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#### Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

Senator Bye, Representative Willis, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to voice my strong support of House Bill 5362, titled, An Act Concerning a Deduction From the Personal Income Tax for Student Loan Interest.

Today many of our state's college students, like myself, are faced with an extraordinary challenge. In the pursuit of self-betterment and chasing the dream of higher wages and better employment, we have committed to earning a higher education to ensure a better tomorrow for ourselves and our families. Unfortunately, for us the cost of going to college continues to get higher and higher with no end in sight. With the recent recession most of our families who have worked hard to save up for our college education had to dip into that fund in order to keep a roof over our heads. By the time we headed off to college most of our families had nothing left in savings. We were faced with a predicament; we have been told since day one, the only way to succeed in America is by earning a college degree. As a result we have seen an increase in the number of students enrolling in college to complete their degree while taking out a number of student loans in order to finance their education. As a result, many students, including myself, will be entering the workforce under a mountain of debt. While many are in this situation, every story is unique; I would like to tell you about mine and what I am facing.

Directly out of high school I enrolled at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, NY, to study engineering. I was confident that engineering was the career for me. While studying at RPI and working several internships over the summers, it dawned on me and I came to the realization that engineering wasn't for me. After two years of studying engineering I left RPI. At first it may seem reasonable to make a career changing decision, but after looking at my financial situation one can see the challenge I would be facing. While attending RPI I paid tuition of about \$30,000 to \$35,000 per year. Fortunately I was able to obtain a scholarship that covered half the costs. Coming from a middle-class family that struggles to make it by, other portions of tuition were paid for by student loans. The total amount of loans equaled \$13,785. The average interest rate is about 4.76%.

After RPI, I worked for a couple of years and began to pay off the loans. During this time I decided what career I really wanted to pursue. I enrolled at Manchester Community College in 2010 to study criminal justice. The Connecticut Community College system is affordable and I have earned an associate's degree without any student loans. Luckily my debts from RPI are currently deferred because of my fulltime enrollment at MCC.

After completing my degree at MCC, I plan to complete a four year degree at Central Connecticut State University and eventually obtain a law degree. I am optimistic that I can get through CCSU without loans. However, a law degree from the University of Connecticut is currently \$21,000 per year. I will inevitably be taking out loans to cover the expenses and as a result will continue to add to my debt.

To summarize, I believe my story is unique but similar in many ways to other college students or graduates. We are not asking the legislature to forgive our debts. We are very thankful for the support and assistance that the government gives college students. What we are asking for is a little bit of help in paying off these enormous amounts of debt. In a tough economic climate it is a struggle to get by or even find a job. This deduction from the interest we pay would allow us to get a little more assistance that can make a huge difference whether it is to pay for rent, heating, food, gas, or other debts.

I would like to thank the committee for heir consideration and allowing me to share my perspective on this situation.

Sincerely,

Amit A. Patel