



Sacred Heart UNIVERSITY

Testimony for the
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
March 2, 2021

Sacred Heart University would like to submit testimony today on two bills up for consideration:

S.B. 881 AN ACT CONCERNING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

H.B. 6374 AN ACT CONCERNING SEXUAL MISCONDUCT ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

Regarding, **S.B. 881 AN ACT CONCERNING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**, Sacred Heart University applauds the Governor for establishing the Governor's Workforce Council and putting resources and a strong team in place to support the implementation of the Council's Strategic Plan. We look forward to partnering with the newly established Office of Workforce Strategies to ensure Connecticut has the talent pipeline it needs to meet the needs of the state's employers and to provide opportunity for our state's citizens. Sacred Heart and the other independent colleges in the state are well-positioned to support this effort as we offer in-demand degrees and have the capacity to quickly respond to the needs of employers with new degree and certificate programs. Because of our capability to be responsive and supportive, we would ask legislators to ensure that any language creating programs or opportunities for funding are flexible enough for private, nonprofit colleges to participate.

The Governor's Workforce Council's strategic plans call on higher education institutions and workforce development programs to work more closely and in alignment with business and industry in our state. One of the barriers that continues to be in place for independent colleges is the requirement that private, nonprofit institutions of higher education must submit new programs for approval to the Office of Higher Education when they reach the limit of the current statutory exemption of 12 programs annually. This arbitrary limit on new programs is inconsistent with the call for higher education institutions to be responsive to changing economy and employers need and to attract and retain talent in the state.

Regarding program overview, Connecticut remains one of few states in the country to continue to require private, nonprofit colleges to go through this level of review. The public colleges are not required to have OHE review their programs and, under the bill, they will no longer have to report to OHE at all about their program offerings. We would ask that the bill be amended to remove the 12-program cap for private nonprofit colleges and allow us the flexibility we need to respond to the needs of the state's employers in developing new programs.

On the subject of FAFSA completion, we strongly support the provision in this bill that seeks to require high school students to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) prior to graduation, beginning with the class of 2024, with a few important exceptions that are outlined in the bill. We are willing to support its implementation by offering support to students and districts. One important component of closing the vast opportunity gap that exists in Connecticut is to do more to educate high school students about their eligibility for financial aid and to help them understand that higher education – at a public or private college – is more accessible than they might think.

We strongly support the expansion of the UPASS program to students attending independent institutions. We have been interested in rolling this out to our students since it was first introduced in 2017. Expanding UPASS will provide greater access for our students to attend class, work and participate in internships in the state.

While we are supportive of NEBHE's high-value credential registry initiative, we are concerned about the mandate in the bill that every institution in the state must upload at least 12 data points on every single program that they offer and keep the data on their institution updated. We suggest that participation in this credential registry be voluntary for independent institutions and that independent institutions have an appointment on the advisory council working with the OHE to create this new database.

Sacred Heart University is eager to engage in the Automatic Admission program that seeks to ease the burden of applying to participating higher education institutions in Connecticut for certain qualified high school seniors in the state. We appreciate that the bill facilitates the opportunity for independent institutions to participate in this program, but would ask that independent institutions be permitted to participate in the program from the beginning – rather than having to wait until the summer of 2023 – and that the fee associated with participation be lowered from \$50,000 per institution.

Regarding, **H.B. 6374 AN ACT CONCERNING SEXUAL MISCONDUCT ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES**, Sacred Heart University supports the underlying concepts of the bill, and we recognize the importance of giving students and employees a continued voice on issues like campus climate.

Sacred Heart frequently seeks feedback from our students a variety of ways. Climate surveys are not the only method we use to collect data and information on sexual misconduct. We provide multiple avenues for students to report sexual misconduct, anonymously or not.

Sacred Heart has no objection to a climate survey every two years. In fact, we support such an instrument designed to learn about and respond to student needs. However, we would like the autonomy to choose the instrument that best supports our campus and culture. Our campus climate survey is likely to encompass much more than issues around sexual misconduct. Equity and diversity are critically important as well. Questions regarding experiences based on other protected classes (such as race, disability, national origin) may be included. In addition, we would like to point out that every campus is different, and surveys need the ability to reflect that.

We would ask the Committee to consider modifying the bill so that rather than having the Council select survey instruments, a limited number of data points are identified that institutions statewide collect every two years, within their own climate survey tools, and then report this information back to the legislature via our annual report required under 10a-55m. This is the approach Massachusetts took in its recent legislation and an approach we would support as well.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to weigh in on S.B. 881 and H. B. 6374.

Sincerely,

Gary Macnamara
Executive Director of Public Safety & Governmental Affairs