



## CONNECTICUT

### TESTIMONY BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

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Amy Dowell,

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Co-chairs McCrory and Sanchez, Vice Chairs Abrams and Barry, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, and members of the Education Committee—thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Amy Dowell, and I am the State Director of Education Reform Now CT (ERN CT).

#### **HB 5038 - An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning Education - Section 36**

We write specifically in support of Section 36 of this bill, which would require students in each graduating class, starting in 2025, to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

According to the National College Attainment Network, for students in the lowest economic quintile nationwide, FAFSA completion increases their likelihood of entering college by 127%.<sup>1</sup> This year, 49.7% of the high school class of 2022 in Connecticut has completed the FAFSA.<sup>2</sup> Since Connecticut students may not always realize they're eligible for federal aid, requiring the remaining 50.3% of students to complete the application may increase their opportunities for higher education by helping them to afford higher education access that may otherwise be unattainable.

Louisiana, the first state to make FAFSA submission a high school graduation requirement, saw incredible success, moving from a completion rate of only 56% in the 2015-16 school year to 82.6% in 2019. That year, it became the highest ranking state for completion in the nation.<sup>3</sup> Other states like California, Texas, and New Hampshire have all also made FAFSA completion mandatory graduation requirements.

Connecticut should be next. This bill would prioritize the needs of students and families by informing their options for financial aid, and by giving them support in their schools to fill out the necessary paperwork. Importantly, opt-out measures and waivers will also protect the interests

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<sup>1</sup> DeBaun, B. (2019, National College Access Network). "Survey Data Strengthen Association Between FAFSA Completion and Enrollment". Retrieved February 2020 at <https://www.ncan.org/news/news.asp?id=456025>

<sup>2</sup> National College Attainment Network (2022). FAFSA Tracker. Retrieved March 2022 at <https://formyourfuture.org/fafsa-tracker/>

<sup>3</sup> Forbes (2018). How Louisiana Led the Nation in FAFSA Completion. Retrieved March 2022 at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/civicion/2018/11/16/how-louisiana-led-the-nation-in-fafsa-completion/?sh=61ec8a756413>.

of students and families who do not want to apply for aid. By having students default to filling out the form, the bill ensures that—at a minimum—all students are aware of the possibility of federal aid and are making a conscientious choice to apply, or not apply.

### **SB 1 - An Act Concerning Childhood Mental and Physical Health Services in Schools**

We are supportive of this bill, and of the legislature's efforts to bolster the mental and behavioral health of the state's students—particularly as they embark upon the difficult path to post-pandemic recovery. It is well documented, both within Connecticut and nationally, that there has been a serious decline in children's mental health—one that the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children's Hospital Association have called a national emergency.

While we understand concern about the qualifications for those tasked with serving students in this moment, we are also aware of an ongoing shortage of school-based personnel. Therefore, we must be creative and flexible when attempting to fill these important roles.

Increased support for school-based social workers and psychologists, training for school nurses and educators on administering medication during an opioid overdose, expanded school-based health centers, and increased minority teacher recruitment are all worthy investments.

### **SB 273 - An Act Concerning Teacher Certification**

This bill would require the Connecticut State Department of Education to conduct a review of the teacher certification statutes and regulations, and recommend improvements.

We support the intent of this bill—namely, to address the important need to streamline Connecticut's overly complicated and prescriptive certification processes so that we can recruit, train, and retain the high-quality educators that students need.

Nevertheless, we also believe that studies of the certification statutes and regulations are already underway in this state—albeit too slowly—and should therefore not be duplicated or derailed.



#### **About Education Reform Now CT**

The state chapter of a national organization and affiliate of DFER CT, Education Reform Now CT is a 501(c)(3) that operates as a think tank and policy advocate, promoting great educational opportunities and achievement for all by increasing equity, protecting civil rights, and strengthening the social safety net.