

## Appropriation Committee Public Hearing

### Testimony on biennial budget

Members of the Appropriation Committee: My name is Reuben Rivera and I'd like to formally thank you, from me and from the students that I represent for holding this hearing. I hope that you find it as impacting as I surely will.

As a member of Eastern Connecticut State University's Student Government Association, I was asked to come speak on behalf of my fellow students. Before I go into my appeal I would like to give a brief summary of why I have come here today. I, like many others here today have faced hardships that I have worked extremely hard to overcome. Growing up in a single parent household in Puerto Rico, it was my mother, my brother and me. Until we moved to the United States I never knew what equal opportunity was; the ability to move up in the world despite other circumstances. Hard work is what was stressed the moment I stepped foot here. It was hard work got me to become the person I am today, however hard work alone I cannot say was the sole cause of how I came to be here. I had a goal of obtaining an education and making sure that I was not like the rest of my family. I attended Eastern Connecticut State University for that very reason, and I have not been disappointed. The knowledge that I have obtained from my two years at the University has been invaluable, however I have only been able to obtain it due to what every college student has to do -- loans. It came to a point, however that I realized that loans were not enough. The cost of tuition and everything else was not completely covered by the Federal Loans that I was able to take out. That being the case, I sought other options. I joined the U.S Army National Guard.

With the Guard's tuition assistance, and with Federal Loans, I am able to attend the University. Even Loans, the National Guard and the Army Reserve Officer's Training Corps, I am \$16,166 in debt.

The reason I am saying all of this is not to tell a sob story, it is to tell the first-hand story of someone who had to struggle to afford an education. There are countless others who struggle every day who do not have the assistance that I have. The being the case, I am here against a budget that would make it that much harder for one to get an education.

Tuition has seen a steady, yet increasingly rapid growth in the average amount of tuition and fees for State Universities throughout the years. In 2010, they were at \$8,043. In 2012, they were \$8,556. Now, it is at approximately \$9,168. Similar results with Community colleges and even the University of Connecticut. With the proposed budget, cuts would have to be made that would impact Universities in one or two ways. Universities are left with the dilemma of not being able to operate, or to attempt to make up for the lost funds elsewhere. The two places I can see these funds coming from are tuition and fees, or from University Services such as the library staff, or cutting student worker hours, making it harder for them to live. Increases in tuition and decreases in essential operations at our State Universities would be detrimental to the success of our entire Connecticut State College and University System.

What is the point of stripping funding from higher education if the children who graduate from the local high schools cannot afford to attend college?

Thank you.

