

To the committee:

Today I wish to bring testimony in opposition to SB 844. I do so on behalf of the students of Central Connecticut State University. They're mostly too busy to do it themselves, and besides, they elected me as a representative, so here I am. You know what that's like, right? Anyway, even if they had the time, many of those students are also, frankly, far too confused to get up here and argue the issue.

As a member of my school's Student Government, and a student of economics, people sometimes ask me to explain—and as much as it kills me to admit, I can't, really. I can tell them all about the state budget, and the problems Connecticut is having. I can give them historical data on higher education spending. I can quote all sorts of facts and figures, but at the end of the day, it boils down to, "The state needs to cut spending somewhere, and this is where they choose to do it." And then they ask me the question that parents of toddlers everywhere dread: Why? And I can't explain why.

Because it's hard to explain why, over the past twenty years, higher education has fallen from roughly a 7% share of the state budget to the 3.6% proposed in this budget, despite the fact that the number of students at our public colleges and universities has steadily gone up during that same timeframe. Now obviously, the state budget is larger than it was twenty years ago, because the state is bringing in more revenue, and that's nice I guess. I'm just not entirely sure why it hasn't led to a greater investment in higher education, particularly in the ConnSCU system.

Because it's hard to explain why UConn is getting a solid increase under the budget proposal while the ConnSCU system is getting cuts. Don't get me wrong, any investment in higher education is great. I'd just like the state to remember that it has 17 other public institutions to think about, and roughly 90% of our graduates stay in the state, producing and paying taxes. I don't think UConn can say the same.

It's hard to explain why the Board of Regents found itself in a position last fall that led them to adopt a plan which is expected to mean a 3% fee increase every year for the next 25 years. Do the math. Forget about tuition increases—fees will more than double in the next 25 years. Let's be real for a minute. Do you think wages are going to double in the next 25 years? Because I'm pretty sure they won't.

It's hard to explain why students have to work themselves to the bone just to be able to pay their way through school. A lot of the students at my school and throughout the ConnSCU system work low paying jobs—often more than one—to help pay for their education. I'm sure everyone on this committee is aware that earning a degree gives graduates almost double the earning power of someone with a high school diploma. I want that for my peers.

I know the state has problems that need to be addressed on a short term basis, but we can't let that distract us from long term thinking and planning. Those students I keep mentioning are good, hardworking citizens of this state who are trying to better themselves and their prospects. I want to see them move up. If we don't start investing in higher education in this state, I don't know how they're going to do it.

Thank you for your time.

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