



Sacred Heart UNIVERSITY

Testimony for the
Higher Education Committee
Sacred Heart University
February 15, 2023

On behalf Sacred Heart University, 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 24 and FY 25.

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.

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. For example, for 2021/22, Sacred Heart University's Roberta Willis Scholarship Program (RWSP) allotment was \$382,317 benefitting 185 students and the Roberta Willis Scholarship Program ARPA Supplement (RWSPAS) of \$328,201, allowed us to help 246 students. Sacred Heart University has provided \$5,596,812 of university grants and scholarships for these same students. For 2022/23, we received \$397,222 from RWSP helping 187 students and \$670,486 from RWSPAS is currently benefitting 206 recipients. Sacred Heart University has provided \$6,617,581 in university grants and scholarships for these same students.

Many of the students we are unable to serve through this program are electing to leave Connecticut—they are enrolling in institutions out of state, and the likelihood they will return is slim.

At the same time, Sacred Heart University must express some concern about the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities' (CSCU) proposal to make certain 4-year in-demand degrees free through an expansion of the PACT program to the Connecticut State Universities.

While we appreciate the need to make education accessible, Sacred Heart would be severely impacted if the state were to provide funding to make one sector free. Sacred Heart 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. Our largest programs include education, nursing and health care, the very areas targeted by the CSCU proposal.

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 in-state and often choose to remain in Connecticut after graduating. As these numbers shrink, so will the interest of employers in remaining in or relocating to Connecticut.

Funding for need-based aid for students attending all of our state's institutions of higher education must continue to be a priority. It is a critical tool for both retaining much-needed young talent in Connecticut and for providing access for low-income students. Rather than make state programs free, increase state funding for needs-based scholarships and grants for these programs, allowing students to choose between state and independent colleges and universities.

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.

Thank you.

Julie Savino
Executive Director, University Financial Assistance
Sacred Heart University