

**Testimony for the
Appropriations Committee
From Martha Shouldis, President
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Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges
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On behalf of St. Vincent's College I am submitting testimony on the proposed Governor's Biannual Budget specific to cuts to the state supported financial aid programs. While I and my colleagues in the private not for profit higher education sector of the State recognize that significant budget shortfalls are projected for the State over the next two years, I submit that cutting programs designed to prepare the current and future workforce that are necessary to grow the economy of the state hurts rather than helps the State of Connecticut in the short and long term. As noted in the 2015 *Higher Education Spotlight* published by the American Council on Education and the Center for Policy Research and Strategy, college educated adults are more likely to earn more, be employed, participate in civic activities, have healthy habits and be less likely to rely on public assistance compared with those with a high school diploma or GED.

St. Vincent's College has over a 110 year history of preparing nurses and allied health professionals for roles in Connecticut hospitals, medical offices, public health facilities and other segments of the healthcare community. I am proud to report that our students come primarily from Fairfield and New Haven Counties and stay in this region of the state following graduation and licensure - to work, serve their communities, raise their families and pay taxes. In 2013 St. Vincent's College along with several of the other private not-for-profit Colleges here in Connecticut prepared 46% of the health professions graduates of the State. This percentage has changed little over the years.

Why is the education of health professionals important to the State of Connecticut? According to an article that appeared just this past weekend in the *New York Times* "The biggest declines in middle-class households during the previous half-century occurred in the Northeast". Connecticut was specifically cited as one of the states in the northeast most impacted. So the question is, can we afford to continue to lose our Connecticut middle class and if not how do we reverse this trend?

While the manufacturing jobs that provided earnings for the middle class of Connecticut declined over the last half century, health care jobs grew as did the salaries they paid. As recently as 1980, "1.4 million jobs in health care paid a middle-class wage: \$40,000 to \$80,000 a year in today's money. Now, the figure is 4.5 million." While many of those

manufacturing jobs required little more than a high school education today most individuals entering a profession that ensures that one can reach the middle class, especially in health care, requires a college education. In fact the majority of those entering the manufacturing sector of the state also require at least an associate degree.

Today to attain the level of education required to enter many of the fields that lead to earnings sufficient for one to be identified as middle class, students need financial assistance. That is particularly true for the students at St. Vincent's who are working adults, average age of 30, many with families, who are working full or part-time while attending College part-time to complete their degrees.

This past year more than 70 percent of St. Vincent's College students applied for financial aid. Of those who applied 38% made less than \$25,000 per year. Another 22% of our students made between \$25,000 and \$50,000. Thus 25% of our total student body received Pell grants – meaning they are among the poorest of the poor students attending college. To fund their educations we were able to bring together aid packages made up of federal grants, institutional grants, loans, the Governor's Scholarship, some donor funded scholarships and student's own personal or family contributions. In recent years each of those sources of funding, especially student loans have continued to increase except for the state grants which declined significantly after the Governor's Scholarship program went into effect. (Due to the fact that the Governor's Scholarship program favors full-time students over part-time students). Even though the share of the state funding for St. Vincent's College students declined under the Governor's Scholarship program vs the former CICS program, this past year 201 of our over 800 Connecticut students did receive a total of \$274,000 in state assistance.

I ask that you keep this important source of aid, the Governor's Scholarship Fund, in the budget. Keep it at least at the current level and maintain the current percentage allocation between the public and private colleges. This is a critical portion of the aid package for our 201 St. Vincent's students and equally so for the thousands of other Connecticut residents completing their degrees at our sister private not-for-profit Colleges and Universities. I will point out that our state residents who attend college here in Connecticut are the graduates most likely to remain here in Connecticut to live, work and might I add - pay taxes.

I am not asking you to give to the non-profit private colleges without a return on the investment made by the taxpayers of the state. This is what we non-profit colleges and universities will do:

- Graduate nearly 50 percent of the state's yearly graduates of health care degree programs – graduates who make up a significant component of the state's middle class.

- Graduate some 28% of the undergraduate and 59% of the graduate students prepared in the state each year.
- Continue to be a bargain for the state as state cost per degree for graduates of the state's not-for-profit private colleges and universities will remain at a fraction of the cost as that of the state's public institutions. Did you know that in 2012-2013 the state cost per degree at public institutions was \$32,839 vs. \$839 for the Connecticut not-for-profit institutions?
- Continue to work with you to prepare the workforce that is currently and will continue to be the backbone of the state's economy.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share this important information and to make this request to keep the Governor's Scholarship program intact, minimally at current funding levels, and to maintain the current percentage allocation of the funds between the public and private not-for-profit colleges and universities.