

UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD

**Testimony for the
Appropriations Committee
Katherine Presutti, Director of Student Financial Aid
University of Hartford
February 15, 2023**

On behalf of the University of Hartford, I am submitting testimony on **H.B. 6659: AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2025, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR**, pertaining to funding for the **Roberta Willis Scholarship Program**. Governor Lamont has proposed to increase funding for this program \$4 million, 12%, in both FY 23 and FY 24.

By way of background, the Roberta Willis Scholarship Program is the state's need-based financial aid program administered by the Office of Higher Education that provides scholarships to needy Connecticut students to attend Connecticut institutions—public and private. Students attending independent colleges receive approximately 17% of the total funding from this program.

The appropriation for this program has been flat for over ten years and therefore we strongly support the Governor's proposed increase.

The Roberta Willis Scholarship Program is a critical component of the financial support that University of Hartford students receive, supplementing their aid from the federal government and from the University itself.

The University of Hartford has invested heavily in the recruitment of Connecticut students over the last five years. Institutionally, we created the CT Pledge Scholarship which specifically applies institutional scholarship dollars to families with income under \$50,000 annually, making a private education more affordable. We also have scholarship programs which directly support students from Hartford and Bloomfield. Nearly 46% of all full time students attending the university are from Connecticut. Approximately 632 of our Connecticut students are Pell eligible demonstrating exceptional need. Among these students are future engineers, nurses and educators. The university is committed to preparing students to support these high need fields for our state, but need additional funding to continue with this investment. The Roberta Willis Scholarship Programs allows us to support students with grant funding helping to minimize student debt which will continue to help the long term stability of our state. This past academic year, with limited funding, we were able to support 160 CT students with Roberta Willis Need-based funding. These students have an average family income of \$43,000. With additional investment in this program, we could help hundreds more. These students are also academically impressive with an overall average grade point average of a 3.01.

Of note, the University of Hartford must express some concern about the CSCU's proposal to make certain 4-year in demand degrees free through an expansion of the PACT program to the Connecticut State Universities. The University of Hartford would be severely impacted if the state were to provide funding to make one sector free. The University of Hartford enrolls a large percentage of Connecticut students and those students have been found working in state after graduation at the same rate as the CSU graduates.

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This program puts a direct target on four year private institutions within the state further exasperating enrollment pressures. These Institutions you will adversely impact are the same ones that continue to educate large numbers of CT residents while also positively contributing to the workforce, and the social and economic construct of the communities around us and the state as a whole.

In summary, we hope the Committee will support the Governor's proposal to increase funding to the Roberta Willis Scholarship Program and we will hope that any additional funding to expand the pipeline for certain in-demand degrees such as teaching, nursing and engineering/manufacturing will include opportunities for students to attend both public and private, non-profit colleges in Connecticut.