



House of Representatives

General Assembly

File No. 457

January Session, 2025

Substitute House Bill No. 6885

House of Representatives, April 2, 2025

The Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement reported through REP. HADDAD of the 54th Dist., Chairperson of the Committee on the part of the House, that the substitute bill ought to pass.

AN ACT EXPANDING THE DEBT-FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAM.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. Section 10a-174 of the general statutes is repealed and the
2 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2025*):

3 (a) As used in this section:

4 (1) "Award" means the greater of: (A) The unpaid portion, if any, of a
5 qualifying student's eligible institutional costs after subtracting [his or
6 her] such student's financial aid, or (B) a minimum award of five
7 hundred dollars for a full-time student or three hundred dollars for a
8 part-time student;

9 (2) "Eligible institutional costs" means the tuition and required fees
10 incurred each semester by an individual student that are established by
11 the Board of Regents for Higher Education for the [regional community-
12 technical colleges] Connecticut State Community College;

13 (3) "Financial aid" means the sum of all scholarships, grants and
14 federal, state and institutional aid received by a qualifying student.
15 "Financial aid" does not include any federal, state or private student
16 loans received by a qualifying student;

17 (4) "Qualifying student" means any person who (A) graduated from
18 a public or nonpublic high school, (B) enrolls as a full-time or part-time
19 student for [the fall semester of 2020, or any] a semester [thereafter,] at
20 [a regional community-technical college] the Connecticut State
21 Community College in a program leading to a degree or certificate, (C)
22 is classified as an in-state student pursuant to section 10a-29, (D) is
23 making satisfactory academic progress while enrolled at [a regional
24 community-technical college] the Connecticut State Community
25 College, (E) has completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid,
26 and (F) has accepted all available financial aid or is a transition program
27 student;

28 (5) "Full-time student" means a student who is enrolled at [a regional
29 community-technical college] the Connecticut State Community
30 College and (A) is carrying twelve or more credit hours in a semester,
31 or (B) has a learning disability documented with the [regional
32 community-technical college in which he or she is enrolled] college and
33 is enrolled in the maximum number of credit hours that is feasible for
34 such student to attempt in a semester, as determined by such student's
35 academic advisor;

36 (6) "Semester" means the fall or spring semester of an academic year.
37 "Semester" does not include a summer semester or session;

38 (7) "Part-time student" means a student who is enrolled at [a regional
39 community-technical college] the Connecticut State Community
40 College and is carrying not less than six but fewer than twelve credit
41 hours in a semester; and

42 (8) "Transition program student" means any person who (A) is a
43 resident of this state, (B) has not graduated from high school, (C) is
44 enrolled in a transition program pursuant to such person's

45 individualized education program, and (D) enrolls in one or more
46 courses at [a regional community-technical college] the Connecticut
47 State Community College.

48 (b) The Board of Regents for Higher Education shall (1) establish a
49 debt-free community college program to make awards to qualifying
50 students each semester, (2) adopt rules, procedures and forms necessary
51 to implement the debt-free community college program, and (3) submit
52 a report outlining such rules, procedures and forms, in accordance with
53 the provisions of section 11-4a, to the joint standing committee of the
54 General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to higher
55 education. Awards made to qualifying students pursuant to the debt-
56 free community college program shall be designated as the "Mary Ann
57 Handley Award".

58 (c) For the fall semester of 2020, and each semester thereafter, the
59 Board of Regents for Higher Education shall make awards to qualifying
60 students within available appropriations. An award shall be available
61 to a qualifying student for the first seventy-two credit hours earned by
62 the qualifying student at [a regional community-technical college] the
63 Connecticut State Community College, provided the qualifying student
64 meets and continues to meet the requirements of this section. The board
65 shall not use an award to supplant any financial aid, including, but not
66 limited to, state or institutional aid, otherwise available to a qualifying
67 student.

68 (d) Not later than November 1, 2024, and March 1, 2025, and each
69 semester thereafter, the Board of Regents for Higher Education shall
70 report, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a, to the joint
71 standing committees of the General Assembly having cognizance of
72 matters relating to higher education and employment advancement and
73 appropriations and the budgets of the state agencies regarding the debt-
74 free community college program, including, but not limited to, (1) the
75 number of qualifying students enrolled at the [regional community-
76 technical colleges] Connecticut State Community College during each
77 semester, (2) the number of qualifying students receiving minimum

78 awards and the number of qualifying students receiving awards for the
79 unpaid portion of eligible institutional costs, (3) the average number of
80 credit hours the qualifying students enrolled in each semester and the
81 average number of credit hours the qualifying students completed each
82 semester, (4) the average amount of the award made to qualifying
83 students under this section for the unpaid portion of eligible
84 institutional costs, and (5) the completion rates of qualifying students
85 receiving awards under this section by degree or certificate program.

86 Sec. 2. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2025*) (a) As used in this section:

87 (1) "Award" means the greater of: (A) The unpaid portion, if any, of a
88 qualifying student's eligible institutional costs after subtracting such
89 student's financial aid, or (B) a minimum award of five hundred dollars
90 for a full-time student or three hundred dollars for a part-time student;

91 (2) "Eligible institutional costs" means the tuition and required fees
92 incurred each semester by an individual student that are established by
93 the Board of Regents for Higher Education for the Connecticut State
94 University System and by the Board of Trustees of The University of
95 Connecticut for The University of Connecticut;

96 (3) "Financial aid" means the sum of all scholarships, grants and
97 federal, state and institutional aid received by a qualifying student.
98 "Financial aid" does not include any federal, state or private student
99 loans received by a qualifying student;

100 (4) "Qualifying student" means any person who (A) participated in
101 the debt-free community college program established pursuant to
102 section 10a-174 of the general statutes, as amended by this act, and
103 completed not fewer than sixty credits through said program at the
104 Connecticut State Community College, (B) enrolls as a full-time or part-
105 time student for the fall semester of 2025, or any semester thereafter, at
106 a state university within the Connecticut State University System or The
107 University of Connecticut in a program leading to a bachelor's degree,
108 (C) is classified as an in-state student pursuant to section 10a-29 of the
109 general statutes, (D) made satisfactory academic progress while

110 enrolled at the Connecticut State Community College and continues to
111 make satisfactory academic progress while enrolled at such state
112 university or The University of Connecticut, (E) has completed the Free
113 Application for Federal Student Aid, and (F) has accepted all available
114 financial aid;

115 (5) "Full-time student" means a student who is enrolled at a state
116 university within the Connecticut State University System or The
117 University of Connecticut and (A) is carrying twelve or more credit
118 hours in a semester, or (B) has a learning disability documented with
119 such university in which he or she is enrolled and is enrolled in the
120 maximum number of credit hours that is feasible for such student to
121 attempt in a semester, as determined by such student's academic
122 advisor;

123 (6) "Semester" means the fall or spring semester of an academic year.
124 "Semester" does not include a summer semester or session; and

125 (7) "Part-time student" means a student who is enrolled at a state
126 university within the Connecticut State University System or The
127 University of Connecticut and is carrying not less than six but fewer
128 than twelve credit hours in a semester.

129 (b) The Board of Regents for Higher Education and the Board of
130 Trustees of The University of Connecticut shall, jointly, (1) establish a
131 finish line scholars program to make awards to qualifying students each
132 semester, (2) adopt rules, procedures and forms necessary to implement
133 the finish line scholars program, and (3) submit a report outlining such
134 rules, procedures and forms, in accordance with the provisions of
135 section 11-4a of the general statutes, to the joint standing committee of
136 the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to higher
137 education.

138 (c) For the fall semester of 2025, and each semester thereafter, the
139 Board of Regents for Higher Education and the Board of Trustees of The
140 University of Connecticut shall each make awards to qualifying
141 students within available appropriations. An award shall be available

142 to a qualifying student for the first seventy-two credit hours earned by
143 the qualifying student at a state university within the Connecticut State
144 University System or The University of Connecticut, as applicable, or
145 until such qualifying student earns a bachelor's degree, whichever is
146 earlier, provided the qualifying student meets and continues to meet the
147 requirements of this section. The board shall not use an award to
148 supplant any financial aid, including, but not limited to, state or
149 institutional aid, otherwise available to a qualifying student.

150 (d) Not later than November 1, 2025, and March 1, 2026, and each
151 semester thereafter, the Board of Regents for Higher Education and the
152 Board of Trustees of The University of Connecticut shall each report, in
153 accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes,
154 to the joint standing committees of the General Assembly having
155 cognizance of matters relating to higher education and employment
156 advancement and appropriations and the budgets of the state agencies
157 regarding the finish line scholars program, including, but not limited to,
158 (1) the number of qualifying students enrolled at a state university
159 within the Connecticut State University System or The University of
160 Connecticut, as applicable, during each semester, (2) the number of
161 qualifying students receiving minimum awards and the number of
162 qualifying students receiving awards for the unpaid portion of eligible
163 institutional costs, (3) the average number of credit hours the qualifying
164 students enrolled in each semester and the average number of credit
165 hours the qualifying students completed each semester, (4) the average
166 amount of the award made to qualifying students under this section for
167 the unpaid portion of eligible institutional costs, and (5) the completion
168 rates of qualifying students receiving awards under this section by
169 degree program.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	July 1, 2025	10a-174
Sec. 2	July 1, 2025	New section

Section 1	July 1, 2025	10a-174
Sec. 2	July 1, 2025	New section

HED *Joint Favorable Subst.*

The following Fiscal Impact Statement and Bill Analysis are prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose. In general, fiscal impacts are based upon a variety of informational sources, including the analyst's professional knowledge. Whenever applicable, agency data is consulted as part of the analysis, however final products do not necessarily reflect an assessment from any specific department.

OFA Fiscal Note

State Impact:

Agency Affected	Fund-Effect	FY 26 \$	FY 27 \$
Board of Regents for Higher Education	GF - Cost	3.3 million	6.7 million
UConn	GF - Cost	Up to 4.3 million	Up to 8.5 million

Note: GF=General Fund

Municipal Impact: None

Explanation

The bill results in costs to: (1) the Board of Regents for Higher Education (BOR) of approximately \$3.3 million in FY 26 and \$6.7 million in FY 27 and annually thereafter, and; (2) the University of Connecticut (UConn) of up to \$4.3 million in FY 26 and up to \$8.5 million in FY 27 and annually thereafter. The bill creates the finish line scholars program, which extends the debt free community college program through a bachelor's degree at UConn and the Connecticut State Universities (CSUs), for those who participated at the community college level and otherwise qualify. Students who enroll at UConn or a CSU in fall 2025 or later are eligible.

It is estimated that 550 students who enroll at the CSUs in FY 26 could be eligible to participate. Because students can be eligible for multiple years, this number increases to 1,100 in FY 27 and annually thereafter. Assuming current out-of-pocket costs incurred by CSU students, this results in program costs of \$3.3 million in FY 26 and \$6.7 million in FY 27 and annually thereafter.

At UConn, it is anticipated that up to 400 eligible students could

enroll in FY 26.¹ This means that 800 students could be eligible for the program in FY 27 and annually thereafter. The out-of-pocket cost to attend UConn full time² can vary significantly by family income. Assuming average out-of-pocket costs of half the total amount of FY 26 tuition and fees,³ costs could total up to \$4.3 million in FY 26 and \$8.5 million in FY 27 and annually thereafter.

To the extent that the bill increases enrollment in the CSUs or UConn, the cost to fund the program could be significantly higher than indicated in this analysis.

The Out Years

The annualized ongoing fiscal impact identified above would continue into the future subject to the number of students who participate and the level of grant funding they receive.

¹ UConn *Report on Transfer and Articulation*, January 2023.

² Approx. 97% of undergraduate students enrolled at UConn in the fall of 2023 (including regional campuses), attended full time.

³ FY 26 tuition and fees at UConn total \$21,336. Half this amount is \$10,668.

OLR Bill Analysis**sHB 6885*****AN ACT EXPANDING THE DEBT-FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAM.*****SUMMARY**

This bill requires the Board of Regents for Higher Education (BOR) and UConn's Board of Trustees to jointly establish a finish line scholars program awarding grants (within available appropriations) to students who received a Mary Ann Handley program award and then enroll in a bachelor's program at UConn or the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU).

Under this program, which must begin with the Fall 2025 semester, award amounts must be the same as under the Mary Ann Handley program (see BACKGROUND). This means that eligible students receive a grant equal to the greater of (1) the unpaid portion of a student's eligible institutional costs (tuition and required fees) after subtracting the student's financial aid, or (2) a minimum award of \$500 for a full-time student or \$300 for a part-time student. The award cannot be used to replace a student's financial aid and must be available until an eligible student earns, after enrolling at UConn or CSCU, (1) 72 credits or (2) a bachelor's degree, whichever comes first.

The Boards must create the program's rules, procedures, and forms and report on them to the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. (Although the bill does not specify a deadline, presumably the report is due before the beginning of the Fall 2025 semester, when the program begins.)

The bill also requires the Boards to submit a report by November 1, 2025, March 1, 2026, and each following semester, to the Appropriations and Higher Education and Employment Advancement committees. As

described below, this report must include information on participation and degree completion rates, among other things.

The bill also makes technical and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

ELIGIBILITY FOR NEW PROGRAM

The bill's finish line scholars program is substantially similar to the Mary Ann Handley program, except it serves students who leave CT State and enroll at UConn or CSCU. Under the bill, to be eligible for the program, students must:

1. have participated in, and earned at least 60 credits through the Mary Ann Handley program at CT State;
2. enroll part- or full-time in a bachelor's degree-seeking program, in a fall or spring semester, at either a four-year institution within CSCU or at UConn;
3. qualify as in-state students;
4. have made satisfactory academic progress while enrolled at CT State and continue to make satisfactory academic progress while enrolled at CSCU or UConn;
5. have completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA); and
6. have accepted all available financial aid other than loans (i.e. scholarships, grants, and federal, state, and institutional aid.

REQUIRED SEMESTERLY REPORTING

Under the bill, the reports due November 1, 2025, March 1, 2026, and each following semester, must include the following information about program participants and awards:

1. the number of students (a) enrolled during each semester, (b) receiving minimum awards, and (c) receiving awards for the

unpaid portion of eligible institutional costs, as well the average amount of those awards;

2. the average number of credit hours students (a) enrolled in each semester and (b) completed each semester; and
3. student completion rates by degree program.

BACKGROUND

Mary Ann Handley Award

In 2019, the legislature required BOR to establish a tuition-free community college program, which is known as the Mary Ann Handley Award (formerly known as PACT). It is offered to certain high school graduates (or transition program students) who enroll as part or full-time CT State students. Award eligibility depends on a student's enrollment status, in-state student classification, and academic progress during matriculation.

By law, the program gives eligible students awards that are the greater of:

1. the unpaid portion of the tuition and required fees (i.e. tuition and fees after non-loan financial aid is applied) or
2. a minimum \$500 grant for full-time students or \$300 grant for part-time students.

Provided on a semester basis, the awards must apply to the first 72 credit hours earned by a student in a community college degree-granting or certificate program (CGS § 10a-174).

COMMITTEE ACTION

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 13 Nay 5 (03/13/2025)