



**Testimony by Dr. Ellen Durnin, Dean**  
School of Business  
Southern Connecticut State University  
Before the Higher Education Committee  
February 14, 2013

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Willis, Senator Boucher, Representative LeGeyt, and members of the Higher Education Committee. For the record, I am Dr. Ellen Durnin, Dean of the School of Business at Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) in New Haven. I am joined by James Blake, Southern's Executive Vice President for Finance and Administration. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Senate Bill 330, *An Act Establishing a Business Success Center at Southern Connecticut State University*.

These are exciting times for Southern's business school. After too many years of teaching, working and learning in an aging building that was inadequate for higher education, our faculty, staff and students finally have access to 21st century accommodations and technologies in a newly renovated building that opened last June. We thank you for your support of that wonderful project.

Now we are ready for Phase II; enrollment in the Business School is growing. We have run out of faculty offices already, and classes are still being taught in outdated temporary buildings. To fully develop the school's potential and to provide the best possible response to Connecticut's work force needs, the university is seeking additional funding to develop the building's adjoining annex as a Business Success Center.

The Center would offer a range of services that would greatly enhance the learning environment and workplace training opportunities for our business students, as well as serve as a resource for the business community at large. Our business partners report that college graduates need development in the "soft skills" area, and the research supports this recommendation. We have created a "Business Communication Do's and Don'ts" seminar for students, as well as a Business Etiquette dinner for our seniors. These events are well received and are funded by our corporate partners. Internship and additional professional development seminars will be offered, along with academic advisement and technology assistance.

An expanded Center would allow us to grow these valuable offerings in response to employers' recommendations, and would provide much-needed additional classroom and conference space, along with a 24/7 technology lab. These venues would be made available to our partners in the business community as well to prepare Connecticut's workforce. In a wider sense, the new center will also advance Southern's campus-wide commitment to access and student success, as we seek to strategically build enrollment, improve our retention rate and ensure that all of our students have a clear path to graduation.

We at Southern are grateful to the New Haven legislative delegation and to the Greater New Haven and Hamden Chambers of Commerce for their support in realizing the economic and community potential of this project. Their letters of support were submitted under separate cover.

While Southern is seeking state support of \$4.5 million to cover construction costs, the university has pledged to raise the remaining \$.5-1.5 million necessary to complete the project through collaboration with our corporate partners. Start-up funding for the Business Success Center has already been provided by the Northeast Utilities Foundation, and additional financial support has been demonstrated by Marcum LLP, Beacon Financial, Scientific American and Webster Bank, among others. Concurrently, the university is applying for Title III grant funding of \$2MM to support personnel and programming in the Business Success Center.

The renovation of the original building created 97 construction-related jobs to support the regional economy. We are proud to announce that the project was awarded a gold-level LEED certification for environmental responsiveness and sustainability, the first such designation awarded within the Connecticut State University system. With a conceptual design from the same architect in place for the annex (see attached), we would anticipate a similar economic impact for the new renovation project.

The need has never been greater than now to participate in Connecticut's economic recovery. A recent study by the National Association of Colleges and Employers revealed that eight out of 11 of the top fields for hiring are in business disciplines. Southern's School of Business is positioned to deliver graduates in these fields to Connecticut's employers, with an undergraduate degree in business and concentrations in: accounting, economics, finance, management, management information systems and marketing, and an undergraduate enrollment of more than 1,000 students. Additionally, the school offers a Master of Business Administration degree for more than 150 full-time and part-time students, most of whom are working professionals in the region looking to advance their careers and their value to employers.

Our students are drawn from all over the state, but predominantly from the southern region. Our top 10 feeder municipalities are: Hamden, Bridgeport, West Haven, Milford, Wallingford, Stratford, Shelton, North Haven and East Haven, along with New Haven. Business is one of the top three majors at SCSU, and our students work hard and study hard. In a recent survey, SCSU's business students reported working more than 27 hours per week while attending college. When they graduate, more than 85 percent of them stay in Connecticut and contribute to the state's economy.

I thank you for your consideration of this funding request. Investment in a new Business Success Center will enhance both the knowledge and skills of our Business School graduates, and will provide meeting and conference space for our business community partners to work with our students. And in doing so, it will advance career prospects and the economic future of our region and our state. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today, and we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.