

Eric Porter

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(I am seeking permanent residence in Danbury, CT)

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee's public hearing on S.B. No. 1011 - An Act Concerning a Reorganization of Connecticut's System of Public Higher Education.

Senator Bye, Representative Willis, and members of the committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I want to first say that I go to school and work in Danbury, CT and I am currently seeking permanent residence there. I would like to raise a family there. I am a voting citizen, and will be voting in Connecticut in the very near future. I am a senior psychology student at Western Connecticut State University. I want to say that to be in the position that you are in is admirable. As a voting citizen I look at the individuals up for office and I commend them for their desire to take on such enormous responsibilities and their willingness to serve in a job that's often thankless. It truly is amazing.

I won't pretend to fully understand economics and politics so I will leave the conclusion up to you. Before making a decision on education funding, please consider my personal experience.

Like so many adolescents, I was angry and confused. I got mixed up with the wrong crowd in high school and started using drugs. I took education for granted. I spent years on welfare and I have been through homelessness, rehabs, and detoxification centers. Just after my 20th birthday I found myself suffering from withdrawals in jail. Just imagine all the symptoms of your worst flu only 20 times more extreme. Later that same year I was manipulating the system to abuse my own medication in rehab. I didn't even realize I had missed my father's birthday, but I'm sure I would have missed it even if I wasn't in a program. I was absent from life for so long.

In November 2010 I celebrated 5 years clean. I am employed and I pay my taxes. I do community service work and go to local hospitals and institutions to give a message of hope to others who are now where I once was.

How did I break that destructive cycle that claims so many young lives? School. To be completely honest I applied to college simply thinking it would give me a better opportunity to party. I was only staying clean because I did not want my parents to kick me out of my house. So, I was surprised to find myself responding positively to the encouragement and support from the staff and professors. It was only through WCSU that I was able to make and achieve academic goals.

I remember Professor Rosenthal asked me how I was doing as we walked out of

a Latin and Caribbean Culture class. I had just found out that I was most likely going to fail sociology, I was thinking about getting high, and I really did not think I was cut out for college. So, I chose my words carefully and said, "I hate this crap!" I explained to him the situation in sociology and how I was feeling about school. He then explained to me how he had been meaning to put up a list of his failures on his office door. I looked at him as if he was nuts. I said, "You have your Doctorate! What are you talking about?"

He made the point that he had failed courses along the way. I was shocked by his honesty. He then said something like, Look, don't let it ruin your enthusiasm; if you need extra help go to the AccessAbility Services department.

I met with the staff there and was encouraged to continue on. Deborah Cohen taught me some crucial skills that resulted in me being more organized in my own head and in class. Neal De Luca has not only guided me in improving my writing skills, but has given me life skills as well. I told him how I was failing and he encouraged me to keep going. He never lost hope in me and taught me how to take a negative and turn it to a positive. Jen Zdziarski informed me about the substance abuse counseling program that WCSU offers and helped me find a purpose for my life. The whole entire psychology department is amazing. I was at my bottom, and there are countless staff members and professors that have helped pick me up from the hole I put myself in. I will forever remember the faces from all the different departments that have given me such an amazing gift: the ability to believe in myself.

In my major I am now focusing on substance abuse counseling. I am currently evaluating my options of furthering my education past a bachelor's degree. I also plan on opening my own halfway house to help integrate people back into society from jail and rehab where I will incorporate many new and unique ideas to create jobs. I will give people the skills they need to become productive members of society. Most of all I will introduce to them a concept that had been absent in me for so long: the ability to achieve and a sense of self-worth. This will also help stimulate the economy and allow me to support my family so they do not become another welfare statistic.

Only because of school is this possible. To think that I could still be milking the government's money while stuck in that revolving door of drinking, drug addiction, and crime is a horror. If funding had been cut five years ago we would never truly know what could have been. I know I do not have the knowledge and experience that you have. I am, however, grateful for the opportunities that I now have; so grateful that tears of joy have rolled down my face walking through campus. So, I think about the future and the countless people like me that may be denied a truly lifesaving education if our community suffers these proposed cuts. Let us try not to take education for granted and make the right

choices to further the greatness of the human race. Please help to keep connecticut the place that people want to raise their family.

Thank you for your time,

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