

Distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Sarah Greco and I am a graduate student at Southern Connecticut State University. I am also the current Chair of the Student Advisory Committee to the Board of Regents for Higher Education.

I am here this evening to express concern about the significant reduction in funding currently proposed for the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities system.

In his budget address last week, Governor Malloy opened with the statement, “Even in this time of difficult choice, **we must not ask any more of our middle class.**” CSCU is primarily comprised of the middle class. We are the teachers, the nurse practitioners, the welders and the social workers. We are the parents trying to build a better life for our children. We are the daughters and sons caring for our aging parents or our siblings with disabilities. **We are CSCU, and we are over 90,000 strong.**

Let’s talk numbers. In fiscal year ’08, state appropriations for CSCU were approximately \$324 million. In fiscal year ’16, the projection for state appropriations to CSCU is approximately \$336 million. This amounts to an increase in state funding of less than a half percent (0.46%) per year, yet costs for CSCU are increasing at a rate of approximately 5.5% per year.

To put this in perspective: I pay out-of-pocket for my part-time graduate studies because I have a family, including a one-year-old son, and I am committed to spending time with them; I work over 25 hours/week, primarily to help support my family and the day-to-day expenses of utilities, rent, etc.—not so I can afford education, etc. beyond those expenses; and because I refuse to take out student loans because I grew up in a household where debt reigned supreme and I have seen the stress that finances can put on a family. My part-time (meaning **one** graduate course) studies amount to \$1,789/semester or \$3,578/year. Perhaps this seems minimal in the grand scheme of the budget, but this amounts to approximately **one fourth** of my personal annual income.

Senator Winfield stated earlier that you needed to know **if** and **how** CSCU students would hurt given the current budget proposal. Let me tell you: students will hurt. Even if it’s only a few hundred dollars in increase for my personal school bill, there is a fall-out. That few hundred dollars means dipping into the savings account, and the difference between my husband and I being able to purchase a home (and thereby reinvest in the economy through additional taxes). Or it means an additional shift at work which decreases the time I can commit to my son’s growth and development—and he is the next generation.

This is a grim outlook for all CSCU students and their families. So this is why I disagree with our leader, Dr. Gray, on one key statement he made this afternoon: **I don’t believe it’s CSCU’s responsibility to share the burden of the state’s financial difficulties.**

Like the mother – my mother, actually – who wore jeans so threadbare they were nearly transparent around the pockets in order to send her kids to baseball and soccer, we can choose to make real sacrifices now in other areas in order to make the future of the CSCU system brighter.

I am an idealist in this arena. I believe you have the power to increase the appropriations for CSCU—even if it is a gradual effort over the next few years. I believe we can see a day when state appropriations for higher education are greater than 40 or even 50%. I believe—and I’ve said this since I began working with the SAC—that we ought to plan for a tuition **decrease**. I believe **we must not ask any more of our middle class**. I believe in the future of Connecticut, and I believe that future is CSCU—**do you?**