Dear Senator Flexer, Representative Haddad, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Patricia O’Neill, Associate Professor of Psychology at WCSU, and President of the Connecticut State University-American Association of University Professors.

I am here to advocate for our students and for the Connecticut State Universities.

In the 21st century, higher education is a human right that must remain accessible and affordable. It is a public good that generates social and economic progress. The Connecticut State Universities have an integral role in creating this social and economic progress for our students. I urge you to support the Connecticut State Universities, and our students.

The transformative nature of the University experience is illustrated by one of my former students. When he attended Western, he simultaneously worked nights as a stock clerk at a local supermarket. He would show up for class, clearly exhausted, but he was so determined to complete his degree. He did complete his degree and did so with an almost perfect 4.0 GPA. What is he up to these days? He’s the general manager of that local supermarket. His daughter, who was just a little girl when her dad attended Western, is now in her third year of a joint PhD/MD program. I like to think it all started at Western.

We serve first generation students, non-traditional students returning to finally finish a first degree, or a second degree, traditional college-age students, and students whose first language is something other than English. They are a diverse, and ambitious group of individuals. They all benefit from the ability to take advantage of a first class education, and one that is considerably less expensive than other choices. Let’s try and keep it that way. In order to do that, support for the CSUs must, at the minimum, be maintained. For too many years, support has declined, and there are some unfortunate side effects of that decline. In order to address the decrease in state support, the Board of Regents has been forced to raise tuition, too many times. This has created serious barriers for some of our citizens, and delayed or prevented altogether, degree completion. That itself can have a life-time impact. The evidence is clear: individuals with at least an associate’s degree earn significantly more over their lifetimes compared to those with less than an associate’s degree. Individuals with at least a bachelor’s degree earn significantly more in comparison to those with an associate’s. Our public higher education institutions still remain out of reach for too many, who then may be forced to take on debt, which in turn hobbles them after graduation, if they graduate.

Invest in our futures, and invest in the Connecticut State Universities.

Thank you for your time.