Budget Presentation Testimony by
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Connecticut State University System
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Good afternoon, Senator Harp and Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Louise Feroe, and I am Senior Vice Chancellor for the Connecticut State University System. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today. I know your agenda is long and the task before you is considerable, so I will make every effort to be relatively brief in my presentation, and I will be pleased to respond to your questions.

The Connecticut State University System includes Central, Eastern, Southern and Western Connecticut State universities. We have the highest enrollment in two decades, more full-time students than at any time in our history, and awarded more degrees and certificates last year than ever before.

Nearly half of our students are the first generation in their families to attend college, and for many of them if not for these institutions, higher education would be out of reach. We are catalysts for Connecticut, and in many ways the education workhorse of our state. Nearly 94 percent of our students are from Connecticut, and 86 percent remain in the state after graduation, pursuing careers and contributing to the civic life of our communities.

We are working closely with businesses and nonprofit agencies across Connecticut, and providing workforce connections for our students, who are pursuing the STEM fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, as well as nursing, business, and other workforce demand fields in unprecedented numbers. A new Ed.D. in Nursing Education, a collaborative effort of Southern and Western which is awaiting approval by the Board of Governors for Higher Education, would produce additional nursing faculty, which will lead to addition nursing graduates.

But even as our student population has been growing, and we have been directing more of our resources to faculty and student support services, we have cut back in other areas. Our students are not immune to the economic downturn, and neither are we.

Higher education is an essential ingredient in Connecticut's economic recovery. We are committed to continuing our efforts to advance that recovery, as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Our reading of the Governor's proposal thus far is that it calls for a reduction of 10 percent, or about $17.6 million, as well as a 2 percent turnover reduction, or about $3.3 million, to which higher education has not been subject in previous biennial budgets. Other areas of the budget may also have implications for us. To explain, let me provide some context, as well as some of the unknowns that we are currently examining.

First, the context. Over the past few years, we have been working diligently across the university system to reduce expenses while minimizing any adverse impact on our academic programs or student services. In fact, our cost savings and cost avoidance total $48.9 million, in areas including energy conservation, information technology and reducing non-instructional personnel. We are certainly willing to do more, but that doesn't change the fact that reductions have already been made totaling nearly $50 million. And even as we have done so, we have improved our graduation rates to well above the national average for public Masters Degree institutions. That required attention to the classroom and to other student support areas, such as advising, career exploration, and psychological services.

Today, for example, our level of management employees compares quite favorably with other state agencies – about 2.5 percent of our employees are management, compared with in excess of 10 percent in other state agencies. Management and system office staff reductions have thinned our ranks without substantially impacting our classrooms. In fact, the only personnel growth in recent years has been in faculty and direct student support. Management, and other personnel categories, have been reduced.

Second, there remains uncertainly, as you know, regarding the negotiations between state employee unions and the administration. Therefore, we cannot know what the budgetary implications of those negotiations will be, but they may very well entail additional cutbacks beyond what is outlined in the administration's budget proposal.

Third, you are aware of proposals for a reorganization of various aspects of higher education in Connecticut. Here again, it is hard to know what the budgetary implications will be, but the administration's proposal envisions decisions regarding funding levels being made by a Board of Regents based on a formula they will determine that may include any number of yet-to-be-defined components.

Many of you are aware of the recommendation by the legislature's Program Review and Investigations Committee for development of a strategic plan for higher education. Budgetary reductions are also on the table, and the reamifications of those reductions. I know those are decisions that you will be grappling with, not only on this committee, but with your legislative colleagues. As many of you know, we have long supported an overarching strategic plan for higher education.

Although our budget is certainly in flux for all of these reasons, we have been working on contingency plans and will continue doing so. We have been proactively working with the University Presidents on scenarios to consider just what a 10% reduction would mean to the universities and, more importantly, our students. It is important to keep in mind that every effort is made to keep the direct impact on students to a minimum. Even so, the types of actions that would need to be considered in the face of a 10% reduction include increases in class size as faculty positions are eliminated, reductions in institutional financial aid and student labor, reductions in student services staff (such as admissions, student health and resident life), and reducing the amount spent on campus repairs and maintenance. These are not actions that would be taken lightly.

You do have our assurance that we stand ready to work with you throughout this process, as you work through the various options regarding the budget, state employee concessions, and various versions of strategic planning and reorganization.

Our bottom line is what is in the best interest of our students – to remain accessible and affordable, and to provide the caliber of education Connecticut students have come to expect and deserve. In our view, if we do that, Connecticut will be well-served as well.