Comments for Public Hearing, Appropriations Committee regarding Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

March 7, 2019

Chairperson Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for hearing my comments today regarding the need for fully funding public higher education in Connecticut.

My name is Cathy Milton, and I was born and bred in Connecticut, and have made my life and career here as a professor of English at Norwalk Community College.

I’d like to borrow a metaphor from Dean Matt Read’s recent article in Higher Ed: public higher education isn’t just another burden for taxpayers to bear; it’s the one thing giving Connecticut a shot at a prosperous future. Economically speaking, accessible higher education is seed corn. Nurture your seed corn, and we all thrive on the harvest. Eat the seed corn, and we all starve. Don’t eat the seed corn. Appropriate the full funds that we educators tell you we need. Connecticut must decide to fund a truly public higher education, if we are to survive.

Connecticut doesn’t grow soybeans or wheat or oranges. We grow smart people. That is what Connecticut has always done. With a truly public higher education fully funded, relying on appropriations more than tuition dollars, we can continue to have the best educated workforce in the country.

This is a place of great opportunity, but the blackest stain on Connecticut is allowing the grossest economic inequality in the nation to exist on our doorstep. The wealth gap is bigger now more than ever. It is proven that the surest ticket to the middle class is a college degree, and your state faculty are on the front lines of that effort. We are not simply producing workers. We create citizens who understand history, ethics, and participation in civic life.

But we have been forced to do more and more with less funding; in 2017, Connecticut had the dubious distinction of having the largest decrease in state appropriations from the previous year of any. Other. State. That same year, Connecticut had the HIGHEST total taxable resources per capita of any. Other. State. Let this committee be the place where the buck stops on economic inequality in Connecticut. Make our public higher education the best in the nation. We faculty are working for that every day. Give us the resources we need to make it happen.

Graduates of our community colleges are staying and working in Connecticut at far higher rates than the graduates of the private schools – the Yales and Wesleyans and Fairfield U’s. Ask Moira Lyons to tell you the amazing actual numbers on the return on an investment in a Connecticut community college student.
They say millionaires are fleeing Connecticut for Florida. If the legislature understands the critical importance of fully funding public higher education, we can grow our own millionaires. For every dollar you appropriate to public higher education, you are making an investment in the future fiscal and civic health of Connecticut.

With thanks,

Cathy Milton