

February 24, 2011

To the Appropriations Committee,

Good morning, my name is John T. Genna, Jr. I am writing this letter in response to the recommended budget cuts that would affect Connecticut's Community College System. I graduated from Quinebaug Valley Community College in June of 2009 and would like to share experience of the time I spent there.

I decided at the age of 33 that it was time to make a change to my career. I had spent the past eleven years working as an aircraft mechanic, seven of which were while on active duty as a United States Marine. I was a bit nervous about the college experience due to trying fifteen years earlier, and not succeeding. From the moment I walked through the admissions door I was greeted with a warm smile.

I quickly realized that the community college system was the right place for me to start my education. I saw the benefits immediately upon starting my first class. The instructors seemed to be passionate about what they were teaching and had an interest in the success of each student. I made it a habit of introducing myself to each instructor after the first class and getting to know them on a professional level. I wanted to have a relationship with the instructors in case I found myself in need of more assistance with the material. This proved to be a right thing to do and I was able to get to know a lot of the staff at QVCC this way.

The class size at QVCC was another benefit of the college. I think the largest class I had there was twenty five people. Fortunately that was a public speaking class, so the size was perfect for overcoming the fear of speaking to a crowd. The personnel that run the college were incredible as well. One of the first people I met was Donna Albeke. She initially helped me with enrollment and getting all my Veterans Affairs paperwork in order. People like her have a natural gift, she was always there to help or lead to someone more suited too. I watched her over the next two years develop the "Oasis" for the veterans to use and enjoy. This was something near and dear to my heart, I unfortunately wasn't able to reap the benefits of this because I graduated right after it was opened. However I was honored when I was asked to be part of the ribbon cutting ceremony.

The programs offered were the biggest reason that I started my education at QVCC. I eventually wanted to obtain a degree in engineering. The college offered both an engineering and a technologies program, both of which were applicable to the direction I was headed. Both programs transitioned seamlessly into a four year program. The benefits of going to

community college first were the cost was much less; I could take the same classes closer to home for cheaper - a win/win situation.

I soon realized that what the community colleges really did was prepare a student and give them the tools to succeed not only in school but life as well. Many of the younger students may not realize just how much they can gain from going to one of the community colleges first. For me it was an incredible experience that I can't say enough good things about. I was not the best student when I was in high school. I was lucky if I graduated with a low "C" average. I had that fear hanging over my head when I first started but soon realized that the instructors were there to help me to succeed. I ended up graduating with honors; a feat that I never imagined was possible.

The pleasant experience that I had at QVCC led me to a four year institution that I will not name. I can honestly say that I am not overly happy there but it is convenient for my schedule. I work full time and go to school full time and have a 20 month old, so this place was convenient for my busy schedule. The issues I have at the current college solidify how much I loved my time at QVCC, and wish all colleges were run this way. At my current college I had a horrible time with the enrolling process and it just escalated from there. People at this college just don't seem to have the love and dedication for their jobs and desire to help students with their needs. I think that is one of the huge benefits of the smaller college, there is chance for the student to not just be a number but a person.

I believe it is a horrible idea to take any more money away from the community college system. These colleges are there for people like me the nontraditional student who is trying to start a new career while living in their old one. They are also a great resource for high school students to use when transitioning from public education to college. It is in my opinion that every student should have to start here before they can go to a university or private college. It really prepares and gets the student used to the requirements and dedication it takes to succeed in higher education.

I believe this budget cut is going to crush a system that is already struggling to survive. Many of people will be affected in the long run, not just the college. The work force will not have the qualified people that it needs to grow. The students will not get the level of excellence that they deserve for the hard earned money they are giving up. The instructors will have to deal with much larger classes throwing off the student to instructor ratio. The programs will not have the funds to keep current with the explosion of technology in the world.

I hope that there is enough support to make Mr. Malloy and his team realize that the community college system is not able to sustain any more cut backs. I realize that there are budget cuts that need to be made, but this is not where it should come from. If we as a state

are to continue to grow, we need individuals that are trained to do the jobs. This training starts at community level. One thing that is over looked is the fact that not everyone can afford the higher priced four years schools. We have to consider that it is almost a requirement now that you have some form of higher education for many of the jobs that support our economy. How are the businesses and economy going to improve if there are less qualified individuals to fill the required positions? It seems that if anything it is going to be harder for the already struggling economy in Connecticut with more educational cutbacks.

In closing I would just like to mention that it's not only traditional college classes that would be affected by the budget cuts. There are also many programs geared toward improving work place skills and services that are offered there. The company I work for has sent the entire staff to QVCC for some of these programs to improve our skills as a team; this in turn improves the business as a whole. The cutbacks are no doubt going to mean that some are all of these programs will have to go yet again hurting the local businesses that utilize the college resources. I would say the state government really needs to further explore the long term effects that will come from further budget cut on the community college education system.

Sincerely,

John T Genna, Jr.