

To the Appropriations Committee:

Thanks for the opportunity to share my thoughts and feelings

I am a working mother and college student. I have chosen to improve my life and the lives of my children by getting the training and education I need to succeed. I will be graduating this May from Three Rivers Community College with an Associate's Degree in Nursing. After passing my boards this summer, I will be working as nurse in our state and pursue advanced degrees in our state schools. Were it not for the access to, and affordability of, our state community college system, I would still be waiting tables, barely paying the bills and definitely not saving for and investing in the future. Because of the access to, and affordability of, our state community college system, my family and I will be able to avoid pitfall of relying on the state's safety nets for health care and basic sustenance. Because of the education I have received in our state community college system, I will be giving back to the people of Connecticut as a Registered Nurse and an investor in our economy. My children, because of my successes, will be more likely to have their own successes and be investors in the state economy.

The yield is so much more than can be measured for investments into the state college system. Our community colleges provide more than access to an affordable education; they provide access to achieving goals, and making dreams a reality. Tuition hikes and cutbacks in our state colleges only serve to keep goals beyond reach, denying people the access to get the education and experience they need to become investors in our state.

I am only one of so many students that will be affected by cuts to our higher education system. My children would be only two of thousands of children of continuing education students that would be affected by their parents not being able to get the training necessary for gainful employment. The ripple effect of cutting back on our state college system is devastating. Please help to keep our goals attainable. The reality is, is that our reality is better because of the access we have to an affordable, high quality education and educators who love what they do, who make sure that we graduate into the workforce as highly skilled professionals who care for the people of our state.

Here are statements I shared in a recent interview:

Steve Starger from the Connecticut Nursing News asked me for a "student perspective" response about nursing education. I sent him the following email; I hope that it is satisfactory for you and that it really conveys my passion for our program. Thanks, Bianca

Dear Steve,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to respond to the bullet point about an improved nursing education progression. We are fortunate in the Connecticut Community College System to have educators that are passionate about us continuing our education beyond an Associate Degree in Nursing. At Three Rivers Community College specifically, where I will be graduating from in May, we are reminded about and encouraged to take advantage of the Connecticut Articulation Plan for nurse educational mobility which is said to provide us with a seamless transition to a BSN program at participating universities (and there are many). Through college fairs that are held on campus, off site, and representative speakers in the classroom, I have not encountered anything that has made a seamless transition seem any less than easily attainable. I am committed to the nursing profession, which is why I plan on continuing through to an MSN and quite possibly beyond.

That being said, I do not want to diminish in any way the importance of the nursing program at our community colleges. They are a tremendous resource for students and the nursing profession alike, providing the opportunity for many gifted and passionate nurses to enter the profession. Without the ADN program, the nursing profession would be denied a wealth of talent.

The nursing program at TRCC has quite literally afforded me the opportunity to make my goal of becoming a nurse a reality. An affordable tuition is only a fraction of why the ADN program is so important; the small class sizes and enthusiasm of the educators have been integral to my success as a nursing student, as well the successes of my peers. I am a working mother on a limited budget, and the community college system fosters learners like me; I was able to complete the remainder of my prerequisite classes while my youngest child was in daycare on campus. The tuition and daycare costs of entering a baccalaureate program outright were prohibitively expensive.

In no way do I feel like my designation as a Registered Nurse will be diminished because I have earned it through the community college system. Quite conversely, I will be a better prepared student in a higher degree program because I have learned the value of rigor and mastered the art of organization at TRCC. My foundation in nursing practice is grounded in our core values of holism, critical thinking, safe and competent care, caring, professionalism, and communication. Our core values are not merely words on a page but what my classmates and I strive to live by as nursing students. Not only will I be a better prepared student in a higher degree program, but I will be more than ready to enter the workforce with 840 clinical hours spent practicing and providing care. As a soon to be graduate of a Connecticut community college, I plan on practicing in Connecticut and pursuing higher levels of education here thanks to our compact with local universities and the foundation TRCC has provided me.

Thanks again, Steve, for giving me the opportunity to comment on nursing education. My apologies for the length, but it is something that I am truly inspired to comment and expound on. If you have any questions, please call me directly at 860-878-8717, or you can email me at biancatsharp@gmail.com

Regards,
Bianca Sharp