

# Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No:** SB-380 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

**Title:** AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TASK FORCE  
TO SUPPORT PROMISE PROGRAMS IN THE STATE.

**Vote Date:** 3/17/2026

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 3/5/2026

**File No.:**

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

REP. GREGORY HADDAD, 54<sup>TH</sup> DIST.

REP. COREY P. PARIS, 147<sup>TH</sup> DIST.

### REASONS FOR BILL:

The reason for SB-380 is to support current and creating state Promise Programs as recommended by the Task Force on Supporting Promise Programs in the State of Connecticut. By supporting the findings of the Task Force, and supporting these programs, it is hoped that they can aid in the full financial and intersocial support of qualifying students from high school through their college careers and connect them with good internships and job opportunities debt free, in effect, it is supposed, increasing success rates in institutions of higher education.

### SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

The substitute language for SB-380 provides a clarification that dual-enrollment and concurrent-enrollment courses are classified as the same course distinction under the parameters of this bill when it comes to requesting repayment for applications to a Promise Program for a high-need student.

### RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

**Connecticut State Colleges & Universities, Interim Chancellor, O. John Maduko:** CSCU supports this bill claiming that by creating the Office of Postsecondary Success, more workforce, affordability, and student success will result by way of reducing net cost for income-eligible students at CSCUs through the Student Success Grant Program.

**Task Force on Supporting Promise Programs in the State of Connecticut, Co-Chairs, Kelvin Roldán & Richard Sugarman:** The Co-Chairs express their strong support for this bill extending the legislation based on the extensive research both have conducted over the past four months concerning Promise Programs. They recommend the Committee initiate the, "[C]reation of a coordinated Connecticut Ecosystem of Promise, anchored by a statewide Scholar Success Grant Program and reinforced by strong local Promise Programs, meaningful institutional accountability, the establishment of an Office of Postsecondary Success, aligned workforce partnerships, and a clear, unified communications strategy for students and families."

These recommendations, the Co-Chairs theorize, can effectively combat student outmigration, and increase affordability by studying trends that relate to such programs, such as Promise Programs, which solve such issues. With the success of the Integrated College Success Model used by Promise Programs, which implement hands-on and work focused initiatives all through a student's career in higher education, they have discovered a marked increase in success for students' post-graduation. Collaborating with the state is recommended as a strong step forward for the already existing Promise Programs in Hartford, New Haven, and Waterbury to extend more aid to students across the state in a unified effort.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Waterbury Promise, Waterbury Promise Scholar, Smith Bernard:** Supports this legislation as in his personal experience in which Promise Programs such as Waterbury Promise enhanced and kept him on track to graduate from Community College and onto a bachelor's degree, all of which supported by such programs.

**New Haven Promise & Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven Promise Parent, Lisa Brandes:** Brandes expresses strong support for this legislation claiming that she has seen benefits that her son experienced by being a part of the New Haven Promise Program. She claims that through support of such programs, students see higher graduation rates, greater internship possibilities and job placements due to the program's connections with the private and non-profit sectors and builds up the state's workforce with more ready and able graduates compared to those who do not benefit from Promise Programs.

**Yale New Haven Hiring Initiative, Director, Chris Brown:** Supports this legislation claiming that with the aid of the New Haven Promise Program, they have seen hired over 800 of their interns over 13 years full-time, creating a very tangible path for students from pre- to post-college. The "To, Through, and Back" model, to Brown, can also be equated to this legislation's strengthening of the Scholar Success Grant Program, which would provide more opportunities in conjunction with strong local Promise Programs, creating a greater pool of promise scholars and interns who stay and work in the state, boosting its workforce.

**Emily Byrne:** Supports this legislation claiming that, by complying with the Task Force to Support Promise Programs in the State of Connecticut's recommendations outlined in their report "Creating A Connecticut Ecosystem of Promise", the bill would benefit more young people in matriculation from High School through College graduation. Though, according to a study by the W.E. Upjohn Institute, Byrne is concerned that, without careful examination of all datapoints of best practices, the bill could, "[Create] competing state funded scholarship

programs is to exacerbate racial and economic divides. While I have not looked at the data closely, my concern in the current draft of this bill is that it could inadvertently do just this. As such, I'd offer a word of caution in the design of the Scholar Success Grant Program, especially when considering the design of the existing Promise Programs in our state."

**Connecticut Business & Industry Association (CBIA), Policy Director, Danielle Cloud:** CBIA supports this legislation claiming that by providing more support for Promise Programs and advocating for more direct guidance from High School through College and into the workforce is beneficial to students financially and improves success rates. Cloud states that by increasing postsecondary success and connecting students with internships, the workforce pipeline is strengthened while students have less debt as these programs have been supporting them throughout their career.

**University of Saint Joseph, President, Rhonda Free:** President Free supports this legislation claiming that students rely on funding streams from both federal, state, and institutional sources, but also outside organizations such as Promise Programs. With the conjunction of strong Promise Programs and the creation of a Scholar Success Grant, and the stipulation that it only apply to Connecticut students and institutions incentivizes the return of students to the state and can bolster workforces in Connecticut which need new graduates such as bioscience, medical, and engineering.

**University of Connecticut, President for Student Line and Enrollment, Nathan Fuerst:** Supports this legislation as it stands in compliance with the Task Force on Supporting Promise Programs in the State of Connecticut's recommendations to provide funds to create a Student Success Grant program to expand access to education to those who would benefit from aid from pre-to-post graduation.

**Sacred Heart University, Vice President – Chief Information Officer, William Guerrero:** Vice President Guerrero supports this legislation claiming that through his career in many universities Promise Programs to have created many opportunities for the residents of the state. By creating more affordability, growing skills through hands-on and work-specific internships, and supporting students throughout their careers avoid barriers to their success, fostering a stable future for them financially and educationally.

**University of Hartford, President Emeritus, Walter Harrison:** Supports this legislation commenting that it provides a means by which historically marginalized individuals can seek a degree without incurring substantial debt. Though, Harrison has some qualms with the bill including the amount granted per student, which he believes should be raised from the proposed \$3,000 to \$5,000 as an absolute minimum wherever a student attends college in Connecticut.

**New Haven Promise, Director of Digital Strategy, Brett Hoover:** Hoover expresses strong support of the legislation claiming that in his experience working with the New Haven Promise Program he has seen thousands of students enter college, needing to work less during their collegiate career to pursue internships in the summer, and explore the entry level jobs that are right for them that put them on track that with their lower debt can be pursued without as much financial hardship.

**Greater Hartford Gives Foundation, Public Policy Team, J. McBride & C. Senecal:**

Supports this legislation claiming that it signals to the public sector that students need more than \$3,000 or \$5,000 annual scholarships due to the rising cost of tuition and encourages them to pitch more. They support the findings and recommendations of the Task Force on Supporting Promise Programs in the State of Connecticut and propose the Committee continue searching for means to significantly reduce tuition to aid all, and especially first-generation, college students achieve an affordable degree with low debt.

**Odia Kane:** Kane expresses support for this legislation claiming that through their experience in the New Haven Promise Program they have successfully attained a doctorate they could not have achieved without the program's constant support. Kane claims that, without the program, they would have been facing \$200,000 in student loan debt, plus interest, and if they had seen the cost without the program's aid, they very likely would have dropped out of college.

**Waterbury Promise Scholar, Icaro Leal Pamplona:** Pamplona supports this legislation expressing that these programs are not just scholarships, but total support from High School through employment. This fact, that Promise Programs connect students with colleges, keep them on track, and encourage them into internships and further job placement positively benefits the state's economy. By providing funding for state and more municipal programs, Pamplona theorizes the investment is not just in scholarships, but in communities' futures, future leaders, and professionals alike.

**Trinity College, President, Daniel Lugo:** President Lugo supports this legislation reiterating the findings that 40% of FY 23 students eligible for need based grants are not able to receive funding due to a gap that exists in the current structure of said programs. Increasing access to Promise Programs on the state and municipal level would therefore, according to Lugo, act as an investment in the workforce and economic stability. "A transparent, income-band-based statewide grant program will strengthen in-state enrollment, completion, and long-term talent retention."

**Waterbury Promise, Executive Director, Kelonda Maull:** Supports this legislation claiming that, "Promise Programs across our state play a vital role in nurturing and retaining talent, preparing scholars for the workforce, promoting equity, improving post-secondary success, and closing opportunity gaps in our most vulnerable communities." In 2025, the Waterbury promise has seen a 25% increase, 301 students, in program enrolment. These students have an over 70% graduation rate and over 5 years they have aided 880 students with a 95% persistence and 93% program retention rate.

**New Haven Promise Scholar, Charles McLean:** McLean supports this legislation given his positive experience in the New Haven Promise Program. He claims that if the state supports such programs more students would end up staying in Connecticut as they would be connected to jobs and support systems locally and thus be encouraged to remain in the state, which to McLean he would have not had the wish to do prior to his involvement with the New Haven Promise Program.

**New Haven Public Schools, Superintendent, Madeline Negrón:** Superintendent Negrón identifies Promise Programs as a necessary step forward in the realm of student success in college. With wraparound support, these programs keep students on track and closes gaps

and hurdles they would ordinarily stumble over during their careers in higher education. In effect, scaling these programs would create an "Ecosystem of Promise" and increase college graduation rates, to the benefit of the state's economy and workforce.

**University of Connecticut Hartford, Dean, Mark Overmyer-Velázquez:** Supports this legislation claiming that he believes it addresses a gap in the financial aid system for students and creates better graduation rates with wraparound care. According to the Dean, "Thirty-two percent of Hartford Promise Scholars choose to attend UConn. Approximately 75 percent graduate from college, far exceeding the national average of about 50 percent for students from similar backgrounds. Within six months of graduation, 95 percent secure employment or enter graduate school, and 85 percent remain working in Connecticut. That is workforce development and a return on investment for our state."

**Hartford Promise, Board Member, Bob Patricelli:** Expresses support for the bill but reiterates that state funds should not act as a constrictive measure to private philanthropic dollars as provided by municipal Promise Programs such as Hartford Promise. He also claims that any new organization should be held to Hartford Promise's bar for GPA and attendance numbers, development of a "Comprehensive college success plan", integrate with local school systems, and encourage and attract other private and public funding sources.

**Waterbury Promise Scholar, Jocelin Quituizaca:** Supports this legislation because, through her experience with Waterbury Promise as a first-generation college student, she has benefited greatly from the wraparound aid given by the program and believes encouragement of more programs in the state would similarly benefit students like her.

**Independent Contractor, IT Consultant, Anthony Ruiz:** Supports this legislation seeing this investment as one mirroring those made by the New Haven Promise in New Haven as a major boon to local students' success rates and a boost civic responsibility instilled in these students by these programs as these programs require students to commit to community service hours as well as internships which benefit the community.

**Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce, President, Garrett Sheehan:** Supports this legislation claiming that businesses need a skilled workforce. This need could be addressed by this bill as by encouraging more Promise Programs to incorporate all over the state, many in-need career sectors can benefit from creating internships collaboratively with these institutions to employ their students through their college careers and, hopefully, offer those interns a full-pay/full-time position with their companies' post-graduation, thus addressing this workforce shortfall, boosting economic growth in the process.

**MD, Shane Solger:** Supports this legislation as he thinks it will provide greater access to fields in need of professionals, such as the medical system. In effect, these programs allow students to go to college based solely on their aptitude and drive, not their parent's ability to pay for their tuition, causing a positive cascading effect where more low-income students become educated and employed in Connecticut, causing greater workforce benefit and economic growth.

**Yale University:** Supports this legislation claiming that they have a history of supporting Promise Programs and believe they are an important step towards affordable higher education in the state. But the university urges caution in transparent oversight saying,

"[D]ata reporting proposed in SB 380 should align with federal IPEDS reporting for consistency and minimum administrative expense." Also, the university asks for clearer definitions regarding the status of institutions that are not required to submit data due to not being eligible to participate in this program are to be categorized and regulated.

**AdvanceCT, Research Analyst, Emily Vergara:** Vergara supports this legislation claiming that the "Promise" model provides more than just tuition, but a support network and a pathway to employment that many, including herself, utilize to return the investment back into their communities' by continuing to live and work in them as professionals' post-graduation.

**Bridgeport Public Education Fund, Inc., Executive Director, Faith Villegas:** Supports this legislation because, as they have created Bridgeport Promise, they have seen high collaboration between themselves, local leaders, and the school system to help students navigate the increasing educational challenges they face day on day to achieve a degree and become employed, preferably in Bridgeport, helping that city gain a more professional workforce as time goes on.

**The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven, President – CEO, Karen Walton:** Walton expresses support for Promise Programs and this legislation claiming that by adhering to the Task Force on Supporting Promise Programs in the State of Connecticut's findings and recommendations related to encouraging growth of municipal programs to combat the trends of lower high school enrollment, affordability challenges, and our state's outmigration of talent.

**CT State Community College Gateway, Campus President, Shiang-Kwei Wang:** Wang expresses strong support for this legislation commenting that results seen from Promise Programs have the financial impact of over \$1.3 billion in direct support to students attending institutions of higher education in Connecticut. By scaling these programs statewide, Wang believes, through a newly created Office of Postsecondary Success and Scholar Success Grant Program, an "Ecosystem of Promise" will be formed, benefiting our workforce as students remain at greater levels in-state when enrolled in such programs.

**Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges, President, Jennifer Widness:** Widness supports this legislation claiming that by accepting the Task Force on Supporting Promise Programs in the State of Connecticut's recommendations, state workforces will see greater communication between agencies governing such programs on the municipal and state level, closing gaps, and increasing employment.

Widness questions numerical considerations in the bill's verbiage, though, claiming that by rigidly mandating institutions to report impacts financially and success rate related for these programs could better be serviced by a more flexible framework to aid the construction of a format for the program's final design. This information can, according to Widness, designate which internships to be focused on without rigid dictation of state statute, keeping this process as flexible and effective as possible for institutions.

**Yale School of Management, Lecturer, Rosalind Wiggins:** Wiggins supports this legislation commenting that Promise Programs outweigh negatives and cost of creating a model for said programs. Creating a centralized model on the state level would, Wiggins believes, benefit students as well as the workforce by providing paid internships, a toolkit model for creation of new programs so they do not have to start from scratch, and share

knowledge and expertise across municipalities, creating an effective methodological approach to affordability and student success.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None Expressed.

**Reported by: Tom Atwood**

**Date: 3/25/2026**