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Members of the Appropriations Committee,

Thank you for the time to speak today. I feel it is important not just to represent my story but also those of so many students like myself. For me, like many of my peers, college is not only something we feel pressure to complete but also excitement. College opens up a new world of possibilities for higher learning and an experience to grow.

When I first started attending college at Southern Connecticut State University I cannot even describe the amount of excitement I felt at all the possibilities of the next four year, of all the things I could do and experiences I could have. I am here today to tell you the heart breaking story of how quickly this joy, excitement, and optimism wears off. For me it lasted until the second semester bill came in the mail. It is a harsh and swift lesson about the world when at just 18 years old I had to face the realization that doing what was expected of me and what I was so eager to do would cost me more than I could ever imagine. Even with scholarships and financial aid the bill was more money than I had to my name.

I come from a family, like so many struggling to stay in the middle class. With both an older sister and a younger sister with college aspirations I knew there was no way my parents could cover all the bills. To make matters worse my FAFSA account was audited and I had to provide a copy of my parent's tax transcript. To this day the memory of looking at that document, knowing exactly how much my parents make and thinking about how hard my father works every single day and knowing that it is still not enough is devastating. So I found a job on campus as quickly as I could and worked to pay my bills so my parents would not have to support me.

To this day I cannot tell you how many nights I spent awake worrying about where every dollar was going to come from. I cannot tell you how many times I have run through the conversations I was going to have to have with my friends, mentors, professors and family about why I was going to have to drop out. Nor can I tell you how miserably limited my options felt for a life without the degree I can barely afford.

What I can tell you is the sadness and disappointment I feel thinking about the possibility of continued and unlimited tuition increases. I am disappointed that something like this could be happening to our students. That like myself their dreams of a college education are being threatened. I am sad because I know exactly how they all feel struggling to figure out where their next tuition payment is going to come from.

I share this story with you today because you need to know, and understand the implications of tuition increases not only from a financial perspective but also from a human perspective, and that we are not just tuition payer but people.

Thank you for your time and consideration.