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Testimony before the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee Regarding H.B. 6162 and S.B. 570

Gwen Pastor, Policy Analyst, Connecticut Association for Human Services, February 23, 2017

Good afternoon, Senator Linares, Senator Bye, Representative Haddad, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee.

My name is Gwen Pastor, and I am the Policy Analyst at the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a statewide nonprofit agency that works to reduce poverty and promote economic success through both policy and program initiatives.

I am testifying in support of H.B. 6162, An Act Concerning the Implementation of a Debt-Free Program for Students Attending Public Institutions of Higher Education, and S.B. 570, An Act Concerning Loan Information Provided to Students by Institutions of Higher Education.

An educated workforce is vital to the economic success of a state. Connecticut is a national leader in education. 43.1% of adults in the state have an associate degree or higher, compared to 35.9% nationally.¹ However, Connecticut's apparently high levels of education are less impressive when examining the education levels of people of color. 49.5% (774,875) of non-Hispanic white adults in Connecticut hold associates degrees or higher, compared to 28.8% (201, 860) of minority adults.²³

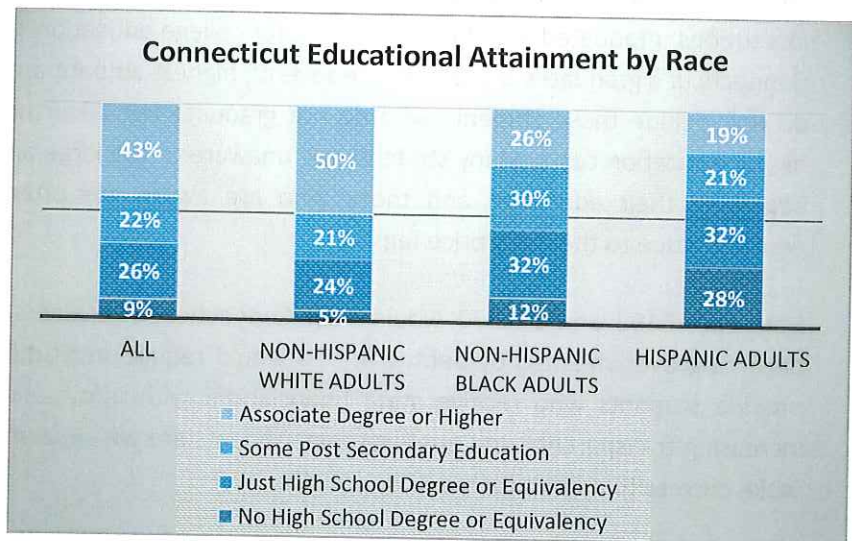


Figure 1: Working Poor Families Data 2015

Statistically, greater levels of education lead to higher paying jobs. People in Connecticut with some

¹ Working Poor Families Project Compiled Data. 2015. "Percent of All Adults 25 and older with Associate Degree or Higher, 2013."

Working Poor Families Project Compiled Data. 2015. "Percent of Working Families Below 200% Poverty in which No Parent has some Post-Secondary Education, 2013."

² Working Poor Families Project Compiled Data. 2015. "Percent of Non-Hispanic White Adults 18-64 with an Associates Degree or Higher."

³ Working Poor Families Project Compiled Data. 2015. "Percent of Minority Adults 18-64 with an Associates Degree or Higher."

H.B. 6162 would prohibit the regional community-technical college system from charging tuition for degree and certificate programs, increase the funding available to the Board of Regents for Higher Education, and require the Board of Regents for Higher Education and the University of Connecticut to develop and submit plans to provide debt-free education for all in-state students attending public institutions of higher education. This would provide Connecticut's residents with the ability to achieve higher education, strengthening Connecticut's workforce and increasing economic opportunity for all of Connecticut's residents.

We understand that hard decisions must be made this session. However, affordable and accessible higher education is crucial to developing the workforce Connecticut needs. CAHS supports these bills and all bills that would make higher education more accessible and affordable in order to strengthen Connecticut's workforce and families.