

Testimony for  
The Appropriations Committee  
by Julie Savino, Executive Director, University Financial Assistance  
Sacred Heart University  
February 15, 2017

On behalf of Sacred Heart University, I am submitting testimony objecting to the proposed cuts to the Roberta Willis Scholarship Program. Further cutting this program by \$2.2M in FY18 and \$4.4M in FY 19 will have a devastating impact on the state's educational institutions' ability to help needy residents receive an education in Connecticut.

At Sacred Heart, our funding for need-based aid for students attending our University has declined 77.4 percent. In fact, from 2015 to 2017, our allocation has been cut 66.8 percent from \$1,089,506 to \$362,041. Given the cuts, we not only cannot award this funding to new students, but we are unable to renew the awards previously made to current students.

We recognize that the state of Connecticut faces serious fiscal constraints and that you have to make tough decisions. We know that we are not the only ones clamoring for a small pool of money. However, we believe it is critical that we continue to support needy Connecticut students who want to attend college in this state. It is the only way that we will retain our young people and provide the highly educated workforce that the employment market is craving.

As Connecticut's independent institutions continue to say no to students in need of financial help, those students we are unable to serve will head to other states with schools offering aid packages that are more generous. The likelihood that they will return is slim. We have already had one major employer leave the state in search of young talent, and others are threatening to do the same.

The state's independent colleges play an important role in educating students for our state's workforce. We award the majority of the degrees earned in key growth areas such as engineering, computer science, research and the health sciences. Many of our graduates do internships and residencies here and often choose to remain after graduating. As these numbers shrink, so will the interest of employers in remaining or relocating in Connecticut.

Again, we know that tough decisions need to be made. But increasing funding for need-based aid to students attending all of our institutions of higher learning must be a priority. It is a critical tool for both retaining much-needed young talent and for providing educational access for low-income students.