



# Sacred Heart UNIVERSITY

Testimony for the  
Appropriations Committee  
Sacred Heart University  
February 20, 2024

On behalf of Sacred Heart University, I am submitting testimony on **HB 5048: AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2025** in support of funding for the Roberta Willis Scholarship Program and, in particular, Section 15 of this bill, which attempts to resolve a longstanding issue related to the timing of the disbursement of funds to institutions to ensure that scholarships can be promised in a timely fashion for the students who would be attending school during the subsequent academic year.

**Funding need-based college financial aid programs is a necessity, not a luxury.** But over the past decade, millions of dollars have been cut from vital programs aimed at attracting and retaining college students, the lifeblood of our State's future growth and prosperity. Sacred Heart University's Roberta Willis Scholarship Program ARPA Supplement (RWSPAS) has allowed us in the academic year 2023-2024 to help 354 students with \$884,595 in need-based grants. The recipients of this grant are our most economically challenged, 87% of the current awardees Pell Grant eligible. Sacred Heart University has provided \$7,576,480 of university grants and scholarships for these same students.

**Additional funding is needed for this program.** Sacred Heart University currently enrolls 700 Connecticut students who are eligible to receive this grant but only has enough funding to award 50% of those students. Of those who are awarded, the funding available through RWSPAS equates to an average grant of \$2,359 out of a possible \$4,500 maximum award. Over 87% of these students and their families are taking educational loans beyond their means to fill the gap. Unfortunately, many of the students we are unable to serve, or serve adequately through this program, elect to pursue alternate forms of higher education or not continue to attend at all.

We appreciate the significant level of ARPA funding that has been allocated to this program over the last three years and **we would ask the Committee to please consider increasing the general fund appropriation for this program now that the ARPA funding must be spent by December 31, 2024.** Additionally, the timing of the disbursement of the institutional allocations continues to be a challenge and we would highlight that section 15 of HB 5048 attempts to resolve that. The Office of Higher Education will not send our allocation until after the budget has passed and paperwork is signed. This year, that was not until after the semester started and students were already enrolled. Students who need this aid cannot make decisions based on money that isn't yet available at the start of the school year. If they receive scholarships from out-of-state institutions, they will attend those, and the likelihood of returning to Connecticut post-graduation is slim.

We would ask that the legislature please work with the administration to address the issue of timing once and for all, with input from public and private institutions in the state, as necessary.

Thank you for your continued support.

John, J. Petillo  
President  
Sacred Heart University