

# Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No:** SB-8 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

**Title:** AN ACT SUPPORTING GRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE STATE.

**Vote Date:** 2/24/2026

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 2/17/2026

**File No.:**

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

### SPONSORS OF BILL:

Sen. Martin M. Looney, 11th Dist.  
Sen. Bob Duff, 25th Dist.  
Sen. Saud Anwar, 3rd Dist.  
Sen. Jorge Cabrera, 17th Dist.  
Sen. Christine Cohen, 12th Dist.  
Sen. Mae Flexer, 29th Dist.  
Sen. Sujata Gadkar-Wilcox, 22nd Dist.  
Sen. Herron Gaston, 23rd Dist.  
Sen. Joan V. Hartley, 15th Dist.  
Sen. Jan Hochadel, 13th Dist.  
Sen. Paul Honig, 8th Dist.  
Sen. Julie Kushner, 24th Dist.  
Sen. Matthew L. Lesser, 9th Dist.  
Sen. Rick Lopes, 6th Dist.  
Sen. Ceci Maher, 26th Dist.  
Sen. James J. Maroney, 14th Dist.

Sen. Martha Marx, 20th Dist.  
Sen. Douglas McCrory, 2nd Dist.  
Sen. Patricia Billie Miller, 27th Dist.  
Sen. Norman Needleman, 33rd Dist.  
Sen. Catherine A. Osten, 19th Dist.  
Sen. MD Rahman, 4th Dist.  
Sen. Derek Slap, 5th Dist.  
Rep. Kaitlyn Shake, 120th Dist.  
Rep. Eilish Collins Main, 146th Dist.  
Rep. Nick Gauthier, 38th Dist.  
Rep. Gary A. Turco, 27th Dist.  
Rep. Anne M. Hughes, 135th Dist.  
Rep. Corey P. Paris, 145th Dist.  
Rep. Rebecca Martinez, 22nd Dist.  
Rep. Travis Simms, 140th Dist.

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

Committee Bill SB-8 is intended to provide funds to those graduate students enrolled at colleges and universities through the establishment of the Supplemental Graduate Student Loan Program.

This program allocates \$10 million of state bonds per year via the Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority (CHESLA).

## **SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):**

Substitute Language for SB-8 include some edits to the maximum bonding to institutions and a raise of \$10 million in state bonding to a minimum of \$20 million through CHESLA.

The Substitute Language also specifies that no less than \$60 million in state bonding be allocated to CHESLA in furtherance of this program going forward.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

**Josh Hurlock, Deputy Director, CHESLA:** Deputy Director Hurlock supports SB-8 helping students navigate the predicted immediate and time-sensitive issue posed by the Federal Government's removal of the Grad PLUS Loan Program. By providing over an original two-year period of \$20 million in state bonding, funding initially 800 graduate students a year (1,200 cumulative after two years) this bill would grant graduate students a reprieve from needing to turn to high-cost private loans which may force them to abandon their pursuits of a graduate career and fill in need jobs in all sectors in the states workforce.

**John O. Maduko, Interim Chancellor, CSCU:** Interim Chancellor Maduko supports SB-8 due to the financial impacts on graduate students' ability to access affordable borrowing that House Resolution 1. In the aggregate, the Interim Director postulates that with the significant changes to the Pell Grant and Grad PLUS loan programs, in Connecticut's CSCU institutions, (with 95% of CSCU students being residents of CT and most likely to remain in state post-graduation), 3,995 students shall be negatively impacted by these maximum loans available from the federal government at an amount of \$26,277,299, bolstering the state's workforce pipeline.

**Sean Scanlon, State Comptroller, Office of the State Comptroller:** Comptroller Scanlon supports SB-8 as he believes it would provide stability and ability to complete graduate careers for graduate students who need funds divested by the federal government. This bill would allow CHESLA to fill that gap immediately and thus support the investment made in our workforce and bolster the needed employment gaps we have in healthcare and other professional careers. The Comptroller also advises that SB-8 be immediately made effective upon passage, as enabling CHESLA to begin bonding at passage would allow students to start seeing benefits from the program for their fall semester and not endangering any sort of financial aid gap from the ending of the federal student aid programs.

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

**Amy Agata:** Supports SB-8 as a healthcare worker. They believe this bill would aid in many medical professionals (APRNs, CRNAs, CNMs, etc.) achieving high-quality education, especially for those who may be underprivileged or a first-generation college student as loan accessibility may not be extended to those persons as equitably as to others without such support from the State and CHESLA in the absence of the previously supportive federal Grad PLUS Loan Program.

**Todd Andrews, Senior Vice President, Goodwin University:** Goodwin University views SB-8 as a positive first step in the changes in federal student aid that will take effect in 2026 with the elimination of the Grad PLUS Loan Program via state bonding alternatives, and wishes it to be made effective upon passage.

Though, Goodwin University, while being in strong support for SB-8, does not think it goes far enough in helping all students of higher education citing it's single focus on graduate students, leaving gaps (up to \$8.3 million removed from Goodwin itself) from the part-time student loan framework that the state has not filled with the recent federal withdrawal from said initiatives.

The University testifies that SB-8 can be amended to allow CHESLA's Supplemental Student Loan Program to serve both graduate and part-time students who are impacted by these federal loan reductions or eliminations.

Alternatively, the University proposes the creation of a parallel program like the Supplemental Student Loan Program intended to serve part-time students specifically, thus covering the needs faced by such students under the same funding model and risk-sharing construct under the administrative structure set forth by SB-8.

**Anonymous, Anonymous:** Supports SB-8 because it is believed to support necessary work in the areas of social work at many levels of the workforce.

**Anonymous, Anonymous:** Expresses support for SB-8 believing that it can lower higher/graduate education stress as financial burdens will be lowered and students can focus more on their studies and less on how they are to pay for said pursuits.

**Connecticut Senate, Senator Saud Anwar, 3<sup>rd</sup> District:** Senator Anwar expresses strong support for SB-8 claiming that it aims to protect the people and professionals of Connecticut from the actions made at the federal level regarding student loans for graduate students. The Senator specifically notes that with the President's and federal comments and action regarding the elimination of the Grant PLUS Loan Program and redefining many occupations within as non-professional was a major blow to many professionals in the State of Connecticut.

**Michael Bailey, Executive Director, UConn AAUP:** UConn AAUP supports SB-8 as graduate students in legal, medical, and doctoral programs who have been redesignated as "Non-Professional" by the passage of the federal elimination of the Grad PLUS Loan Program, it is felt, will be supported on the state level by this legislation. It is also felt by UConn AAUP that this bill can help students by expanding access to education for future educators in the medical field, etc.

**Christopher Bartels, CRNA, Wilton Anastasia Associates:** Supports the passage of SB-8, emphasizing the believed positive impact of lower loan impact and repayment rates.

**John Brady, Executive Vice President, AFT Connecticut:** AFT Connecticut supports SB-8 because, by allowing the Connecticut State Government to step in, damage caused by the federal government's elimination of Parent Plus and Grad PLUS Loan Programs can be mitigated. Brady believes this bill may also create a sturdy future for the professionals and grad students of today and those of the future through increased stable access to education.

**Liberty Brown:** Supports SB-8 claiming that it can sustain graduate students of all financial backgrounds and strengthens the skilled workforce of the state at all levels during this time of federal divestment in many student loan programs that said students rely on.

**Gina Calabro, CEO, American Institute of Architects Connecticut:** AIA Connecticut supports passage of SB-8 claiming that it supports reinstatement of loans on a state level that were cut by the federal passage of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act and support the states workforce pipeline.

**Immaculata Cann, Chief Nursing Officer:** Supports SB-8 claiming that it supports our states professionals including those in behavioral health and APRNs. In effect, the reduction of loans cost and increase in borrowing ability would offset the increasing amount of debt for graduate students caused by the increasing cost of higher education, especially when it comes to graduate school.

**Maryclaire Capetta, President, American Physical Therapy Association of Connecticut:** The APTA of Connecticut supports SB-8 as they believe the bill will offset the effects of the new capping of Federal Direct Loans at \$20,500 and the elimination of the Grad PLUS Loan Program is projected to cost many Physical Therapy students dearly as, at UConn, a three-year Doctor of Physical Therapy Program costs \$118,000.

**Connecticut Hospital Association:** The Connecticut Hospital Association supports SB-8 as the loans provided by the state bonding through CHESLA will help many programs of higher education retain students and especially in the hospital arena, gain more talented medical professionals to fill the much-needed positions in the medical field who provide high-quality care throughout Connecticut with these graduate degrees affordably attained through this new program.

**Danielle Cloud, Policy Director, Connecticut Business & Industry Association:** The CBIA supports passage of SB-8 as these loans help Connecticut residents attain a graduate education. These students are more likely to stay in Connecticut and be recruited into many high-need jobs in the economy, thus buoying business, the economy, and competitiveness of the job market. The talent pool of the job market is therefore positively impacted by these loans as without them, many talented individuals drop higher education, and thus, supporting them is a major priority, which this bill satiates in the current absence of federal loan offerings.

**Marte Ostvik-de Wilde, Associate Professor, University of Saint Joseph:** The Professor maintains strong support for SB-8 given the increased burden financially faced by graduate students. Those in the Counseling Department, of which the Professor is Department Chair, students are required to take 60 credit hours for a master's and complete 800 unpaid practicum and internship hours and reduce drop-out rates.

**Kate Dias, President, Connecticut Education Association:** The CEA supports SB-8 because they claim it has the possibility of providing lower out-of-pocket costs for higher education from particularly middle or low-income students who have fewer financing options on the private market. Combined with these private loans heightened interest rate, the program proposed in SB-8 would dramatically reduce the burden on such students and provide financial security to all graduate students who study in and will statistically stay and work in Connecticut post-graduation.

**Joy Elwell, Clinical Professor, University of Connecticut:** Professor Elwell postulates that SB-8 can offset nursing/medical related teaching shortages in Higher Education. According to research by the American Association of Colleges in Nursing (AACN) in 2025 the average age of a nursing professor holding a doctorate was 60 and over 85,000 nursing students were turned away due to faculty shortages.

**Casandra Esposito, President, Connecticut Nurses Association:** Supports SB-8 as the new state financing can support graduate students as the workforce needs their services. In effect the financing will provide stability and opportunity to all graduate students who would have relied on federal loans, therefore burgeoning state support and the workforce pipeline.

**Rhonda Free, President, University of Saint Joseph:** The University of Saint Joseph supports SB-8 as CHESLA and the State's actions is believed to be able to support their graduate students monetarily and encourage them to stay in Connecticut, as they do statistically already, with these stable loans in play.

**Alexandra L. Ganim, LMSW:** Ganim, a Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW), postulates that SB-8 would benefit the state's workforce due to its support for those trying to become employed in Case Management through graduate studies as costs have become prohibitively expensive.

**Wendy Garvin Mayo, Chief Executive Officer, Collaborative Cancer Care:** Supports SB-8 on the grounds of its positive effect on state workforce development strategies to cover shortages of care and employment experienced in the therein.

**Margaret Goodwin, Volunteer-Retired, Social Welfare Action Alliance Connecticut Chapter:** Supports SB-8 due to debt reduction, especially in Social Work graduate and other professional programs.

**Marie Hardin, President, Quinnipiac University:** Quinnipiac University strongly supports SB-8. In the last collegiate year 2024-2025, around \$18.5 million was borrowed by Quinnipiac students from the Grad PLUS Loan Program. With that money threatened, SB-8 would provide stability and support critically needed sectors of our state's economy with newly educated graduate students.

**Ed Hawthorne, President, Connecticut American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations:** Supports SB-8 on the grounds of creating equality in loan availability to graduate students and revitalizing our state's job market with needed professional jobs that can be filled by these graduate students who attain their degrees affordably with state-provided financial aid in lieu of federal dollars.

**Shannon Lane:** Supports SB-8 claiming that it encourages students to engage in graduate degrees and do so affordably, without the need of taking out private loans.

**Dr. Heather LaSalle, University of Saint Joseph:** Dr. LaSalle supports SB-8 on the grounds of an affordable means by which particularly mental health professionals sustain themselves during their graduate education, and after. Serving the communities in Connecticut these individuals return to will overall reduce our state's need for professionals in the workforce as well.

**Kathryn Lofton, Graduate Student, SCSU:** Supports SB-8 claiming that it is a good means by which higher education cost, and debt accrued by said cost, can be lowered in this state.

**Connecticut Senate, Senate President Pro Tempore, Senator Martin Looney, 11<sup>th</sup> District:** Senator Looney expresses strong support for SB-8 claiming that it supports our state's students all the way through their graduate education. The Senator believes this bill, through its state bonding, provide loans that would encourage students from Connecticut to go to institutions of higher education in Connecticut and stay to work and live in Connecticut post-graduation, making our state stronger and stable as time goes on.

These sentiments of support were echoed by:

#### **Connecticut State Senate Democrats**

**Mona Lucas, Assistant VP for Enrollment, University of Connecticut:** Supports SB-8 as a means by which students who attend higher education in the state can be supported financially while attending graduate programs. Thus, striking a responsible balance and fiscally able response to address the affordability gap created by federal cuts to student aid in Connecticut.

**Ami Marshall, President, Connecticut Advanced Practice Registered Nurse Society:** CTAPRNS supports SB-8 as meaningful investment in graduate students will increase recruitment of APRNs, timely completion of degrees, increase access to APRN care, and promote health equity and diversity in the workforce.

**Emily McCave, Professor of Social Work, Quinnipiac University:** Supports SB-8 based on increased affordability for graduate students affected by the elimination of the Grad PLUS Loan Program.

**Jocelyn Medina, Graduate Student, University of Connecticut, School of Social Work:** Supports SB-8 claiming that it is a leading program which the state can be a catalyst in the nation for providing state-level solutions to the federal cutting of student loan programs. Thus, supporting the professionals of the future in Connecticut.

**Edith Ouellet, EdD RN CNE:** Supports SB-8 based on the need for healthcare educators in all fields.

**Jennifer Parzych, Associate Professor, Southern Connecticut State University:** Supports SB-8 and requests it be extended to support paid internships for graduate students in clinical and educator preparation programs such as school counseling.

**John Petillo, President, Sacred Heart University:** Sacred Heart University supports SB-8 claiming that it protects access to graduate and professional education, bolsters Connecticut's health care and behavioral health employment pipeline, lowers student reliance on high-interest private loans, and supports retention in the workforce by increased degree completion rates.

**Julia Powers, MSW Student, SCSU:** Supports SB-8 claiming that it addresses a workforce gap in the social work field.

**Kathrine Presutti, Executive Director of Student Financial Aid, University of Hartford:** Supports SB-8 as grant and scholarship money is at a very low level and those graduate students trying to get into professional careers are facing major financial hardships. This bill would alleviate that burden of seeking alternate means of payment, such as private loans, and provide financial stability for all Connecticut graduate students.

**Jason Prevelige, Legislative Committee Chair, Connecticut Academy of Physician Associates:** Supports SB-8 claiming that it provides reasonable funding options to students pursuing graduate studies. They also urge immediate adoption of the bill upon passage.

**Laura Prior, CTAPRNS:** Supports SB-8 and it's shoring up of the employment pipelines for APRNs and other professionals that have been categorized by the recent federal administration's reclassification as "non-professional".

**Lynn Rapsilber, Nurse Practitioner:** Supports SB-8 claiming it's investment into nursing education is a vital, strategic, and responsible policy.

**Joyce Rioux, APRN, CT APRN Society:** Supports SB-8 in the Occupational Therapy field as costs exceed caps put on borrowing by the Federal Government, with lower private options and higher cost of living adding to the burden. This bill would alleviate that burden and create a low risk-high retention "bridge" to OT licensure and employment within the state of Connecticut.

**Jamie Rodriguez, Advocacy Chair, Connecticut Association of Marriage and Family Therapy:** Supports SB-8 claiming that it is believed to be able to support workforce infrastructure in many agencies and areas of interest for higher education, healthcare, and the workforce itself.

**Julia Rosa, Professor Emeritus, Connecticut State Community College Capital:** Supports SB-8 claiming that all sectors of healthcare delivery in the state can derive benefits from this bill and provide opportunity to the over 80,000 baccalaureate students who were turned down from graduate school due to lack of faculty, who rely on such graduate students and thus, their financial aid.

**Gina Rosich, Associate Professor and Chair, University of Saint Joseph:** Supports SB-8 claiming that it remediates damage done by HR 1 and provides support for those in graduate education who engage in internships which are unpaid to complete their degrees.

**Kim Sandor Et. Al., Leader-Healthcare Professions:** Supports SB-8 claiming that it will provide many Connecticut residents a chance to go to graduate school and bolster the state's employment pipeline, which is under threat. In particular, the collegiate faculty pipeline can be bolstered by this bill as those grad students wishing to teach are only able to do so, for many, by receiving federal student loans. Without them, the state, through SB-8, is believed to be able to support them and train the next generation of professionals as a result, father benefiting the state itself.

**Kimberly Sandor, Executive Director, Connecticut Nurses Association:** Supports SB-8 on the grounds of affordability and workforce pipeline strengthening in the healthcare industry.

**Kelly Sargent:** Supports SB-8 as an investment in graduate students now constitutes an investment in Connecticut's future and those professionals which we need to support all aspects of our workforce, supported financially regardless of socioeconomic background.

**Misty Scoggins:** Supports SB-8 as many students now, according to a study at Central Connecticut State University, 40% of students were concerned about affording food and 24% had to put rent above basic needs costs over the past three months. This bill would provide greater stability and alleviate these worries significantly.

**Hannah Spinner, Aspiring Educator State Chair, Connecticut Education Association:** Supports SB-8, believing that it can alleviate stress on students financially and allow them to continue their careers in higher education. In addition, it would prove to be a way forward in investing in the future of our state's educators who would choose to teach given a stable financial backing for their graduate studies.

**Corry Unis, Vice President, Strategic Enrollment, Fairfield University:** Supports SB-8 claiming that it would support advanced degrees and give graduate students a chance to achieve them affordably. They insist that the bill be made effective and implemented immediately upon passage.

**Terri Williams, DNAP CRNA APRN:** Supports SB-8 claiming that it reduces loan debt to those involved in a three-year doctorate or other graduate program consisting of many unpaid hours of practicum or other learning time in residency.

**Yale University:** Yale Supports SB-8 claiming that it supports the public good and helps graduate students graduate as debt-free as possible. Yale intends to implement a similar program at their institution to augment the relief that can be given to their students in need of financial aid with broad access and flexible repayment plans to help as many students as they can.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None expressed.

**Reported by: Tom Atwood**

**Date: 3/9/26**