

Testimony of Per Bjornstad, President of Student Government Association, Eastern Connecticut State University, to Appropriations Committee

February 24, 2014

Members of the Appropriations Committee, I am Per Bjornstad, President of Student Government Association and Senior at Eastern Connecticut State University.

I first would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today and advocate for your support for increased funding for higher education. My testimony not only reflects my personal opinion, but also that of thousands of students at Eastern, in addition to many other students across the state in various different institutions of the CSU system.

When people think of Eastern they think of an outstanding university where you can receive a **quality** education at an **affordable** price. Quality and affordability are a combination of terms that not often paired together. Especially when it comes to higher education. It's what makes our school unique, and why Eastern attracts students from across the state and across the country.

Eastern has maintained a reputation of producing exceptional graduates that overwhelmingly chose to enter the Connecticut workforce to contribute back to the very state that has given them so much. To my knowledge there are 40 or so legislators of the 186 that are graduates of the Connecticut State University System, many of which I am sure to be Eastern graduates. Without increased funding from the state how can Eastern expect to provide an outstanding education to its students that may one day hope to serve on the state legislature? We want our students to be critical, analytical, and to be well rounded graduates so that when they do decide to get a job in Connecticut they'll well prepared for whatever profession they decide to pursue.

I graduated from Darien High School, and for those of you who are unfamiliar with that town it's about an hour and half away, close to Stamford and Greenwich. Just a little about myself, I come from a very international background. I've lived in different parts of the world, Hong Kong, London, Luxembourg, and so when I had to decide where I wanted to go to school, it wasn't easy. Should I go to school out west, should I go to school in New York, maybe Massachusetts, perhaps abroad. The quality of Eastern's classrooms, its safe campus, and extraordinary faculty, were all very appealing to me. It was also affordable. I couldn't afford to pay what other state schools and private universities were asking for. If Eastern, and other schools in the CSU system, do not receive additional funds from the state both the quality and affordability of its institutions will be in jeopardy. Reduced library hours, fewer police officers, and larger class sizes may become the reality if Eastern doesn't receive additional funding. Do we want our students to be just a number in a classroom, or to be unsafe walking around campus at night? I know I don't.

Eastern, and the CSU system, needs as much funding as possible to maintain the level of excellence at each of its institutions. Without additional funding, soon to be high school graduates, like my 17 year old brother, who are looking at colleges to attend, either won't choose schools in Connecticut or won't go to school at all. I think that's doing a massive disservice to the younger generation, who will soon be running this very state.

Now I know UConn has always been a centerpiece of higher education in Connecticut, but when I hear that UConn gets hundreds of millions of dollars more than the CSU system I don't understand. How is that fair when there are tens of thousands of more students in CSU system than at UConn. I don't see how it's fair to allocate so much more money to UConn instead of the CSUS. Without your support Eastern, and the CSUS, won't be able to provide a quality education for its students that will one day lead the state.

Additional funding to Eastern Connecticut State University, and the CSU system, will be a great financial investment. But that investment will improve the education of current and future students.