllabi are routinely disclosed through open records requests without issue. Transparency in these documents allows prospective students to make informed decisions about what and where they want to study. It also allows current students to see what they are going to be learning to make decisions as to whether the content meets their needs. It also ensures that faculty are held accountable; it ensures faculty is not teaching inappropriate content.

The core principle of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) laws is to compel a publically-funded institution to operate transparently, unless there is a very compelling reason for secrecy. A syllabus is one material that guides instruction. And any material that guides instruction is part of official operations. And because it is part of official operations, then it should not be exempt from disclosure, because preventing syllabi from disclosure contradicts the very purpose of open records laws by limiting transparency about publically-funded instruction.

Research on transparency from an article in the Journal of Communication Studies that was published in 2022 suggests that transparency helps to build public trust. And historically, open access to government records, including educational materials, has helped ensure that publically-funded institutions remain accountable and responsive to the communities they serve. And, when taxpayers fund any educational system such as a public institution, they are entitled to understand the academic content and expectations those systems provide.

People who support this bill are arguing that syllabi should be protected because they represent intellectual property or could expose faculty to political pressure. However, syllabi are not scholarly works; they are administrative documents that summarize course structure and assigned materials. And because they are not scholarly works, they are not intellectual property. Faculty scholarship in a course includes the course content – and this already receives intellectual property protection. Additionally, transparency does not undermine academic freedom. Rather, it ensures that institutions receiving public funding remain accountable to the public they serve. Also, even if a member of the public does not like what is in a syllabus, the faculty member can just ignore that complaint and move on with their life unless it is gross incompetence.

I personally oppose this bill because I want to make sure that if there are horrible faculty members working at publically-funded institutions, I want them fired and exposed. Our students deserve teachers that are professing their content as experts in their field, not anything that happens to be motivated by a personal desire to get students to think the same way they do because they feel strongly about something – especially if it has nothing to do with their field.

In conclusion, I am writing to oppose **H.B. 0550: An Act Concerning A Technical Change Concerning Government Administration and Exempting Course Syllabi From Disclosure Under The Freedom Of Information Act.**

While I acknowledge that it is important to protect legitimate intellectual property and academic independence, exempting syllabi from FOIA undermines transparency.

As I always say: Policy should avoid perpetuating this process.

Respectfully submitted,
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