Governor Ned Lamont
State of Connecticut

FACT SHEET
2020 Legislative Session

SENATE BILL 15
AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING HIGHER EDUCATION

Summary of Proposal:

This proposal makes changes to the statutes to implement policy changes in the Governor's recommended FY 2021 budget adjustments related to higher education.

Section 1 revises the debt free community college program established by the Board of Regents pursuant to CGS 10a-174. Under current law, the debt-free college program is available to first-time, degree-seeking, in-state students who enroll full time, make satisfactory academic progress while enrolled, and have completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). As revised by this bill, eligible students must also have graduated from high school up to one year before enrolling in community college and must have a FAFSA Expected Family Contribution (EFC) of no more than $7,500.

This section authorizes the Board of Regents to use up to $2,130,842 of the debt-free college appropriation in FY 2021 to hire advisors at community colleges as part of the Guided Pathways initiative, which is funded in conjunction with the revised debt-free college program in the Governor's recommended adjustments. The bill directs up to $500,000 each year beginning in FY 2021 to market the debt-free college program.

Sections 2 through 4 repeal the Higher Education Coordinating Council established in CGS 10a-6a. This is not the same as the Higher Education Consolidation Committee established in CGS 10a-55i. The Higher Education Coordinating Council is responsible for establishing accountability measures for public institutions of higher education and is required to meet annually to receive reports by the public systems of higher education using these accountability measures.

Reason for Proposal:

This proposal is necessary to implement the Governor's budget by reducing the overall cost of debt-free community college and providing funding necessary to increase advising services at community colleges. Expansion of advisors will improve student success rates and retention among community colleges.

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The repeal of the HECC will lift the requirement that OPM convene an annual meeting, as it has been difficult to achieve a quorum due to the council's high-profile membership and lack of authority to send designees.

Significant Impacts:

Section 1 results in a significant reduction in the number of community college students eligible for free tuition or minimum awards under the debt-free college program, thus reducing the cost to administer the program. Specifically, the revisions would remove eligibility for students who are more than 1 year out of high school and who have a FAFSA EFC above $7,500. The EFC is calculated using information from a student's FAFSA application to quantify that student's family's ability to pay for college. An EFC of $7,500 for a family with 2 dependents roughly translates to a household income between $75,000 and $80,000.

Additionally, the authorization for the Board of Regents to fund advisors from the debt-free college appropriation will support the implementation of Guided Pathways in community colleges, which will likely improve retention of students over time at community colleges.

The authorization for the Board of Regents to fund debt-free college marketing from the appropriation will allow the funding increase to cover marketing costs without using community college operating funds.

Sections 2 through 4 result in the repeal of the Higher Education Coordinating Council, including the requirement of an annual meeting of the council.