March 7, 2019

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Bryan Bonina, and as President of the Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges, I am here today to speak about the Governor’s budget for the community colleges and the need for more investment, specifically in the areas of hiring more full-time faculty and academic advisors.

While I understand that you have faced difficult decisions when crafting recent budgets, CSCU has dealt with years of successive budget cuts, rescissions, and holdbacks, which has added up to a 19% reduction of state appropriations since 2015. The Community Colleges have suffered from the years of declining state funding.

For example, research has shown that academic advising has the most direct impact on completion rates. In our college system, the responsibility of advising falls to both professionally trained academic advisors and full-time faculty.

As resources have grown tighter at the colleges, the employers have replaced retiring full-time faculty with part-time faculty, who are less expensive to employ. Adjunct instructors are only paid to teach, not to advise students or hold office hours. Our part-time faculty usually fall into one of three categories: professionals working full-time in an industry and teaching in their spare time, retired full-time faculty who still wish to teach occasionally (and are paid the same as other adjuncts), and part-time faculty who make a full-time living teaching up to six or more courses at several different colleges.

According to a CSCU white paper*, “the colleges currently have 754 FTE full-time faculty serving approximately 50,000 students—a 64:1 ratio. In contrast, the four universities employ 1,276 FTE full-time faculty, or a 26:1 ratio of students to faculty.” For example, at Asnuntuck Community College in Enfield, the number of full-time faculty has stayed flat at 25 full-time faculty members since 2005, but the number of part-time faculty has nearly doubled from 60 part-time faculty members in 2005 to 106 part-time faculty today.

This over-reliance on part-time faculty for their inexpensive labor does a great disservice to the member, our students, and to the taxpayers of Connecticut. A $25 million investment to increase the number of full-time faculty at the colleges by 200 will significantly increase the support that students receive both in and
outside the classroom. Further, many of our current part-time faculty with the necessary experience and credentials should be transitioned into full-time jobs.

In terms of academic advisors, the CSCU white paper* shared that “based on data from the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), the ideal college ratio for advisees to advisor is approximately 250: 1. NACADA has reported that the median ratio of advisees to advisor at two-year colleges in the United States is 441:16 . However, the advisee to advisor ratio for our community colleges is more than twice the national median: 900:1.”

We support CSCU's request for $13 million to hire more academic advisors at the community colleges. The number we have is woefully inadequate to deal with the challenges our students face, challenges that include: working while attending school, first generation students, low income, parents, and nontraditional students.

Years of declining state support has negatively affected student advising, and likely student completion. Our colleges need a significant investment to be able to hire more professional academic advisors and more full-time faculty at the community colleges.

Further, it is crucial that this investment in faculty and staff be made soon as the demographic trends of our employees show significant retirements on the horizon.

And it has been shown that investment in CSCU pays! For every dollar our students invest in their education, they will garner $6.60 in higher future earnings, with an average annual rate of return of 22.2%. For every $1 of public funding in CSCU, the state will receive $3.80 in added tax revenue and public sector savings.

An investment in the community colleges is an investment in the Connecticut economy.