

UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD

Testimony for the Appropriations Committee
Katherine Deacon, Director of Student Financial Aid
University of Hartford
March 4, 2021

On behalf of the University of Hartford, I am submitting testimony in support of continuing to fund the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship Program.

During a year where many families have been impacted by job loss and unemployment due to COVID-19, these scholarship funds will continue to make higher education accessible and affordable for our neediest Connecticut students. **The appropriation for this program has not increased since FY 2015.** This year, perhaps more than ever, these funds will contribute to the future of Connecticut by helping students persist toward earning their degree. In addition to providing financial support, the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship Program demonstrates to our Connecticut students that the state values them and wants to help them pursue higher education. We must continue to commit to helping our students achieve their educational aspirations.

The University of Hartford educates about 4,000 full time undergraduate students, annually, of which 37% are from Connecticut. Many of these students benefit from the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship Program, but there are so many more that could benefit from this assistance. Last year, the university supported 559 full time students from CT that received Federal Pell grant funds. This demonstrates the highest need level. The University was able to support 214 total students with Roberta B. Willis Scholarship funds, of which 189 were Pell grant recipients. With additional funding, we are committed to supporting more students as they pursue the next steps in their education. The average family income of the students who received RWSP funds is approximately \$40,000 per year.

Students who receive the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship are often high academic achievers as displayed by a mean grade point average of 3.30. These are students who can contribute to a better future for Connecticut. Among the University of Hartford, Connecticut students are future engineers, entrepreneurs, physical therapists, nurses, respiratory therapists, artists, and teachers – to name a few. Investing in our CT students will ultimately contribute to the long-term stability of our state.

The University of Hartford will continue to assist low-income Connecticut students by providing them the opportunity to earn a degree. We ask that you uphold your commitment to the success of deserving Connecticut students by preserving funding for this program that will help make this a reality for them.

Thank you in advance for voting to fully fund, and hopefully increase, the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship program.