Jennifer Martinsen
Northwestern Connecticut Community College
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Members of the Appropriations Committee:

I graduated high school in 2010, and, without ambition or direction, I immediately entered the workforce. I worked in everything from health care to food service, retail to wedding photography, but was never able to figure out what I wanted in life. I had always been a little hesitant to go to college, because I didn't think I could afford it, and was afraid that I still would not be able to find my niche. But after three years working minimum wage jobs, I knew I needed a change. So in 2013, with a little bit of reluctance, I decided to enroll at Northwestern Connecticut Community College.

When I initially picked Northwestern, it was because it was affordable, and ten minutes from my home. I'll admit that my expectations of the quality of the education I would receive there were pretty low, due to the stigma that surrounds community colleges. I found that this was far from the truth.

In my first semester at Northwestern I was immediately struck by the passion of my professors and the commitment to the students by the entire faculty and staff. I was further impressed by the determination and enthusiasm for learning displayed by the students. I felt as though I had found a community of people who would do anything to help me succeed. It is thanks to everyone at Northwestern that I finally found my interest in the math and science fields and am now hoping to transfer into an engineering program.

Before attending Northwestern I had never been interested in politics or any sort of engagement in my community. It all seemed very dull, and I never really felt that I could make a difference. My experiences with my community college have completely changed my views. Working with the Student Senate and many of the clubs on campus I now see the value and power of involvement. I found great joy in volunteering, finding creative ways to raise money for charity, and organizing events for my fellow students to enjoy.

Because that's what accessible higher education does. It doesn't just create people ready to enter the workforce, it creates people who are willing and eager to be active in their communities, which is an invaluable resource.

I know that it is the accessibility, affordability, and the quality of staff at community colleges that makes them so great. I know this because it was the reason I was able to succeed at Northwestern. I also know that my school is already running on bare minimum funding. Additional cuts will result directly in increased tuition and cuts to staff that will lower the quality of education I receive.

I have truly loved the time I have spent at Northwestern and I don't want to see this happen, not only for myself, but for my peers, the amazing faculty and staff, and the future generations of Connecticut students who wish to better themselves and their community. I hope you will take my experience into consideration when reviewing the budget higher education.

Thank you.