

Testimony of Yale University
SB 881, An Act Concerning Workforce Development
March 2, 2021

Representative Elliott, Senator Haskell, Representative Haines, Senator Witkos, and Members of the Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to comment on SB 881, “An Act Concerning Workforce Development.” Yale University supports the recommendations of the Governor’s Workforce Council for a coordinated, statewide strategy for identifying workforce needs in the state and ensuring that all Connecticut residents are prepared for a career of their choice. Yale agrees with the aims of SB 881 and has wishes to work with the Committee to refine the legislation.

FAFSA Completion. Yale University supports section 13 of the bill which would require high school students to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) prior to graduation unless they have obtained written permission from a parent or guardian not to complete the application. This rule would take effect with the class of 2024. Completing the FAFSA helps to dispel students’ and families’ misimpressions about the affordability of college; in addition, research has shown that providing families assistance in completing the FAFSA significantly raises the chances that a student will enroll in college (<https://www.nber.org/papers/w15361>). These are compelling reasons for high school students to complete the FAFSA.

Yale is engaged in encouraging Connecticut students to prepare for and attend college. Yale works closely with New Haven Public Schools on a number of programs, including Yale’s Science Pathways, to offer academic and research experiences that complement the students’ work in school. Yale is also a co-founder and principal funder of New Haven Promise, which has awarded scholarships to 1,900 students since it was established in 2014. A central aim of these programs, in addition to providing academic and financial support, is to help New Haven students see college as possible for them.

In addition, FAFSA New Haven (<https://fafsanewhaven.org>) introduces students to the FAFSA and the CSS Profile, while also providing advice about financial aid and completing college on time. FAFSA New Haven held 15 “FAFSA Days” sessions for the high school class of 2021, offering personalized assistance in completing the FAFSA.

We recognize that some high schools across the state may be challenged to meet this mandate if it is enacted. In addition to providing a phase-in period, the General Assembly should consider how to treat students who make a good faith effort to complete the FAFSA but cannot find the assistance they may require. It may also be necessary to recruit and train volunteers who would assist high school students in completing the FAFSA.

UPASS Program. The Governor’s Workforce Council noted that availability of affordable transportation is an important factor in enabling access to workforce training and higher education. Affordable public transit also helps students to travel to internships and other work experiences; it gives them greater choices in where they live; and it makes Connecticut more attractive after graduation to a generation of students who do not wish to rely on cars. Yale University supports section 22 of the bill, which would authorize the Department of Transportation to expand access to independent college and university students in the state to bus and rail transportation services.

The Department of Transportation has for years offered students at public colleges and universities low-cost access to bus and rail service; the “UPASS” program has proved to be very popular, and it has enabled students at participating institutions to reduce the cost of traveling to classes, internships, and other activities. It has also encouraged the use of public transportation instead of cars, reducing congestion and greenhouse gas emissions. There is strong interest among Yale students, especially graduate and professional students, in having access to a program like UPASS. We believe this program or one like it should be available to students at any college or university in Connecticut.

Credential Registry. Yale University agrees that prospective students would benefit from having consistent information about options for postsecondary education through NEBHE’s High Value Credential Registry initiative (section 3 of SB 881). In other states, participation in the credential registry is voluntary, and we recommend the participation in this credential registry be voluntary for independent institutions in Connecticut. Finally, we recommend that independent higher education institutions have an appointment on the Advisory Council working with the Office of Higher Education to create this new database.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.