



State of Connecticut Office of Higher Education

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Office of Higher Education Releases Audit Results of Stone Academy Student Transcripts

The Office of Higher Education (OHE) today began releasing to more than 800 former Stone Academy students audit results and a copy of their student transcript. The audit results were produced by CliftonLarsonAllen LLP (CLA), an independent auditor that OHE contracted with to conduct an independent review of Stone Academy's students' records to:

- protect the integrity of practical nursing education programs and the health of patients,
- provide students with an accurate record of their training, and
- assist OHE in determining which out-of-pocket tuition payments are refundable under the law.

Students who attended Stone between November 2021 and February 2023, and who had not graduated before the school closed, will receive their original Stone Academy transcript, their audit results, and a letter explaining how the audit was conducted. Students who have not already made a request for their audit results and original Stone Academy transcript can do so here: <https://ct.gov/studenttranscript>

"Stone Academy students trained hard to build a better future for themselves, their families, and the patients they serve," said Office of Higher Education Executive Director Tim Larson. "Unfortunately, these audited transcripts demonstrate Stone Academy was not providing most of its students with the education they need to be prepared to take the NCLEX or practice as an LPN. My office will make sure students are refunded for their out-of-pocket tuition payments that are refundable under the law and know the options available to them to complete their education as quickly as possible."

The Office of Higher Education and the Department of Public Health agreed that a very broad interpretation of the mandatory regulations would be utilized to recognize valid coursework and clinical hours and OHE provided the auditor with the agreed upon parameters.

The audit results are the next step in helping these students continue their education and, eventually, join the profession. CLA determined the number of hours of instruction that each student received in accordance with the requirements for nursing education programs. In most cases, Stone Academy student clinical experiences cannot be counted toward the requirements as they were performed at an inappropriate site, delivered by unqualified faculty, conducted with improper faculty to student ratios,

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or had inconsistent or absent supporting documentation. In many cases, Stone Academy provided no documentation reflecting student completion of the hours required to earn credit for a course.

The Office of Higher Education will notify students who are eligible to apply to Griffin Hospital School of Allied Health Careers for a ten-month teach-out program. Students who do not qualify for the teach-out program may apply to one of the state's other approved practical nursing programs at Lincoln Technical Institute or Porter & Chester Institute.

To assist OHE in determining which out-of-pocket tuition payments are refundable, CLA reviewed the financial ledgers and student transcripts for active students. CLA calculated approximately \$263,000 in out-of-pocket expenses that the state will reimburse to students out of the private career school student protection account. CLA also identified nearly \$13 million paid to Stone Academy in federal financial aid on behalf of the active students. The United States Department of Education has the authority to conduct their own review of the federal financial aid for Stone Academy. OHE recommends students interested in applying for a loan discharge visit here: <https://studentaid.gov/manage-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/closed-school>

Attorney General William Tong has sued Stone Academy, Paier College of Art, and their owner Joseph Bierbaum alleging numerous violations of the Connecticut Unfair Trade Practices Act. The Office of the Attorney General is seeking civil penalties of up to \$5,000 per violation—a sum likely totaling many millions of dollars, in addition to the disgorgement of all revenues, profits and gains achieved through such acts and practices. The complaint also seeks restitution for the victims of Stone's conduct—students.

The Office of Higher Education plans to hold a webinar to review the audit results with Stone students and answer questions. Participating in the webinar will be representatives from OHE, DPH, CLA, the United States Department of Education, Griffin Hospital School of Allied Health Careers, and Lincoln Technical Institute. The webinar will be recorded for those who are not able to attend.

In addition to the more than 800 active students at the time of Stone's closure, there are 389 alumni who graduated from Stone Academy after November 1, 2021 but had not completed their licensing application or passed the licensing exam before the school closed in February. Of those students, 106 have now passed the exam and the others are either preparing to complete the application or take and pass the exam. The Department of Public Health is offering to those who pass the exam a free forty-hour clinical refresher course. Pursuant to section 67 of Public Act 23-204, OHE will also provide stipends to students who complete in that course.

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