Thank you Rep. Walker, Sen. Osten, and the members of the committee for allowing me to testify today. My name is Sarah Hoegler. I am twenty-one years old and, this past May, I graduated from Western Connecticut State University summa cum laude with a bachelor’s in psychology. If I had not chosen to attend Western, then I would not be here, more than four years later, preparing to pursue my PhD in developmental psychology at the University of Notre Dame. When I first came to Western, I was 17 years old and had been homeschooled my entire life. I enjoyed being homeschooled, as it taught me numerous valuable lessons, but that meant that entering college was my first time in a formal school setting. I wasn’t certain what to expect, or whether or not I would be successful in my studies. I came to realize that whether or not I was a successful student at Western was entirely up to me. Western constantly offers so many opportunities for students to succeed and flourish, as long as students pursue these opportunities and work diligently to earn them.

I am grateful to have been at the receiving end of a long chain of opportunities, which began my freshmen year when I took a psychological statistics course. I was dreading that course, because I really hated math and the professor was notoriously difficult and intimidating. I didn’t do well at first, but I worked diligently for the semester and ended up getting an A. In the process, I incidentally came to love research and statistics—even though they involved math. The professor who taught the course, Dr. Nelson, turned out to not be as scary as I first thought. She allowed me to become involved in her research lab, which has now amounted to nearly four years of research investigating resilience and success in high-risk college students. Working in the lab has resulted in the opportunity to co-author several publications and a book chapter, present a number of posters, and, most recently, give a paper presentation at a professional conference. Based on this research, Dr. Nelson and the rest of our lab have designed interventions to help anxious and high-risk students. I have been able to witness the efficacy of these interventions from not only the perspective of a researcher, but also from the perspective of a supplemental instructor. Furthermore, acting as a supplemental instructor for psychological statistics courses not only allowed me to share my love of
stats with other students, but also sparked my passion for translational research—a passion I will continue following into graduate school. I really loved seeing these interventions actually make a difference in struggling students’ lives.

I also joined the Kathwari Honors Program, in which I was uniquely challenged by interdisciplinary honors courses. I also met many other enthusiastic students who encouraged me to not only strive toward academic success, but, more importantly, to strive to become a successful, compassionate human being. In that vein, I also had the privilege of being mentored by Dr. Kukk, the director of the honors program, who taught me—through his own research, teaching, and personal example—so much about what it means to be a compassionate achiever. In fact, in general, the faculty at Western—especially Dr. Nelson and Dr. Kukk—have been incredibly supportive and encouraging. They have always made it clear that they sincerely want the best for their students; they have challenged me to pursue numerous opportunities, held me to high standards of excellence, and, when it comes to my research work, they have even considered me as a junior colleague.

These experiences have taught me three invaluable lessons, which I might not have learned elsewhere. First, I learned to always pursue opportunities, but to never expect them to be handed to me. This taught me how to take responsibility for my own successes and failures. Second, I learned that the best and most worthwhile experiences are usually, if not always, the most difficult. Moreover, as I learned through my research, we actually learn best by struggling with concepts and by working through difficulties; we don’t learn when things are easy. Finally, at Western, I was surrounded by individuals who demonstrated how to be unwaveringly and wholeheartedly compassionate to everyone they meet, a lesson I am most grateful for above all. I am infinitely thankful for all these ways that Western has prepared me to begin my doctoral studies, during which I will continue to research resilience interventions. Western has shaped me as a scholar, researcher, and person; it has helped motivate and equip me to pursue a career as a professor and researcher. I must thank you all again for providing me yet another opportunity by allowing me to testify today.