

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-8

AN ACT CONCERNING HIGHER EDUCATION AFFORDABILITY AND

Title: GRADUATE RETENTION.

Vote Date: 3/7/2023

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/2/2023

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee.

Sen. Martin M. Looney, 11th Dist.

Sen. Bob Duff, 25th Dist.

Sen. Saud Anwar, 3rd Dist.

Sen. Jorge Cabrera, 17th Dist.

Sen. Christine Cohen, 12th Dist.

Sen. Mae Flexer, 29th Dist.

Sen. John W. Fonfara, 1st Dist.

Sen. Herron Gaston, 23rd Dist.

Sen. Jan Hochadel, 13th Dist.

Sen. Julie Kushner, 24th Dist.

Sen. Matthew L. Lesser, 9th Dist.

Sen. Rick Lopes, 6th Dist.

Sen. Ceci Maher, 26th Dist.

Sen. James J. Maroney, 14th Dist.

Sen. Martha Marx, 20th Dist.

Sen. Douglas McCrory, 2nd Dist.

Sen. Patricia Billie Miller, 27th Dist.

Sen. Marilyn V. Moore, 22nd Dist.

Sen. MD Rahman, 4th Dist.

Sen. Derek Slap, 5th Dist.

Sen. Gary A. Winfield, 10th Dist.

Rep. Anthony L. Nolan, 39th Dist.

Rep. Gary A. Turco, 27th Dist.

Rep. Geraldo C. Reyes, 75th Dist.

Rep. Dominique Johnson, 143rd Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill would expand the program for debt-free community college to include students who are returning, increase the minimum grants offered by the program, redirect ARPA funds from the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship program to the Connecticut State University System, mandate the Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority to establish a student loan subsidy program for those employed in high-demand professions, and offer a tax deduction to state residents who paid interest on their student loans during the taxable year. Testimony has revealed that the state's colleges and universities are experiencing decreasing enrollments, and students are facing increased financial burdens due to rising tuition and fees. By expanding the PACT program to include returning and part-time students and bolstering the Roberta Willis Scholarship with ARPA funding that focuses on supporting the CSUs, more people will be able to attend college debt-free. Furthermore, proposed implementation of student loan subsidies and tax credits on qualifying payments would provide incentives for residents to remain in-state and receive financial assistance.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Connecticut State Colleges and Universities \(CSCU\), President, Terrance Cheng](#): supports this bill as it would eliminate the prior credit restriction to the PACT Program, increase the minimum grant awards, and transfer unused ARPA funds within the Roberta Willis Scholarship Program from the community colleges to the CSUs. It is stated that this bill would promise the success of the PACT program in increasing access to a community college education for thousands of students while helping to stabilize pandemic-related enrollment declines. It is noted that the PACT program has provided 18,670 awards to 11,160 students this year, at a cost of nearly \$18 million, and that early data shows increased retention rates for PACT students versus non-PACT students. It is also stated that the Committee should explore expansion options for the PACT program to include eliminating the in-state high school graduation requirement and extending the program to cover summer intersession courses.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Connecticut General Assembly, Senate Democrats, Joint Testimony](#):

Senator Looney, President Pro Tempore of the Connecticut State Senate, Senator Duff, Senate Majority Leader, Senator Anwar, Senator Rahman, Senator Lopes, Senator Marx, Senator Maroney, Senator Gaston, and Senator Maher's support this bill because the state is facing a crisis in higher education, as enrollment rates are dropping significantly due to the declining number of students graduating from Connecticut high schools and the pandemic. It is stated that the rising cost of higher education is affecting students' career prospects but, the implementation of the PACT program has been successful in providing a tuition-free process for students to continue their studies at one of the community colleges in Connecticut. It is stated that this bill aims to build on PACT's success and expand the program to include returning full and part-time students and to increase the minimum award for students. It is further explained that the Roberta Willis Scholarship, which was created to prevent the "brain drain" caused by unaffordability, has also been affected by financial crises, and the bill reallocates ARPA funds to concentrate primarily on state universities. It is also stated that the bill also aims to lower interest rates for student loans and offers a tax deduction for those paying off student loans to encourage residents to stay and take advantage of what the state has to offer.

Capital Community College (CCC), Professor & Department Chair, Marsha Bryant:

supports this bill but not as it is currently written. It is stated that the PACT Program should be expanded into state universities rather than the three areas that are outlined by the Governor. It is also stated that CSU students are too facing financial hardships from rising costs of education and programs that benefit them should be implemented. It is further recommended that the PACT Program should be revised to include assistance to in need students seeking to transition from the Community Colleges into the State Universities.

Central Connecticut State University (CCSU), Professor of Sociology, John O'Connor:

supports this bill but not as it stands because, more financial aid is needed to support students at the CSUs. It is stated that the PACT program should be expanded to CSUs rather than to the three areas outlined by the Governor. It is also stated that the PACT program should implement mechanisms of supporting needy students seeking to transition from Community Colleges to State Universities.

A Better Connecticut Institute (ABCI), Executive Director, Kim Forte: supports this bill because the state colleges and universities are facing decreases in attendance and rising tuition because of their reliance on campus-based enrollment for funding. It is stated that courses are being eliminated on campuses, limiting opportunities for students, particularly students of color and immigrants. To achieve true equity in higher education, the state must freeze tuition rates and expand the PACT program.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Lukas Houle

Date: 3/16/2023