

Testimony for Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly
February 18, 2016
By Eileen Hurst, Director
Veterans History Project at Central Connecticut State University

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

I respectfully submit my testimony on behalf of the Veterans History Project at Central Connecticut State University and on behalf of Connecticut's veterans.

The Veterans History Project (VHP) at CCSU is an archive partner with the Library of Congress on the national Veterans History Project, which was created in 2000 when the U.S. Congress voted unanimously for legislation to collect and preserve the oral histories of our nation's men and women who served in the military or civilians who supported the war effort in a significant way during any of our country's wars. Congress mandated the Library of Congress (LOC) to be the repository of these oral histories.

In 2005, CCSU became an official archive partner with the LOC in collecting and preserving the oral histories and primary source documents of Connecticut's veterans from WWI, WWII, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf War, and the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts. To date, we have archived over 700 collections representing veterans from WWI through today's conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition to a videotaped interview, the VHP scans and digitizes any documents, service records, photographs, diaries, journals, field maps, drawings, etc. related to the respective veteran's military experience. A copy of the taped interview, along with any supplemental materials provided, is sent to the LOC to be archived and made accessible for future generations.

The VHP at CCSU also maintains its own digital archive on line at www.ccsu.edu/vhp which is accessible to anyone with an internet connection. Since February 9, 2010, we have uploaded 850 videos to You Tube, resulting in 442,390 views from people from all across the world. In the month of January 2016 alone there were 10,370 views.

Our archive is used by students, scholars, historians, and researchers as well as by veterans and the general public. In fact, National Geographic used video clips from five of our collections in their documentary, "Inside WWII".

Our Connecticut veterans who have been interviewed are very appreciative of the service we provide and for the opportunity to help document American history. Because of the "brotherhood" shared by members of the armed forces, word spreads quickly in veterans' circles. Consequently, we always have a wait list of at least 40 veterans.

The VHP, part of the Governor O’Neill Chair Oral History Program at CCSU, has been self-sustaining since its inception in 2005. The Center for Public Policy and Social Research (itself self-supporting) has funded it entirely (with two minor exceptions) as a pro bono project.

In fiscal year 2014/15, the VHP received a one-time appropriation of \$50,000. Then Senator Terry Gerratana (New Britain) worked to get a \$30,000 appropriation for each of the years in the present biennial budget.

In his recent recommendations for budget cuts, Governor Dannel Malloy **proposed cutting the \$30,000 for the VHP for fiscal year ’17. VHP receives no funding from the university**, so it is critical for us to try and keep this small bit of funding to pay for our student workers in order to keep the VHP alive and active. I understand that budget cuts are necessary and funding priorities must be established. I believe that our veterans should be a priority. Their stories must be preserved to document our American history. Connecticut should be well represented in that American history. Time is of the essence as hundreds of our WWII and Korean War veterans die every day. Please help us to preserve their stories before it is too late. There are veterans, who have proudly served our nation, living in every community in Connecticut. Each has a unique story of his experience in the military. We must consider the future as well as the present. Let us not sacrifice the future when we have such a wealth of history available to us today.

The VHP at CCSU not only preserves the oral histories of Connecticut’s veterans but also maintains a speakers’ bureau, works with high schools across the state in developing curriculum units of study and programs for high school students, conducts educational forums, and sponsors many activities and special events to recognize and thank Connecticut’s veterans. One recent historic event, sponsored in collaboration with the CT Department of Veterans’ Affairs, the Connecticut Air National Guard and the New England Air Museum, was the “Vietnam 50th”, held at the Connecticut Air National Guard base and attended by more than 10,000 to commemorate the 50-year anniversary of the Vietnam War.

Hopefully, you agree that our veterans and our American history are important and the VHP is important enough to warrant funding. Thank you for considering how restoring this relatively small budget cut would make a huge impact on our ability to continue documenting and maintaining the history of Connecticut’s veterans for our benefit and for future generations.

I am available at hursteim@ccsu.edu or 860-832-2976 to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

Eileen Hurst
Director, Veterans History Project

