

UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD

Testimony to the Committee on the Governor's Workforce Development bill SB 881: [An Act Concerning Workforce Development](#) March 2, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on behalf of the University of Hartford concerning SB 881. We recognize and support the important work by the Governor's Workforce Council to provide access to educational opportunities for CT residents, along with your commitment to ensure the pipeline of talent necessary to meet the needs of employers within the state. As an independent university within Connecticut, we are well positioned to help in these efforts by recruiting, retaining, and graduating students in relevant degree programs that meet the demands of a shifting labor market. We are actively innovating and working to provide experiential learning opportunities and partnerships to produce a prepared, educated, and skilled workforce. We have been and will continue to be a strong and supportive partner in the state's workforce development efforts. Therefore, we ask legislators to ensure that any language creating programs or opportunities for funding are flexible enough for Connecticut's private, non-profit colleges to participate.

Academic Program Approval: The Governor's Workforce Council strategic plans calls 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, non-profit 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 provided in 10a-34 limit of 12 programs annually. While 12 new programs annually may seem like a big enough cushion, the University of Hartford could quickly exceed that cap if we chose to offer a series of new degrees in one concentration. Connecticut remains one of few states in the country to continue to require private, non-profit colleges to have 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 anything at all about their program

offerings. We would ask that the bill be amended to remove the 12-program cap on our program approval exemption to better position private, non-profit colleges to respond to the needs of the state's employers in developing new programs.

FAFSA Completion: The University of Hartford strongly supports the provision in this bill which seeks to require high school students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) prior to graduation, starting with the class of 2024. As an institution, we will continue to support high schools in the Hartford area and throughout the state by offering opportunities to assist students with FAFSA completion and financial aid literacy. Many students across the state are not familiar with the many financial aid programs they may be eligible for at both private and public institutions. The FAFSA form remains the most important starting point to helping them recognize the availability of funding. We strongly believe this process will help to close the opportunity gap that exists in Connecticut by helping students realize that access to higher education is not financially out of reach for both private and public institutions.

UPASS: We want to reaffirm our support for expanding UPASS to students attending independent institutions. University of Hartford students benefit from robust partnerships with area businesses, schools, community organizations, healthcare facilities, and more. Consider the important role that *all* colleges and universities have in connecting students to the many assets and opportunities within their regional area and the important impact of such exposure.

While some students will have their own personal means of transportation, the UPASS program would provide an easy, safe, and affordable alternative for students to make these important connections and cultivate a relationship with the area around them. With this, we would ask for further consideration on the requirement that a pass must be purchased for *every* enrolled student. This program should shine as a tremendous opportunity for students to access the state's public transportation and not as a financial burden to those students that may not need it.

Automatic Admission: The University of Hartford shares in the desire to ease the burden of applying to college by removing unnecessary barriers and requirements. We join in the eagerness to participate in the Automatic Admission program for qualified students and are appreciative of the state's willingness to include independent institutions in this initiative. We are however requesting that interested independent institutions be permitted to participate in this program earlier than the summer of 2023 as noted in the bill. Students who are automatically admitted to a college or university would certainly have a higher propensity to enroll compared to students who have been solicited to "apply". Excluding the state's independent colleges and universities for any period of time has the potential to put them at a severe disadvantage in building their incoming class. Further, the proposed institutional fee of \$50,000 for participation serves as an additional barrier. We are asking that this fee threshold be drastically reduced, if not eliminated. The

University of Hartford enrolls our largest number of students from Connecticut high schools. If the spirit of this program is to give students meaningful access to college, we encourage the state to consider these requests and allow this program to flourish by providing students the ability to have choice amongst the excellent private and public institutions the state is fortunate to have.

Respectfully Submitted,

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