

General Assembly Appropriation Committee
February 28, 2011 -- Testimony of Jarmaine V. Lee

My name is Jarmaine V. Lee. I live in Hartford and attend Capital Community College where I am a member of the Capital Ambassadors and Presidential Candidate for the Student Senate. I am pursuing an associate's degree in the music industry.

During my first semester @ Capital Community College I was faced with the challenge of being burned out of my home in Windsor, CT. My school was dynamically instrumental in assisting me in recovering from this misfortune. One resource that was most helpful was the state tuition work study program which allowed me the opportunity to be gainfully employed in my educational environment. Had it not been for these funds being available, it would have been to my misfortune and could have possibly caused me to drop out of school.

Most students at Capital Community College who are pursuing a degree like me rely on financial aid programs for tuition, books, employment and other expenses related to the cost of getting a college education. This assistance has greatly enhanced the ability of taxpaying citizens like myself in pursuing an education and still provide for themselves and their families. Many are the first individuals in their family to get an opportunity to attend college, and are only able to attend because of the financial aid provided through federal and state grant programs that are now targeted for sacrifice to balance the budget.

When you add the cuts in your budget to the tuition increases set to go into effect next fall and the cuts to federal Pell grants, it is a certainty that many Capital Community College students will be denied the opportunity to continue their education. Fewer people will be able to go to college in Hartford next fall.

The double digit reductions in the proposed state budget for student financial aid and instructional resources are a serious blow to the goal to make sure Connecticut has an educated workforce -- a workforce that will be necessary to fill the jobs that require education beyond high school. Fewer graduates from places like Capital mean fewer residents who are qualified to fill jobs. Fewer jobs filled means the Connecticut economy stays down and state government has less to meet its basic obligations.

We know resources are tight and your choices are difficult in balancing the budget this year. However, President Obama stated that our country's future is contingent upon those of us who obtain a proper education and adequate job training. Please remember financial aid programs at Capital Community College are essential to keeping the doors to college open for all students regardless of their financial means. There are no frills or waste associated with financial aid grants. The money goes directly to meet a clear need and enables students to get an education without going into debt.

Most students at Capital are making sacrifices to get the education that will lead to good jobs. Most are balancing work, raising families and going to school to be successful. Give us the opportunity to earn our degrees and become productive, tax-paying members of the community.

I urge the appropriations committee to restore funds for the student financial aid, to reduce the size of classroom cuts and to consider legislation that will minimize tuition increases at community colleges in 2012.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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