



# CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

Katherine Bergeron  
*President*

## Memorandum

*To:* Higher Education Committee

*From:* Katherine Bergeron, President

*Re:* House Bill 5034: An Act Prohibiting An Institution of Higher Education From Considering Legacy Preferences in the Admissions Process

*Date:* Feb. 17, 2022

I am grateful for the opportunity to share my thinking about House Bill 5034.

Connecticut College is committed to fostering a campus environment where all students, no matter their circumstances, have the ability to thrive, reach their potential, and contribute to the thriving of others for the greater good. This is the ideal we call **full participation**. It is the same core value that lies at the center of our admission strategy, which focuses on increasing the opportunity and the means for talented students of every background to attend our college.

Over the last two decades, we have created signature initiatives like our own Science Leaders Program, with its focus on supporting underrepresented students in the sciences; and the New London Scholars Program, which allows students and teachers from New London County to take a course at the College at no cost. We have enjoyed a long and fruitful relationship with The Posse Foundation as well, an organization that has curated teams of student leaders from the same city to pursue higher education on our campus. By May, a total of 95 Posse scholars from Chicago will have graduated from Conn.

Connecticut College is one of a small handful of colleges in the country committed to meeting 100 percent of a student's demonstrated financial need. Over the past ten years, our financial aid budget has increased by 68 percent. In fiscal year 2021 alone, we awarded \$50 million in need-based financial aid—including \$6.4 million for Connecticut students. The College is now in the process of raising an additional \$25 million in endowed financial aid as part of our [Defy Boundaries](#) campaign.

In short, increasing access and opportunity for all students and families—an ideal that is at the core of this bill—is central to our values and our strategy as a college. And yet, as an independent institution of higher education, we have to oppose HB 5034. We do not believe it appropriate for the state legislature to make policy around the admission practices of independent colleges.

More specifically, we have grave concerns about how this legislation would be enforced given the complexity of the admission process. Legacy applicants, as it happens, constitute an infinitesimally small portion of our applicant pool. We received, for example, 8,900 applications for the Class of 2026. Only 147 of these

applicants—1.65 percent—have a legacy connection. With such a tiny number, it would be nearly impossible to demonstrate whether any of these students, should they be admitted, did or did not receive preferential treatment.

But here is a more important point: Because the diversity of Conn's student body began to noticeably increase after the year 2000, we are now entering a period when the children of alumni from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds are applying to be considered for admission. I am sure it is the same at many other independent colleges in Connecticut. It would be a cruel irony to prohibit legacy admissions just at the point when alumni families of color might finally—after so many years—begin to benefit.

We do want to acknowledge our gratitude that the legislature, in its most recent budget, has allocated federal stimulus dollars towards the Roberta Willis Scholarship. Still, I was surprised to read in a recent national study that Connecticut invests only \$260 in student aid per enrolled undergraduate, less than a third the national average of \$980. If the State of Connecticut wishes to promote access and opportunity, we respectfully suggest that the legislature use its power to advocate for increased investments in need-based aid. Such support would be critical for relieving the financial burden on the state's most talented students and families, while also helping colleges like ours to continue advancing our goals of full participation.

For all these reasons, we urge you not to move this legislation forward.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Katherine Bergeron". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line above the first few letters.

