

24 February 2015

Good evening,

Co-Chairs and Members, of the Committee. My name is Suzanne Wilson and I have been a professor at the University of Connecticut in the Neag School of Education for two years. I came here from Michigan State University where I was on the faculty for 27 years, and served as director of teacher education for my last eight of those years.

One reason I moved to Connecticut was because of the positive and strong connections between the state and the University. Connecticut has for a long time set an example for the country of a state's commitment to its public education system.

Having lived through similar financial crises in Michigan, as a faculty member and administrator at Michigan State, I understand the challenges you face in reducing the deficit. As others have noted, the recommended budget released last week creates a gap of approximately \$40 million between the state funding and what is needed to operate UConn. While the university has successfully risen to the call to tighten budgetary belts for years now, a cut of this present magnitude would have a devastating effect on quality programming, research, and outreach.

My own work concerns teacher preparation. As you no doubt know, in the last 15-20 years we have witnessed an insistent rise in market thinking in teacher education and education in general: choice, charters, privatization, on-line learning, vouchers, closing schools where averaged scores are low, and so on. In the middle of all these changes, some institution has to take responsibility for examining the changes, determining which are productive, which are worth while, which hold promise for the best teaching and best learning. And then insuring that present schools and present and future teachers can avail themselves of the best thinking and the best practices. That institution is the university, which has the unique role of informing Connecticut's schools and teachers – including, of course, our own students who will become teachers – about the best and most promising practices.

There is no quick, cheap fix to preparing and supporting teachers to work with struggling schools. We are committed to making sure that teachers and administrators receive high quality initial and on-going preparation and support. We help teachers in schools through outreach, prepare teachers in high quality ways to work in extraordinary and always increasingly, challenging circumstances, and do research on how to improve education for all of our children. All of that takes considerable time, innovation, openness to change and reform, and perseverance.

These proposed cuts will put UConn in an impossible position: If we take the proposed cuts and don't raise tuition, we'll have to raise class sizes, furlough faculty, take time away from research and outreach to attend to our instructional programs. People will lose jobs. The cuts might mean even cutting instructional programs, which would threaten the quality of what we do, and the relationships with schools that are so fundamental to the state's education. These kinds of cuts don't rally the troops, inspire creativity, and inspire harder work. Rather, they inspire worry, retrenchment, and they encourage the most conservative behavior. And worse, they counter everything our college tries to do. With fewer people and

more to do, no one will have enough time to drive to and work in them schools, support all students, respond to teachers and principals, spend adequate time on one's research, recruit more and more diverse teachers, respond to the needs of schools, and volunteer through outreach and service to give back to the state in meaningful ways. Inspiring teachers to work in challenging schools takes time. Financial cuts can be devastating, but their effects on time are even deeper. It will be harder for us to recruit new teachers, harder to provide them to extensive attention they need to learn to teach, and harder to keep them in schools that are themselves struggling with similar cuts.

The major reason I came to UConn was the forward thinking, innovative, "let's change the world," "can do" attitude of the faculty, administration, and students. At a time when other states – including Michigan -- were suspicious and unsupportive of their large, leading public institutions, it was a breath of fresh air and a sign of hope to see the investment Connecticut made in UConn. And it has been exciting to work in such a dynamic, challenging environment. Please consider lessening the magnitude of these cuts. We need all hands on deck to serve the state's schools, and these cuts would seriously compromise our ability to do just that.