



Testimony of Subira Gordon Executive Director of ConnCAN
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee 2/28
Regarding bills: S.B. 273, S.B. 435, S.B. 685, and H.J. 68

Testimony in support of S.B. 273, S.B. 435, S.B. 685, and H.J. 68

Co-Chairs Senator Haskell and Representative Haddad, Ranking Members Senator Hwang and Representative Hall, Vice Chairs Senator Flexer and Representative Turco, and distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee,

My name is Subira Gordon and I am Executive Director of ConnCAN, a leading education advocacy group statewide for the past last 15 years.

I'm here testifying in support of several bills today, including: S.B. 273, S.B. 435, S.B. 685, and H.J. 68. Here's the bottom line: Connecticut must invest in a school-to-work pipeline that works for everyone. Affordable access to college is key to making this a reality. That's why ConnCAN supports policies that make college more affordable and accessible and that reduce the financial burden of post-secondary education.

Now more than ever, some level of a college level education is critical to our children's future success. [Research](#) is clear: more than 70% of jobs in Connecticut by 2020 will require education beyond high school, and of the ten fastest growing industries in Connecticut, nine will require at least an associate's degree.

However, even as Connecticut experiences an uptick in high school graduation rates, the rising costs of attending college remains too high of a hurdle for many to jump, especially students of color and from low-income backgrounds.

Simultaneously, Connecticut's public school population is diversifying rapidly. By 2020, nearly one-third of Connecticut's working-age population -- and nearly half of our youngest workers -- will be people of color.

In order to attend college, too many kids, especially those from low-income backgrounds, must go deep into debt, thus threatening their financial insecurity in the short-term and for the long

run. Once debt repayment begins, it creates a drag on purchasing power, and recent graduates must oftentimes delay life financial achievements like homeownership and retirement savings.

The college debt problem hits black and brown students the hardest. Recent research from [Demos](#) shows that nationally, African-American borrowers graduate with over \$18,500 of debt for an associate degree at a public 2-year college, and over \$30,000 for a bachelor's degree from a public college.

For Hispanics and Latinos, the results are similar: \$11,673 for public 2-year college, \$22,105 for public 4-year college. Low-income Pell Grant recipients, even with significant financial support, leave college in debt, too: \$16,851 for public 2-year college, and \$28,447 for public 4-year college.

In Connecticut, things are no different. Connecticut borrowers average \$18,157 in post-secondary debt, with median monthly payments of \$187, or \$2,244 a year, according to the [Urban Institute](#). And, [State Higher Education Executive Officers Associations](#) (SHEEO) research has shown that Connecticut students -- regardless of income -- are responsible for 53% of net tuition costs, on average.

Smart investments in making college education accessible and affordable for all has a high rate of return. For every \$1 invested in public secondary education, states see an average return between \$3 and \$4, according to research from [UC Berkeley](#).

By making meaningful investments for students to access public college without fear of indebtedness, Connecticut is investing in its future, strengthening its economy, and developing more accessible, inclusive systems.

The legislation referenced earlier in my testimony, if passed and signed into law, will enhance opportunities for those who have been historically excluded from post-secondary education, and help prepare more kids in Connecticut for future success.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Subira Gordon
Executive Director, ConnCAN

