

Defining the Problem: Timing Misalignment Between RWSP Grant Awards and State Budget Passage

Connecticut higher education institutions are requesting funding guarantees of the Roberta Willis Scholarship Program (RWSP) grant awards by **November 1** to plan academic student aid packaging, and institutional budgets.

The Connecticut Office of Higher Education (OHE) does not guarantee RWSP grant awards until the **Connecticut State Budget is enacted**, which typically occurs in **May (short session)** or **June (long session)**. Final appropriations determine the total funding available for RWSP and directly affect award amounts and allocations. This creates a structural timing misalignment between:

- **Institutional planning cycles**, which require funding certainty by early November, and
- **The state budget cycle**, which does not provide confirmed appropriations until late spring.

At its core, the problem is a **state-level fiscal timing constraint that prevents timely grant award notifications aligned with institutional operational needs**. To address this issue, for FY25 the General Assembly included a one-time \$15 million holdback to facilitate early notification of RWSP awards for FY26. This measure temporarily addressed the timing gap for one of two RWSP grants (Need-Merit) as the program transitioned from a split funding structure with state and Federal ARPA funds back to a purely state-funded program.

The misalignment of the state budgeting cycle and organizational planning cycles is not unique to the higher education industry. In many cases, recipients of state funding must plan based on projected state funding that is subject to change until the legislature passes a budget. Institutions can and do make budgetary decisions based on projected financial aid support, but many are reluctant to do so without a guarantee that OHE is not authorized to provide. OHE gives the best estimate of available funding possible, as early as possible, based on the existing appropriation for Roberta Willis Scholarships. Variation from OHE's projections only occur if adjustments are made to the baseline appropriation for RWSP in the state budget.

In conclusion, OHE is operating in full compliance with state [statute](#) and established budget procedures. Because RWSP award levels are contingent upon enacted appropriations, and the Connecticut State Budget is typically adopted in May or June - many months after the November 1 notification date requested by institutions—OHE cannot guarantee grant awards in advance of final legislative action.

