

Appropriations Committee Testimony
by Stephen Monroe Tomczak, Ph.D.
February 24, 2015

Dear Senator Beth Bye, Representative Toni Walker and members of the appropriations committee:

Thank you for allowing me the chance to speak to you. Tonight, I am speaking to you as both a faculty member and an alumnus of Southern Connecticut State University. When I went to Southern in the 1980s, it was an affordable institution, where one could get a good quality education. Today, while it is still less costly than private institutions, more and more students are forced to go into debt to pay our tuition. According to Mark Huelsman of Demos, "thirty years ago, you could finance a year's worth of tuition at a minimum-wage summer job." Clearly, this is not the case anymore.

And, at state universities, a big reason for this is declining state contributions to higher education. Tuition at Connecticut State Universities has increased by 21 percent over the last five years, while state support has shrunk from covering 44 percent of costs in 2010 to covering 31 percent this fiscal year. (CT Mirror). College tuition rates have been rising more than family incomes, causing the tuition costs to take an increasingly large bite out of family budgets. The increasing unaffordability of a college education in Connecticut, combined with the decreasing share of tuition covered by Commonwealth grants, have forced students to borrow more to pay for school. And there seems to be no end in sight. In 2000, average tuition and fees alone at the average public 4-year institution in Connecticut cost 8 percent of a median household's income; by 2012 this share had reached 13 percent.

As an educator, this situation is deeply troubling, because I believe that higher education is critical investment that we as a society must make to build our future. But it is also troubling to me personally as a Connecticut resident and as an alumnus of our state university system. Will it be possible for the young person of today to get the sort of affordable education I received at Southern, which enabled me to pursue graduate education which eventually allowed me to return to Southern as a faculty member?

This does not seem likely if current policy proposals are enacted. Under the Governor's proposed budget, the state's community colleges, four regional Connecticut State Universities and online Charter Oak State College face a \$20.6 million cut, which is \$38 million short of what is reported to be needed to continue existing programs.

This harms our state grievously. It is short-sighted, bottom line focused thinking at its worst. As a CSU alum, I am hardly alone in remaining in Connecticut. Eighty percent of CSU students remain in the state after graduation, going on to begin careers, start and raise families and build businesses that create more jobs in Connecticut. CSU is a major force in the state's economy as we help to mold and develop an educated, critical thinking and engaged population who go on to contribute to the state in so many ways. Some even as professors at the institution that gave them their start.