Testimony for the Connecticut General Assembly
Appropriations Committee and Higher Education Subcommittee, February 10, 2016

"Magic Carpet, Life Boat and Bridge: the Need for Financial Support for Public Higher Education"

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Esteemed Committee Co-chairs, Ranking Members, and members of the committee,

My name is William Faraclas. I am a professor of public health in my 41st year of service at Southern Connecticut State University, and President of the SCSU Faculty Senate. I am pleased to be with you this evening, as I am grateful for your untiring efforts to find ways to improve lives and revive this state by increasing funding for public higher education. As a professor of public health, I am concerned about things like global warming, world hunger and Zika virus. But I am more deeply troubled when I ponder how we will train the next generation of students in Connecticut to become public health practitioners to solve these problems—or to become nurses to care for the sick and elderly in our communities; teachers, who will inspire young people and educate students with special needs; social workers, who will protect children and other vulnerable members of society; political scientists, sociologists, and public administrators, who will save our cities; and engineers, environmentalists and other natural scientists, whose innovations will give us a sustainable world, while raising quality of life. That's what we do at the Connecticut State Universities—educate people who stay in Connecticut and contribute to society.

In my field, prevention is the highest priority. *Public* higher education is *preventive*, as shown compellingly by economist Philip Trostel[1], who details the inoculating effect of a bachelor's degree, in comparison to a high school degree only. According to his findings, college graduates earn $32,000 more each year than high school graduates, and are 3.5 times less likely to live in poverty. That is prevention! College graduates are substantially more likely to be employed, have higher retirement incomes, experience better health outcomes, live longer, stay married, stay out of prison, and be less of a burden on other taxpayers. That, too, is prevention. They also pay more in taxes, contribute more to charities, and are more likely to vote.

Consider higher education as a magic carpet because it has powers of levitation. It raises individuals from poverty to self-sufficiency and carries them to opportunity. It elevates society by promoting productivity, informed citizenship and community participation. It can lift Connecticut out of it downward spiral. But it works only for those who have access to higher education. Insufficient funding results in higher tuition that disenfranchises poor, minority populations. In Connecticut the gap in college degree attainment is 21% for African Americans, and 28% for Latinos. The *2016 Report Card for Budget Support for Public Higher Education*[2] gives Connecticut an overall grade of D-, including bad grades for Tuition, Spending per Student, and State Aid to Students. These are the results of insufficient state funding for public higher education. We can and must do better to ensure real access and foster academic success. After all, for many students, higher education is a lifeboat. Every time we cut funding and raise tuition, we are pushing students off the boat.

The CSCU faculty is committed to helping every student succeed academically. We have done more with less. We have carried the burden personally by sacrificing salary and benefits for many years, while we have watched management expand to unprecedented and baffling proportions. To make it very simple, we need more full-time faculty to teach, advise and mentor students. We need to guarantee that classes are taught with academically reasonable enrollments to maximize student engagement and learning. We need student support services to help our students overcome the deficits of poor preparation for college. We need to provide sufficient financial aid to avoid paralyzing student debt. There is great competition for funds in an era of fiscal anemia. But supporting higher education is a long-term investment in the state and its people that can rebuild the middle class and position this state for prosperity. You know about the bridge to nowhere. For many students, public higher education is the bridge *from* nowhere. A bridge to a world of possibility, to personal success, to an educated and productive citizenry. Let's not close that bridge; let's add lanes to foster social justice and take this state to a prosperous future.

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[1]Trostel, Philip (The Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center and School of Economics, University of Maine). (October 14, 2015). It's not just the money: The benefits of college education to individuals and to society. Lumina Foundation. Retrieved 2-9-16 from https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/its-not-just-the-money.pdf.

[2] Young Invincibles. (January 2016). 2016 State Report Cards. Student Impact Project. Retrieved 2-9-16 from http://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/YI-State-Report-Cards-2016.pdf.