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Before deciding to further reduce support for Connecticut State Universities the State Legislature should consider that spending money on education is by far the best investment a state can make.

Just this last Monday (2/8) *Here and Now*, an NPR show, reported on "Ten Things to Know About New Hampshire" They listed as #3 New Hampshire is one of the healthiest states in the country; the New Hampshire Acting Director for Public Health Marcella Bobinsky attributes this to the fact that New Hampshire has a highly educated population where "61.9% of the population has more than a high school degree. We have an educated workforce and therefore essentially educated parents." The host continues "Those educated parents give New Hampshire kids a leg up." Bobinsky attributes education to the relatively low rate of childhood poverty, strong policies around childhood immunization and low teenage pregnancy rates. As you can see, that highly educated population has paid dividends back to the state at many levels.

That is what accessible, affordable higher education can do for the bottom line in the state. Keeping Connecticut State Universities affordable and accessible is an excellent and crucial investment. Looking across the country and even the world, the strongest economies are those with the best access to higher education and the best educated workforces, from California to urban China to France.

When we increase tuition or defund our CSU system we put the economy of the state on the line, but we also put the quality of life in Connecticut in jeopardy.

Take a look at who makes up the state university system. Nearly 90 percent of CSU graduates stay in Connecticut. CSU alumni contribute to Connecticut's economy and take care of our citizenry, from nurses helping with labor and delivery, to teachers, public school administrators, policemen, medical administrators, counselors, social workers, business owners and more. The money spent on public higher education comes back to all of us as a highly educated workforce that will attract new businesses. A highly educated workforce will take care of us from cradle to grave. A highly educated workforce will ensure a strong future for all of us.

Take a closer look at the student body at SCSU:

94.9 percent of students are Connecticut residents. We educate the children of our state residents and we educate the future residents of our state. These students rely on an accessible, affordable and high quality education. Surely we owe our own children that much. After all, these young educated people will be caring for all of us in the very near future. Don't we want them having the best possible foundation?

65 percent of SCSU students are women. Women make up almost two-thirds of our student body. They are working to break the glass ceiling and launch into a professional career. The better women are educated, the better off our whole society will be. Women socialize the next generation, setting standards and goals throughout our communities. The choices women make today in terms of health, education, employment, family, and community define our future.

51.6 percent of the teachers in my home town earned their highest degree from a CSU school. CSU schools are affordable and accessible. Increasing the cost of these schools will have a direct economic impact on our communities.

39.4 percent of entering SCSU freshman are students of color. Many of our students are children of immigrants who are working toward the American Dream. We not only educate these students, we provide a bridge to mainstream middle-class life.

30.6 percent of SCSU students are minority students. Our students come from a variety of backgrounds. Many come from the large urban centers in Connecticut. Our state universities, and Southern in particular, offer a way to even the playing field by providing high quality, affordable education to minority students from across our state.

33 percent of the incoming class is comprised of first-generation students. They want the benefit of a liberal arts education and the hope of a professional career. This is their gateway to the American Dream.

62 percent of students are commuting to SCSU. These students almost invariably live at home and work while going to school. Not only are they making the sacrifice to pay for a higher education, they are doing so while being active members of our state workforce and paying taxes. When they finish their degrees they will make an even larger contribution to our state economy.

Our top students are making a difference in the world. Many of them choose SCSU because it is a university that values the teacher-scholar model; these students appreciate the unique opportunities and the value of the state university system. Many of our students continue on to graduate school and compete for scholarships and research grants with students from top-tier institutions, and they succeed.

The “cost-savings” and “efficiencies” recently introduced to the CSU system sound good but in the short and long run will weaken our state workforce and eventually our state economy. Increasing costs and decreasing the quality of higher education will have long-term repercussions throughout the state. Most of students will NOT be going elsewhere to school, they are barely hanging on now. We will suffer for their absence at graduation. Please continue to fund and strengthen the CSU system.