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**Testimony for the
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
Jennifer Widness, President
Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges
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On behalf of the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges (CCIC), I am submitting testimony on four bills before your today:

- **S.B. 824: AN ACT REQUIRING TRAINING FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNING BOARDS OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE STATE**
- **H.B. 5668: AN ACT REQUIRING THE OFFICE OF HIGHER EDUCATION TO ESTABLISH A MICROCREDENTIAL PILOT PROGRAM**
- **H.B. 6583: AN ACT REQUIRING INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION TO SUBMIT CLOSURE PLANS TO THE OFFICE OF HIGHER EDUCATION**
- **H.B. 6582: AN ACT CONCERNING UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FOR ADJUNCT FACULTY**

S.B. 824: AN ACT REQUIRING TRAINING FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNING BOARDS OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE STATE

This bill would require independent institutions of higher education adopt a policy requiring that each member of the school's governing board receive instruction and training at least once every four years in financial management of institutions of higher education, legal and fiduciary responsibilities of a member of such governing board and applicable standards for accreditation of institutions of higher education and programs of higher learning. The bill further requires that institutions post the policy on its website as well as a summary of the training provided every four years.

CCIC appreciates the intent of this bill and understands the importance of a strong training program for a higher education institution's Board of Directors. We also very much appreciate the modifications that have been made to this bill compared to last year's version.

However, some of our member institutions strongly oppose this bill and view it as a complete overreach and unnecessary. Our member institutions all take the issue of onboarding and training Board members seriously. Having a well-informed and well-trained board is critical for the

overall health of an institution. Professional development and training of these Board members about issues concerning higher education is ongoing.

Further, all of the private, non-profit colleges in the state are regionally accredited and must undergo significant and comprehensive accreditations and evaluations at 5 and 10-year intervals by the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE), **which includes a review and assessment of the institutions governing board, its functions and effectiveness.**

No other state in the country mandates training for board members of private colleges in this manner, other than Massachusetts. Wisconsin, in fact, has a state statute prohibiting state intrusion in the policies and governance of independent higher education.

CCIC's member institutions value the support that this Committee consistently shows for independent higher education in a diverse higher education community in Connecticut. Our opposition to this bill stems in large part from a concern about insulating the governance of independent colleges and universities from political influences. For this reason, we believe that restraint in establishing directives about governing boards of private entities is the best course for the state. As such, we must oppose this bill.

H.B. 5668: AN ACT REQUIRING THE OFFICE OF HIGHER EDUCATION TO ESTABLISH A MICROCREDENTIAL PILOT PROGRAM

This bill seeks to require the Office of Higher Education to establish a pilot program to develop a virtual platform on which state residents can earn microcredentials. "Microcredential" is defined in the bill as a digital badge earned in six months or less through completion of for-credit or noncredit coursework and demonstrated mastery of a specific skill.

Many CCIC institutions offer short-term, for-credit credential programs. Increasingly, these short-term programs serve as on-ramps to post-secondary degrees for students. A statewide platform to make these programs more visible and accessible to students and employers in the state could be useful. Further, having a policy in place to ensure programs offered through this platform meet basic standards would benefit students and their families.

We urge close collaboration with the Office of Workforce strategy so that the microcredential programs highlighted by the platform align with the in-demand careers that OWS is seeking to promote.

H.B. 6583: AN ACT REQUIRING INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION TO SUBMIT CLOSURE PLANS TO THE OFFICE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

This bill seeks to require independent institutions of higher education in the state to submit to the Office of Higher Education a closure plan and, if an institution plans to close, a written notice regarding the arrangements for such closure.

We appreciate that the bill allows for regionally accredited institutions such as CCIC members to submit to OHE the same closure plan that has been submitted to their regional accreditor to minimize the duplication of efforts.

We would seek clarity that this bill does not apply to the four private, non-profit institutions of higher education in the state who are not licensed and accredited by the Office of Higher Education and for which section 10a-34e should not apply.

H.B. 6582: AN ACT CONCERNING UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FOR ADJUNCT FACULTY

This bill requires the Department of Labor to consider specific circumstances when determining whether an individual who performs instructional, research or principal administrative duties at an institution of higher education is eligible to receive unemployment compensation, in an effort to provide eligibility for unemployment benefits to certain adjunct faculty.

CCIC has significant concerns about this bill.

First, the nature of adjunct faculty is that their positions are part-time and temporary. They are hired by institutions of higher education to supplement the course offerings by teaching a course that may not need to be offered every year or every semester. It is not intended to be a permanent position. Many adjunct faculty are employed elsewhere; are retired from full-time work; or only desire part-time employment. According to a TIAA Institute study on Adjunct Faculty, adjunct faculty are paid an average of \$3,000 per course, but almost 60% of adjuncts are in households with an income of \$50,000 or more. The majority of adjuncts are in households where adjunct earnings are not the primary source of household income.

Second, the bill is impractical on a number of fronts. It requires institutions of higher education to annually provide the Department of Labor a week before the end of each academic year or term a list of individuals who performed services in an instructional, research or principal administrative capacity services who *do* have a reasonable assurance of providing such services in the same capacity during the second academic year or term and those who *do not*. It further requires the institutions to describe the manner in which the reasonable assurance was offered.

Institutions of higher education often can not make a commitment in April or May to the Department of Labor what its fall course schedule will look like. Schedules are finalized over the summer. If a course does not have adequate enrollment to proceed, a course may be canceled.

Last, this bill would be cost prohibitive to implement for institutions of higher education that are already facing enormous fiscal stress. Between reductions in revenue and increased costs to operate in the pandemic, CCIC member institutions have collectively lost over \$225 million since March; federal funding has covered less than 30% of those losses thus far.

Unlike public institutions of higher education, independent institutions are self-insured and have to cover their unemployment expenses out of their operating budget. If unemployment were to

be made available to certain adjunct faculty – who are temporary, non-permanent employees by their very nature – institutions would be forced to pass the cost along to students and families.