

February 24, 2015 – Public Budget Hearing, Higher Education Funding

Good afternoon Honorable Chairs, Senator Bye and Representative Walker, Ranking members Senator Kane and Representative Ziobron, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Ashley Bullard, a fourth year political science student at Eastern Connecticut State University, and Vice President of Student Government Association.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. The budget is the single most important part of legislative activity, should be looked at carefully, and debated and deliberated to its fullest extent.

Today, I am here to discuss why this committee should help the higher education institutions across the state. The CSU system is struggling. Budget cut and loss of enrollment has hurt the Universities in the state. Without a proper budget, how can these schools run properly? How can they provide the best education and experience for students across the state?

The institutions are used to slashes in budget, but projections show that in the next twelve years, enrollment will continue to drop in schools across New England. This loss will of course, create a loss in budget where tuition would have been able to supplement. We should look at enrollment numbers in regards to budgets in two ways: one, how it will effect operations of a school, and two, why a drop?

While we may only be able to theorize why there is a drop in enrollment, it is wide spread belief that the cost of tuition is far too high. Students struggle to make payments despite taking out loans, and the loans we take out are so high, that we may indeed be still paying them off when our own kids are wanting to go to college. In a society where an undergraduate degree is essential, the cost of that degree cannot make it unattainable. By being unable to earn a degree, adults will be forced into minimum wage jobs, as employers in higher level jobs require a degree. By limiting a college education, we are limiting potential earnings, and ultimately hurting our economy and career prospects of the young adults in this state. Students have already begun leaving Connecticut to seek out more cost friendly institutions across the country. By forcing the institutions to continually raise tuition, we are forcing students away from Connecticut.

Budget cuts and enrollment hurts student life at universities. Take Eastern Connecticut State University for example. This past year, we experienced 100 less first year students enrolled. This created a large drop in our budget. I have seen the effects of this personally through my position as Vice President of

Student Government. Our university takes pride in the 70+ student clubs and organizations on campus for students to take advantage of. This number grows every month with new clubs being created to better suit the interests of students. Because of the loss in students this year, we saw a loss in student activity funds. This meant that the clubs and organizations that hold Eastern's identity and culture were unable to put on as many events that encouraged student support, and new clubs were unable to receive as much funding as they could have. This may be only one small aspect of the effected operations of a school, but for the students, it is a large one.

Most importantly, the drops in adequate financial assistance to the institutions are hurting academics. I know from talking with my peers, and from my own thoughts on the matter, that we need more full time faculty. Access to full time professors is extremely limited, as they are flooded with classes and students vying for their attention. I have been fortunate enough to foster a relationship with one of my professors, and something we have talked about is the burden on the political science. As students studying government and politics, we have topics that we would like to learn more specifically about. With the limited number of full time faculty in the department, there are not many options for different kinds of classes. While this may be supplemented by the hiring of part time professors, the student/professor relationship is not the same. They are not in office as often, and they may be worried about classes they teach at other schools as well. This is not what the students want.

At the end of the day, I understand that this committee hears many cases of why they should give more money to the different sectors of our state. Because of this, I simply ask that you fully consider the implications of cutting the budgets for the CSUs. It comes down to doing what is right for the future of this state; It comes down to doing what is right for the future of our students.