



CSU-AAUP

Protecting quality public higher education

CAPITOL
MONITOR

A Report on Activity at the State Capitol

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CSU-AAUP Is Taking Action At The Capitol

A host of legislation that stands to benefit quality public higher education has been heard in the Higher Education committee this session. CSU-AAUP leaders have been there to lend support for key initiatives, including bills that would help students in crisis, protect academic freedom, and prevent the CSCU system office from closing or merging higher education institutions.

Other bills that your union is supporting include paid family medical leave and a \$15 an hour minimum wage. In addition to testifying at Higher Education Committee hearings for a number of bills, CSU-AAUP leaders, members, and students also testified at the March 7 Higher Education Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee public hearing. Together, they advocated for adequate funding for quality public higher education and offered legislators a glimpse into the world they face as students and faculty at the CSUs.

To read testimony from CSU-AAUP members and our students at the Appropriations Committee hearing, [click here](#).

The following list of bills are of interest to CSU-AAUP this session:

[SB 840](#) AN ACT CONCERNING ACADEMIC FREEDOM AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION. "To protect the freedom of expression of faculty members at public institutions of higher education in their scholarship, research and teaching and regarding matters of public interest."

[HB 7118](#) AN ACT FUNDING THE UNFUNDED PENSION LIABILITY PORTION OF THE FRINGE BENEFIT COST FOR CERTAIN EMPLOYEES OF THE CONSTITUENT UNITS OF THE STATE SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION. "To prohibit the passing of unfunded pension liabilities to students and recipients of research grants through the fringe benefit rates of non-General Fund employees at public institutions of higher education."

From the summary of testimony in support of HB 7118:

Under current legislation, the high fringe benefit rates that institutions are forced to pay significantly decrease budgetary funds the schools are able to put towards their programs of scientific research. With the limited funds the science departments have, it is difficult to hire qualified research technicians, they are forced to use less than cutting-edge technology, and there have been major cutbacks on the number of experiments that researchers are able to conduct. The high fringe benefit rates have made the grant application process for researchers difficult and non-competitive, forcing the researchers to tap into

their budget to cover the state's high fringe, leaving significantly less money to go towards hiring qualified staff and funding the experiments themselves. These problems affect Connecticut's ability to remain competitive in the field of scientific research. This issue should be of special concern to faculty in the sciences and others seeking grant funding.

[SB 749](#) AN ACT REQUIRING LEGISLATIVE APPROVAL FOR THE MERGER OR CLOSING OF INSTITUTIONS WITHIN THE CONNECTICUT STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES.

"To require legislative approval for the merger or closing of institutions within the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities."

[HB 7191](#) AN ACT INCREASING THE MINIMUM WAGE

This bill raises the minimum wage in Connecticut to \$15/hour over the next three years. But it ALSO contains an indexing measure that will ensure that the state minimum wage increases with the cost of living.

This is an issue that directly affects our students and their families, many of whom are struggling to pay for basic costs of living, let alone ever-increasing tuition and fees.

[HB 7256](#) AN ACT CONCERNING STUDENT ACCESS TO ACADEMIC ADVISORS AT THE CONNECTICUT STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES.

"To require a study by the Board of Regents for Higher Education regarding student access to academic advisors."

Quality advising is a key to retention and degree completion for our students. It is also something that can't be done by just anyone. Students deserve access to quality advisors and advisors deserve to be recognized for the important work they do.

[HB 5832](#) AN ACT CONCERNING EMERGENCY EXPENSE GRANT PROGRAMS AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

"To provide one-time emergency expense grants to students' who experience unexpected financial hardships that impede such students' ability to complete their degree."

Many of us can think of times when our own students' class work was jeopardized or interrupted by financial set-backs out of their control, such as car trouble, medical bills, or accidents. This legislation would go a long way to helping them succeed in their studies.

[HB 7257](#) AN ACT CONCERNING FOOD-INSECURE STUDENTS AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

"To collect data and review policies regarding food-insecure students at public institutions of higher education."

This is another important study bill. The issue here is that institutions are approaching the situation ad hoc with no outside resources. The study aims to find best practices, and ultimately recommend funding. The reality at our universities is that students who used to receive free and reduced breakfast and lunch in K-12 are now in our classrooms with no USDA-subsidized meals to fuel their efforts. To top it off, they now face ever-increasing tuition costs as they strive for a higher education degree.

[SB750](#) AN ACT CONCERNING THE PREVENTION AND TREATMENT OF MENTAL ILLNESS AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

“To create a task force to recommend a state-wide policy for and study the prevention and treatment of mental illness at institutions of higher education in the state.” The ratio of counselors to students has been an issue on all four of our campuses as more students are experiencing mental health challenges. This study will examine the current services as well as the demand for services.