CHAIRPERSON:          Representative Toni E. Walker

SENATORS:              Abrams, Flexer, Hartley, Lesser, Miner, Winfield

REPRESENTATIVES:       Baker, Haddad, Hall, Johnson, Rotella, Ryan, Santiago, Tercyak, Nolan

REP. WALKER (93RD): Good announcement that it is immediate. Okay. So, let me just give you a -- a little heads up, so that you know this. Right now, going on -- in the building, I don't know if you've noticed there are quite a few people. There is a minimum wage debate going on. There are a couple of other major committees going on.

I don't know if we have tolls. I think -- I feel like we've done tolls every day. But -- we -- I don't -- no, no tolls today? No? Okay. But anyhow -- yeah, I know [laughter] -- but, then -- so the legislators are going to be coming in and out. All of this is going to be on TV in the -- in their -- in their committee -- in their -- in their offices? Audios, okay, in the -- in their offices.

So, they will be able to hear -- more than likely somebody will probably start to testify and one of the legislators from your district will hear you when you -- because that's -- what I want you to do when you first start talking, I want you to say your name and what district you're coming from and what school that you're representing. I think I'll say that when I -- when I introduce you. So, don't have to say it, but your name and your district.
And I hope that every single one of you in here is a registered voter. Am I -- am I -- am I -- is that correct? Everybody that's a registered voter [clapping] please clap. [clapping] There you go. Yeah. [laughter] I was going to ask you to raise your hand, but I probably would've gotten upset, so I'll just say clap.

But this is important for you, this is your opportunity to be part of democracy and to really explain to us about what you are getting and what your education is all about. This is Representative Haddad who is the Chair of the subcommittee. Representative Haddad, would you like to say something to the --

REP. HADDAD (54TH): Only -- only that this is my favorite hearing of the -- of the Appropriations Committee process. It's great to see so many young people in the audience here year after year, fighting for your -- your -- your futures and the future of the state. So, I look forward to your testimony.

REP. WALKER (93RD): So, we will -- like I said, we will have members coming in and out. Please make sure that you -- if you see your -- your representative that you try and speak to them at some point in time during the evening.

And with that, I just -- the reason why we are asking everybody to be as prompt as possible about their speeches, is because, if you realized, you got about 47 people speaking. So, I know all of you have had math, that's over two hours of testimony.

And so, for us to make sure that -- 'cause we want you to be the voice today. We don't want to be the
voice. We want to be here to hear you. And right after you, we have another public hearing immediately after. And they can -- they -- they'll wait. They'll -- because they're here to testify probably on your behalf from the different schools.

But the most important thing, is for you to say your -- what you have to do and let the next person go on, so that everybody will be able to testify. And we don't -- we don't bite. We really -- we really enjoy you guys a lot.

So, with that, I will say panel one is the independent colleges. And when you say your name, please say from what school you're from. And that will be the group right in front of me. Go right ahead. Oh, and what town. Thank you.

LEE PAGE: Greetings. I'm Lee Page from Gales Ferry, Connecticut. I'm a freshman grad student from the University of Hartford. The University of Hartford was the right pick for me. It is one of two or three bachelor level Radiology Technology degree programs in Connecticut.

I had the privilege of graduating from a small school, Stedfast Christian Academy out of Groton back in 2012. I'm an active duty vet. I completed seven strategic deterrent patrols. But I must say, I've never felt more a part of a community, then I do at the University of Hartford. The faculty treat you like family, the morale is high, and the education is par none. And for that reason -- and the only reason I can experience this, is because of financial aid such as the Roberta Willis Scholarship.
Now, that I'm transitioning from active duty, my wife and I are both full-time college students. My wife picked up a few hours a week to help us get by and I'm in the Reserves to provide health insurance for us. With the possibilities of tolls, the finances of me driving back and forth from Gales Ferry every day may be complicated.

Now, more than ever, students, like myself, need your help. When I graduate, I want to give back to my community. I want to help people and the healthcare is the tip of the sphere. The University of Hartford has excellent healthcare programs as well as education, mathematics, and much more, all of which will help enable young people to become productive members of society. And this is the ultimate investment.

The Roberta Willis Scholarship not only gives individuals, like myself, the opportunity to attend an in-state school, but interning in local hospitals, furthermore, seek employment here in Connecticut. This not only changes the life of the student, but gives them the opportunity to better their communities, therefore improving this great state of Connecticut.

Please continue to fund the Roberta Willis Scholarship to ensure that students, like myself, have the opportunity to enroll in an institution that best fits them in this state. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Go right ahead.

STEPHEN CAMPBELL: Good evening, members of the committee. My name is Stephen Campbell. I'm representing Goodwin College and I'm from Bloomfield, Connecticut. Actually, in my junior
year at Goodwin, studying manufacturing management, I started almost three years ago in May of 2016, once I was released from incarceration after doing nine and a half years.

Transitioning into college for me was a little rough. Goodwin embraced me and encouraged me to continue to push forward. I started in a 15-week program, that was a Certificate for Manufacturing. That transferred in, after I did well and got encouragement from the Goodwin community, to pursue additional 15 weeks and earn a 30-Credit Certificate.

I did well in that and continued to get the support from the Goodwin community and I transferred into my associate's program. And that's when I started paying for my own tuition. And it was a little rough and I made a lot of sacrifices and scholarship like the Willis Fund -- Roberta Willis Fund assisted me tremendously in pursuing my education.

Now, I have my Associate's Degree. Goodwin hired me as a lab technician to work in the lab, helping students hands-on, and I'm half way through my Bachelor's Degree. I just want to thank you all for providing opportunities to individuals, like myself, and other individuals looking to pursue their education in later years in life and giving them an opportunity to make a difference in their lives and eventually in their community. And I just want to say thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Go right ahead.

ALYSSA CRUZ: Hello everyone. My name is Alyssa Cruz. I was born and raised in Bridgeport, Connecticut, but I currently live in West Haven.
I'm a senior at Albertus Magnus College and I will be graduating with my BA in graphic design.

My experience at Albertus has been life changing. The person I am now is not who I imagined I would be, almost four years ago. Entering Albertus my freshman year, I was incredibly quiet and shy, unsure of myself or the journey that would come. Now, leaving as a senior, I am incredibly aware of my value as an individual and know that, regardless of where my path may go, I will bring my passion and determination with me.

Financial aid, such as the Roberta Willis Scholarship Grant, has been incredibly important to me, because I wouldn't have been able to experience college without it. I am a first-generation student. I would not have been able to afford classes. So, I would not have been given the chance to take on leadership roles such as being a resident assistant or experience hands-on work such as being an intern for the Marketing Department, both at Albertus and the New Haven Symphony Orchestra.

Within these roles, I became a better communicator and really developed into a leader. As an individual, I became so much more confident within my work and gained a greater understanding and appreciation for what life has to offer. Albertus has truly opened up many opportunities. And I feel blessed to have come here.

When I graduate, I intend on staying in CT and developing my artistry while also pursuing a career within technology. Along with that, I also intend on paying my education and experience forward to younger adults and students like myself.
Without the scholarship, I would not have been able to become the young professional I am today. Please continue to fund the Roberta Willis Scholarship program to ensure that students, like myself, have the opportunity to enroll in the institution that is the best fit for them in-state. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you.

COLLEEN FEENEY: Hello. My name is Colleen Feeney and I am from Bristol, Connecticut. I'm currently a senior at Connecticut College where I'm majoring in English and minoring in Music. I saw college as a place to expand myself and my knowledge of the world, and Connecticut College has provided a place for that. Connecticut College has given me a place to explore my interests and to examine the world in different ways, whether that be through studying text in an English class or looking at issues like gender, race, looking to music, art, or any of the various issues that impact our world.

At Connecticut College, I found a community I am proud to be a part of, a place where I feel like I belong, and that my peers have opinions and experiences I can learn from. This would not be possible for me without scholarships like the Roberta Willis Scholarship Grant. I come from a low-income family where my mom is the sole provider. I have always wanted to go to college, but as it grew closer, it seemed less and less attainable, even the least expensive schools are quite out of reach.

I have a summer job at McDonald's, where I saved up some money, enough to cover books and expenses, but not enough to bridge the gap between what money the college costs and what my family could provide. It
is scholarships like this one, that have afforded opportunities to me I couldn't have imagined and wouldn't have thought possible.

Now, as I look to graduation, I hope to find a way to give back. I'm looking to do a year of service before continuing my education. I haven't decided where yet, but I am in the process of applying to programs here and abroad, including places like City Year, as well as other programs to take teach English as a foreign language abroad.

Scholarships like these have made my academic experience possible. And now, it's my time to give back to my community.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you all. You did a fabulous job. And I messed up, because I was supposed to -- if you remember my instructions from Sue, I was supposed to tell the next committee. I failed. So, don't tell her I failed on what I'm supposed [laughter] to do. Okay. Thank you. You did a fantastic job. Thank you. [clapping]

The next panel is UConn. And the panel after that is the CSU system, panel 3. And also -- I just want to also let you know, this is Senator Winfield, who's turning around. [laughing] He's from New Haven. And Senator Flexer is the other Co-Chair for the Higher Ed subcommittee and also Higher Ed committee, too. And I want to also introduce -- we have a new member, Anthony Nolan from New London. Welcome. He just got elected last week, so -- I mean a couple weeks ago, so, let's give him a hand. Okay? [clapping] Go right ahead.

AMA APPIAH: Good afternoon, distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is
Ama Appiah and I'm a fourth year student at the University of Connecticut, currently studying Molecular and Cell Biology and Communication. I currently have the honor and pleasure to serve as the Student Body President of the undergraduate population here at Storrs campus. Thank you for the opportunity to allow me to speak about my UConn experience and how it's impacted my life thus far.

As a second-generation child of two immigrant parents from Ghana, the importance of education has been ingrained in my upbringing. I, along with my two brothers, had a private school education throughout our elementary, middle, and high school years. I made the decision to -- to attend a public institution for my degree because UConn is renown for providing an exceptional education for value, as well as being a leader in STEM programming. Due to scholarships and the financial aid awarded to me, I have been blessed to attend a university that has pushed me to be a critical thinker, leader in my community, and ultimately, a strong advocate for a UConn education.

During my four years, I've had the opportunity to pursue two majors, serve in six different leadership positions, design and lead an $8,000 dollar independent clinical research study funded by the UConn Ideal -- IDEA Grant program, all I -- while working an on-campus job with University Communications.

My proudest achievement has been to serve as the first African-American female undergraduate Student Body President at the Storrs campus. In this role, I've had the ability to give back to the university community that has given me so much, and it -- it is
extremely rewarding. I have been a force in discussing academic policy as well as a diligent advocate for support and programming for experiential learning and preparing students for their post-graduate transition.

I hope that, with this advocacy, UConn students will have the drive and chance to stay in the state of Connecticut, and contribute to its economy. Without the financial support I received from UConn, I would not have been able to accomplish what I have -- what I have in the -- my time at the university. Without state financial support for higher education, I would not have the resources and program -- programs available for me to participate in. With -- without financial support, the 17-year-old second-generation Ghanaian-American student, and others like her, would not have the accessibility to higher education and fulfill her maximum -- maximum potential. Thank you for your time.

PATRICK HOCKING: Good afternoon. My name is Patrick Hocking, an Honors sophomore, studying Biomedical Engineering at the University of Connecticut. I'm a member of the primary undergraduate innovation group, the Werth Innovators, led by the Werth Institute, an organization that brings together student and faculty programs, fostering entrepreneurship and innovation that potentially have commercial application, and can be used create new companies.

As a resident of the state, and a student at its flagship university, I am asking the committee today requesting that funding for UConn's state budget be maintained at the level recommended by the Governor or increased beyond that level so that the
University can continue to expand effective programs in entrepreneurship education.

Entrepreneurship education is something I've found great passion for, both as a beneficiary and a benefactor. My introduction to this field began just over a year ago, where I had the opportunity to participate in the Connecticut Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation's technology commercial -- commercialization initiative: Accelerate UConn, where I was able to work with a laboratory from the School of Nursing developing an -- an analytical breastfeeding device. Since then, I've had the chance to participate in a wide range of educational sessions, classes, programs, and cooperatives; ranging topics from parent law to consumer marketing.

At the beginning of my UConn career, I never would have imagined being where I am today. I loved medicine, and I loved helping people, so naturally, I pursued biology and the pre-med tract. It was through the entrepreneurship programs at UConn that I learned that is far more than the doctors for helping people and prompting medicine. Through these programs, I've fallen in love with problem solving and supporting others, which has led me to founding my current venture. In our process, we are providing opportunities for college students to gain experience in their fields through targeted pairings with local Connecticut small businesses. It was only by the utilization of the techniques taught by UConn's entrepreneurship programs that we were able to properly execute, incorporating strategies such as hypothesis testing, product-market fit, and the customer-value chain.
If it weren't for the funding of these critical programs, I feel that I, along with the many fellow young entrepreneurs I've had the pleasure to meet, would be lost. Entrepreneurship without guidance seems as it would be absolutely terrifying, if not for the mentors and teachers I've had the opportunity to learn from. It's programs like these that have empowered and -- and inspired me to pursue the challenges of entrepreneurship in the state of Connecticut after graduation. Watching myself and my colleagues grow over this time has brought a passion that pushes me to request that Connecticut continue to support the growth of entrepreneurial education.

Finally, I implore the committee to keep in mind what it means to invest in UConn. Building strong, well-rounded students today, ready to take on the plethora of challenges faced daily by small business owners, is essential to the state and its communities. Providing the correct tools to future entrepreneurs allow for their future companies to flourish, providing jobs, income and attraction to the state of Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to allow me to speak on this topic, and please feel free to contact me to open a dialogue about the content of this testimony.

SERGIO MOREN: Good evening. My name is Sergio Moren and I'm here representing industry. I am the VP and General Manager of GKN Aerospace in Cromwell, Connecticut. And the reason I'm here is because we benefit -- industry benefits from Connecticut programs -- from UConn programs. I, myself, am a product of UConn. I'm a graduate. I got into
industry via internships in Connecticut, so I am not born in Connecticut. I migrated here and I have stayed in Connecticut since I went to UConn.

GKN Aerospace has many programs that we're working with -- at University of Connecticut along with internship programs and senior design projects that we work with the University of Connecticut. We -- since about five to six years ago, we have hired 15 full-time employees from the University of Connecticut, myself included. And we continue to hire interns and other folks from UConn and around the state.

The reason why I'm here is because I believe in what UConn is doing. I believe, because I am part of it. I am product of what UConn has made and the efforts that they make on a daily basis to create a good workforce. And if anyone has resumes out there and is looking for internships, let me know. [laughing] More -- more -- more than welcome to provide those and we'll be hiring interns this summer. Thank you for the opportunity.

JON-MARC MCGREGOR: Members of the Appropriations Committee, my fellow panelists, esteemed guests and visitors and, of course, my beloved Huskies, good evening to you all. My name is Jon-Marc McGregor and I'm a sophomore Chemical Engineering student at the University of Connecticut, pursing double minors in Mathematics and Chemistry. Before I begin, I would like to formally express how honored and grateful I am to be given this once in a lifetime opportunity to speak on a pressing matter, that not only will affect our thriving university, but will thereafter influence the growth of our state as well.
I owe all of that on to UConn. I'm seen as a migrant from Jamaica, a McNair and LSAMP Scholar, peer mentor for the School of Engineering's BRIDGE program, student leader of multiple organizations such as NSBE and UConn's Engineering Ambassadors, academic tutor, or even an undergraduate researcher in the chemical engineering department, working on projects to better Hartford County. But above all, I'm simply a believer. A believer who is striving to be a step closer to achieving my goals of becoming a professional engineer due to the resources that are available at the university.

Upon graduation, I aim to work in the Research and Development Sector of the chemical industry so that I can continue to make creative and effective solutions that could benefit our environment. I'm confident that I am on the right path due to instrumental opportunities that the university provides, which allows us to find our niche on campus and later on in society.

In closing, I would like to emphasize that our future as a state truly depends on the ability to develop new generations of intellectual and skilled talent that employers need to compete and succeed in today's global economy. For years, there is no doubt that UConn has been gradually making a unique contribution to the success of this state. Cuts will alter all the great values that make our university a sanctuary of academic excellence and a premier destination for students, like myself, who seek an institution that is not only financially affordable but also has a high emphasis on diversity and inclusion within our engineering program.
All we ask is for you to not give up on us and continue to believe in the mission this university is based upon. With our state-of-the-art facilities, hard-working faculty and staff, we are raising our academic performance, closing the achievement gap, and giving every single student an opportunity to succeed. I truly admire all these CORE values, and it's because of them, I'm proud to call myself a Husky and I'm proud to be a UConn engineering student. Thank you.

STEPHANY SANTOS: 45,531. That is how many people you have residually reached by your investment in one person, me. Allow me to explain. My name is Stephany Santos. I grew up Middletown, and I'm a daughter of immigrants, and I'm a product of Connecticut public schools.

As an enthusiastic basketball player since third grade, growing up, UConn has always been on been radar; however, as a 5'4" power forward [laughing] my size would not [laughing] allow that to happen. Instead, my pull to UConn was the combination of a summer program I participated in my senior year of high school, called Explore Engineering, followed by my acceptance to the Summer BRIDGE program, Jon-Marc, mentioned through the School of Engineering.

Upon my acceptance to UConn as an undergrad in 2008, I accepted a -- a Leadership Scholarship that covered my undergraduate tuition for four years, thanks in part to Connecticut funds.

In 2011, I accepted a Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship, thanks in part to Connecticut funds. When I received my Bachelor's in Biomedical Engineer in 2012, and I completed a Master's abroad in
Mechanical Engineering in Italy, and a second Master's in 2015 but back at UConn, as a part of the UConn EAGLES program. After that, I stayed at UConn and have been working on my PhD in Biomedical Engineering, and I'm proud to say that I'm first in my family to do so. I'm able to pursue my PhD thanks to Connecticut funds covering my tuition, and the National Science Foundation and the Ford Fellowship Foundation covering my living stipend.

Now back to that number. As an undergrad, I was co-founder of Engineering Ambassadors, an organization that Jon-Marc alluded to, that inspires K-12 students to pursue engineering, and especially underrepresented students. Since I helped found EA in 2010, I've helped train 660 undergrad students that helped spread the love of engineering from our kids to our entire state, both on and off our campus. Directly and indirectly, we've reached and spread positive messaging to 44,292 K-12 students. Over the years, several students have come to UConn Engineering as a result of their interactions with us.

I've also taught for the BRIDGE program that initially taught me how engineers help create a better world every year since 2008, except when I was abroad for my Master's in Italy. Thus, I've helped prepare 548 underrepresented freshmen -- excuse me, incoming freshmen into UConn engineering, helping many of them stay in their major and make use of their scholarship dollars, too. I've mentored 98 undergrad tutors on how to be teachers and mentors themselves.

The last of your reach is the 31 undergraduate research assistants, again many of them
underrepresented in engineering in my lab.
Together, we're researching osteoarthritis from a mechanics point of view, because you can't cure a disease if you don't understand how it starts.

By your investment in me, you showed me you believed in me to be a leader and make a difference. By your investment in me, you allowed me time to volunteer with all of these impactful endeavors. Your investment in me, reached an additional 45,531 Connecticut hopefuls. Imagine what your investment in UConn could do with more. Thank you. [clapping]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you all, and make sure you get your resume to that gentleman over there, please. [laughing] Next, CSU, and right behind them, will be the UConn Health.

Before I get going, I just want to have everybody -- all the other members of the panel up here. Representative, would you like to introduce yourself and -- she's got a mouthful of food. Should I skip you? [laughter]

REP. HALL (59TH): Dinner -- sorry. [laughing]

REP. WALKER (93RD): That's okay. We eat on the run here.

REP. HALL (59TH): Representative Carol Hall and --

REP. WALKER (93RD): From what district please?

REP. HALL (59TH): -- it's amazing to have all these students here tonight. Some of the testimony we've already heard, it just blows me away. So, I'm happy to be here and look forward to the rest of the testimony for this evening. Thank you.
REP. WALKER (93RD): What -- what district are you from?

REP. HALL (59TH): 59th, which is --

REP. WALKER (93RD): And where is that?

REP. HALL (59TH): -- Enfield and East Windsor.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Senator Flexer, would you like to say where you're from?

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Whoa.

REP. WALKER (93RD): She got so excited she spilled the water. [laughing]


REP. WALKER (93RD): And she's not kidding she really does. [laughing] And the young lady next to her.

SENATOR HARTLEY (15TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to be here to hear directly from all the students. And I'm Joan Hartley from the 15th, which is Waterbury, Naugatuck, Middlebury. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. The young man next to you.

REP. SANTIAGO (130TH): Hello everyone, State Representative Ezequiel Santiago, representing the 130th Legislative District of Bridgeport. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. And the young lady next to you.
REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm Representative Susan Johnson. I represent the 49th House District, which includes Windham which has Eastern Connecticut State University in it and part of Quinebaug Valley Community College. It's great to be here. Thank you, Madam Chair.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. And the young lady -- I can say young lady, because I'm that old, see? Okay. [laughing] Go ahead, the next young lady.

REP. ROTELLA (43RD): Thank you, Madam Chair. I am Representative Kate Rotella, and I represent the 43rd District, which is Stonington, North Stonington, and Mystic.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. And the young man next to you.

REP. BAKER (124TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm Andre Baker. I represent the 124th District in Bridgeport. And I wanted to say to each and every student, you are the future of Connecticut, so be proud of yourselves.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Uh-huh.

REP. BAKER (124TH): And --

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Senator Winfield, since I -- Senator -- Senator Flexer, got to you, would you like to tell us your -- your districts?

SENATOR WINFIELD (10TH): Yes. I'm Senator Winfield from the town of 10th District in New Haven and West Haven, Southern is in my district, Albertus is in my district, and it's New Haven, so there's a bunch of other colleges in my district.
REP. WALKER (93RD): Gateway is in your district.

SENATOR WINFIELD (10TH): Gateway, UNH, and --

REP. WALKER (93RD): Yale. Yeah. [Laughter]

SENATOR WINFIELD (10TH): -- Yale.

REP. WALKER (93RD): They're not here. {Laughing]

SENATOR WINFIELD (10TH): A lot of -- a lot of colleges.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. So, I just wanted to give you a -- a -- a picture, a snapshot to let you know who are the people in here tonight. Thank you. So, go right ahead. We're here for you.

RJ DEWAR: Hi, my name is RJ Dewar. I'm from New Haven, Connecticut. Thank you, Representative Walker and Senator Osten, ranking members, and committee members for giving me a chance to address you today.

I'm honored to have been selected to represent Eastern and speak you, mostly because this opportunity would seem to be very unlikely to some who knew my background. People are often referred to as a product of their environment. Growing up in New Haven, Connecticut hasn't been the ideal situation to go through. I'm a first-generation college student from a low socioeconomic background. I also have an identical twin brother who is also a student at Eastern. My parents are having to struggle to assist us with the significant financial obligations of attending school. As you can imagine, the financial responsibilities for my parents haven't been easy to fulfill. We had to apply for loans and grants and I became a resident
assistant to help decrease the cost of attending college.

Given all that, what motivates me to keep going is the desire to help my parents out and make them proud. I feel I can accomplish that at Eastern. As you know, Eastern is Connecticut's public liberal arts university. It doesn't matter what major you have, at Eastern you're going to learn a lot about a variety of things. I have taken science, art, and economic classes, which have been challenging and rewarding. I have worked on developing the skills that employers desire from college graduates, such as critical -- critical thinking, how to gather and analyze information, and how to solve problems. I aspire to enter the field of higher education and hopefully give back to college students who come from similar backgrounds like myself.

I have been very fortunate to live on a small campus where you get to have conservations with full-time professors, not just adjuncts, and where you can lead class discussions -- discussions and complete team projects. I'm currently the Vice President of the MALES Organization, a member of the Asian Cultural Society, as well as an intern in the Vice President Student Affairs office. These experiences are giving me an opportunity to work on -- as a member of a team, practice my leadership skills, and contribute on campus as a student leader.

Eastern offers some great support services. As a resident assistant, I have referred my students to Math Achievement and Advising Centers plenty of times, Counselling and Psychological Services has provided mental health counselling to my residents and peers, helping them through the most traumatic
times in their lives. Housing and Residential Life provides an environment that is safe and allows students to thrive by participating in co-curricular activities.

If you cut Eastern's budget, or do not provide the level of financial support that is needed, we will not be the same university that I've grown to appreciate. We have been very fortunate at Eastern to have received the support provided by the legislature in the past. And it is my hope, that you will continue to support our state universities so that students, like me, and my brother, can fulfill our dreams of graduating from college, pursuing our careers, and remain in the state of Connecticut. I want to thank you again for letting me speak today.

ELENA RUIZ: Good evening, Legislators. My name is Elena Ruiz. I am a junior at Eastern Connecticut State University. I am dreamer from the state of Georgia, blessed to be Connecticut to pursue a higher education through the Dream.US Scholarship. I am fortunate to stand here before you in this hearing to advocate for the future of higher education in Connecticut. This is an opportunity, like none other, that would have been impossible in Georgia as an undocumented youth.

This year, through Eastern's SGA, I become Vice-Chair of the Student Advisory Committee, a subcommittee to the Board of Regents. As a member, I have voting position on the board that entitles me to directly impact the decisions concerning students of Connecticut.

By contrast, the Georgia Board of Regents for Higher Education is made up of predominantly affluent white
males and females. They have autonomous ruling to govern, control, and manage the University System of Georgia, which includes 26 of the most prestigious universities in the state. These men and women wrote into law, banning myself and some other 23,000 undocumented students from the right to apply to the most prestigious institutions and from seeking any state and federal financial aid. Moreover, Georgia provides tuition assistance to excelling high school students that graduate with a 3.0 GPA or higher. I was eligible to have up to 90% of my tuition covered, but the members of the Georgia Board of Regents had decided for me.

Through the generosity of Donald E. Graham and other fellow philanthropists, some 120 dreamers from Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina, to name a few, have been welcomed to the state of Connecticut, a state that does allow us to pursue our dreams.

I commend the Board of Regents and the legislator -- Legislature, for making the students participate in their decisions and allowing our voices to be heard. It is my purpose, however, to persuade you to invest in higher education. I have heard an overwhelming amount of times the distress of fellow students concerning the debt they have acquired in pursing their higher education.

In addition, the states -- the states and university and community colleges' exhausted effort to try to balance their budgets when receiving a mere 39% from -- of the budget from the state. This has resulted in a couple hundred dollar increases in tuition for the last several years.
The potential to investing in higher education has unlimited positive consequences. It could be a billion-dollar industry employing a vast number of the labor force and educating the workforce of tomorrow. It is time to invest in the future for tomorrow and to reassure prospective students of CSCU in a positive future of Connecticut. This would persuade them to remain in Connecticut for an indefinite number of years upon graduating. Thank you.

VICTOR CONSTANZA: Hi. Hi, my name is Victor Constanza, and I go to Central Connecticut State University. I'm here to speak on behalf of my school, and how much they have helped me. I am currently a senior, a first-generation American, and will be graduating this May.

So, to start off, Central helped me before I even got to Central. I was a horrible high school student. I did not care about high school. But I realized my mistakes too late. However Central has a great program called the Educate -- EOP program, Educational Opportunity program, there you go. And they serve to give second chances to students who do not do well or to first-generation college students.

After some time CCSU, created the leader that I am today. No, not in the classrooms but with extracurriculars. Central's student life provided me a chance to become an activist through a student organization called CHANGE. Here, we fought for Central undocumented immigrant families to be safe from unjust deportations, and we were very successful at it. Because of our success, we became a non-profit and now fight for interns and student teachers to have protections and get paid.
Central has a great Student Government program, where it taught me how to delegate and make legitimate change in our campus. However, through time, students stopped their participation because of the increasing price of college. More students are more focused on earning a wage than participating in clubs because of this situation. We have lost many potential leaders because of poor students.

I can say that Central has also saved my life. Around summer of last year, I became very independent and got a full-time job, which would carry over to my fall semester. Because of a -- of a very bad relationship with my boss, I had to quit for my own mental health. However, I knew the road ahead of me was going to get worse. Fall semester of last year was the darkest time of my college career. I had no sustainable kinds of money going into my pocket, so paying rent and buying food was tremendously hard. There were many days where I starved and had to lie to everyone that I was fed and doing well. My mental health was in a huge decline and my depression got worse, which led me to very dark thoughts, which include an attempt in ending my own life.

However, my last thought to either pay any kind of bills, was to ask Central for help. I sent them an email, and they responded very quickly. And because of them, I got to live the rest of the fall semester and my current spring semester and they gave me $3,000 dollars in scholarship money per semester. I really [laughter] owe CCSU my life.

My story is not the only story of survival. I have a friend named Roshanay Tahir, who is a Biomolecular
Science major at CCSU. She works three different jobs, takes up to six classes. She's also running to be our next Student Government President and a very well-known activist in our school in our -- and in New Britain. She carries all this as her parents do not want to support her in her career. Her story is very related -- relative to a bunch of our students, as a lot of us do seek work and have to pay all or a good chunk of our tuition. Any increases to our tuition without any benefit in relieving the student, will hurt a lot of our working class students.

We all have to make -- we all have to make sure to make our college affordable, or we lose great leaders like Roshanay or other great students who just want a better life for themselves or their families.

CCSU was the best thing that has ever happened to me. It creates leaders that actual movers and shakers, as well as protecting their own. I ask the Appropriations Committee to not overlook Central when establishing tuition or making a budget. We need to make college as accessible as possible. Thank you very much. [clapping]

KASSANDRA FRUIN: Hello everyone, my name is Kassandra Fruin. I am the current Student Government President at Central Connecticut -- Connecticut State University. Originally from Naugatuck, Connecticut, but I do reside in New Britain now.

It is proven that children of addicts are doomed to be addicts themselves. Children and young adults, like myself, have the odds stacked against them, pushing us to surrender to our chaotic upbringing.
I shared the same -- same statement last year to you all to put into perspective a common story in Connecticut. My story is one of the many that illustrates the struggles of a young person trying to overcome their upbringing, a person who has come from a low-income family and with a family that has fallen into the opioid crisis.

In my situation, I did not want to become another statistic. Taking the step to go to college was not simple, and each day I am faced with the -- the reality that the only -- one of the only ways I can afford my way through my degree is, once again, fighting to keep tuition low.

Two years ago today -- I mean, excuse me [laughter] two years ago, a week before my second semester of my sophomore year, my mother died unexpectedly from an accidental overdose. She had been battling mental health issues and addiction longer than I could remember, but she was still my mom. My heart broke and I was forced to become an independent adult at 19 years old; my only home being the room I resided in on campus. Wiping away the small contribution my mother was able to handle, all of my college and living expenses were now in my hands.

If it wasn't for Central having one of the lowest tuitions of the CSU schools, if it wasn't for the support of my financial aid office, if it wasn't for the guidance provided to me from the administration staff at Central, I would not be here today. In fact, I am not sure where my life would be at this very moment. I predict that I would've fallen to another statistic.

That is why I'm testifying again, another year later. I'm the voice of students who did not get
the future they deserved because they could not afford it. Without an affordable education, children and young adults, like myself, would not have easier avenues to flourish within today's society. I believe that, without the access to affordable higher education, I would not be the person I am today; a young adult capable of making a life for herself and defeating all odds. Without higher education and CCSU, I would not have a place to truly call my home and a place where I was accepted regardless of my background.

I hope the Appropriations Committee thinks of students and prospective students, like myself, just -- who just want a chance and can make a life for themselves through their education. Thank you so much for your time. [clapping]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you guys. You did a fantastic job. Thank you so much. Next UConn Health and after UConn Health, the Board of Regents Community Colleges. Good afternoon still.

ROSHNI PATEL: Good afternoon.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Good afternoon. You may begin. Go ahead.

ROSHNI PATEL: All right. Thank you so much. My name is Roshni. I'm a fourth year medical student at UConn. And before we start, I just wanted to take a quick second to thank you guys, again, for having us here to do this today. And, of course, I wanted to take a minute to just give a shout to all of our colleagues, all of faculty and staff who are here today in support of this hearing. So, if you're here from UConn, can you guys just stand up really quick? We want to just [clapping] really
acknowledge everyone for being here today and taking the time out of the very busy schedule we know everyone has.

REP. WALKER (93RD): As usual, UConn's got the most people here. [Laughing]

ROSHNI PATEL: I just wanted to start off with a quick shout out.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. [laughter]

ROSHNI PATEL: All right. So, just to get started. Again, my name is Roshni and I'm a fourth year medical student at UConn Health. So, I'm actually due to graduate in May. I was born in Milford, Connecticut and I have lived here my entire life.

UConn has -- as an institution has been an integral part of my education for some many years. I attended UConn as an undergraduate, where I studied Molecular and Cell Biology. I remember being thankful to be able to attend a state university that allowed me to have both an affordable education while providing me access to wonderful faculty, researchers, and medical facilities, where I was really able to learn and grow as a student. My years at Storrs prepared me to embark on my next steps as a medical student at UConn Health in Farmington.

Again, I am so thankful to have had the opportunity to train as a medical student in Farmington. As a student, I've been able to interact with some truly talented faculty members, who have taught us to be both competent and kind physicians for the future. We were able to learn in a beautiful faculty with access to a variety of researchers and labs. These opportunities expand our abilities to further our
learning and allow us to contribute to medical knowledge and advancing care for patients.

Another unique opportunity I've had as a UConn student is my participation in our school's Urban Service Track. This is an interprofessional educational track designed to support students who are interested in working in urban and underserved communities. I have been fortunate enough to receive targeted education on how to take care of vulnerable populations such as the elderly, homeless, veterans, and refugees. Furthermore, through the program, I have been able to actually go into the community and work one-on-one with individuals of high medical need, allowing me both to expand on my own education while serving those in the state who may not necessarily otherwise get any medical care.

UConn, in particular, does an amazing job at exposing students early to primary care. We -- from year one, we're actually set up in a continuity clinic that we attend from -- a first-year medical student all the way through our third year. This gives us a real feel for what's it's like to work in an outpatient setting, develop patient relationships, and maintain continuity of care. This, along with some great faculty mentorship, really inspired me to pursue a career in internal medicine with the goal of being a primary care physician post residency.

While there are many opportunities to attend different institutions, I'm really glad I ultimately chose UConn as my medical school. I was able to get an affordable, yet quality, education in my home state. This was really a huge motivating factor for
me to actually stay in Connecticut post residency. I hope to settle here long term and serve in both a primary care and academic setting. This way I can serve as a primary care physician for patients in Connecticut and fill an essential gap in care, something that we are in dire need of with the physician shortage in primary care.

Additionally, I hope to serve as an educator for future -- future medical students, such as myself, and train new physicians, who may one day, stay and practice in the area. My educational goals and future career path is a testament to how UConn is truly contributing to creating a highly skilled workforce, many of whom will eventually stay and reside in the state.

It is critical that UConn continue to get the support it needs from the state to maintain these goals. This, in turn, allows students, like myself, to achieve their personal goals while bettering access across the state to both quality healthcare and essential education. Again I thank you so much for your time and support.


First, I would to thank the members of the Appropriations Committee for their continued support of the education of the future physicians, dentists, and scientists of Connecticut. I come forward to implore you to continue your support of UConn Health, including the Schools of Medicine, Dental Medicine, and the Graduate School.
I proudly consider myself a full UConn product. I graduated from the University of Connecticut, Storrs in May, 2014, with a degree in Molecular and Cell Biology and a minor in Psychology. I will graduate from the University of Connecticut School of Dental Medicine this May.

I was still an undergraduate, when I heard the buzz regarding the inception of Bioscience CT and Next Gen CT Initiative supported by the Connecticut legislature. Unfortunately, I was unable to experience the changes associated with these initiatives when I was an undergraduate. However, the magnitude of the changes that Bioscience CT has brought to UConn Health in my almost four years at this institution have been outstanding.

Through your foresight, I’ve seen the addition of state-of-the-art technology at the Dental and Medical Schools, that bring UConn Health to the forefront of medical and dental education and training. For example, the new Virtual Anatomy or Anatomage tables and the Moog dental simulators allow us more opportunities to hone our skills before working with live patients, and prepare us to use the current and future technologies we'll experience in real practice.

Bioscience CT also allowed for the addition of new faculty and improvement to our academic faces, such as the newly built Academic Rotunda which supports collaboration and team-based learning.

I believe that continued funding of our institution is a symbiotic, mutually beneficial relationship. Improvement of our clinics, funding of our -- of research and the addition of technology in our pre-clinic and clinical education have allowed us,
as a the next generation of Connecticut healthcare providers, to receive a top notch education at a reasonable price.

And in turn, as the only public academic medical center in the state, we have the privilege of caring for some of the neediest and most vulnerable in our state who may, otherwise, have no access to healthcare. Many of us have strong ties here and are looking forward to continuing to serve Connecticut constituents in our future practice. Twelve members of my class of 40 dental students are pursuing residency training or immediate post-graduate employment in the state of Connecticut. And many more of us have plans to return to the state after post-graduate training.

I sit in front of you today, as a result of your past commitments to UConn Health. And I ask that you keep this momentum going for the next generation of UConn trained scientists and healthcare providers. Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER STEELE: Hi everyone. Can you hear me? Hi, my name is Chris Steele. I'm an Assistant Professor here at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine. I was born and raised in Burlington, Connecticut, and now I'm a primary care physician in the area.

I recently graduated from UConn with a Doctorate Degree in Medicine and a Master in Public Health. I completed my training in Internal Medicine at Johns Hopkins, where it was a specialized program working with underserved healthcare, and initiated training in high-value care. And I returned back here to start my career and give back to community that gave so much to me.
My first time with UConn Health, and I've never really shared this until today, was in middle school. So, my dad went through some hard times where he lost everything, and financially he was in a lot of debt, and it led to a lot of hard years. He was a guy that always worked hard, seven days a week. I didn't even know, what weekends were [laughing] growing up because he worked on Saturday, Sunday, 14-hour days. And he just hit hard times and, you know, there was a lot of times during those two years where he had to get his feet back, you know, and financially get back on stake where there's a lot of tears. And I remember one Christmas, you know, my dad was crying on the side, just 'cause he couldn't give us gifts for -- for Christmas. So, you know, there was a lot of powerful times.

And one of those memories that stood out to me, was my father and mother were basically angry because their primary care doctor said, hey, we can't see you anymore because you got Medicaid insurance. They consulted with many physicians, and they basically said, no, we are not taking your insurance and the only place that would do it was UConn. So, after a lot of people basically gave us -- you know, after a lot of hardship and a lot of down, a lot of people not believing in us, it really put an impression in my head that hey, UConn seems to be really there for us and for the community. So, it kind of is what inspired me to be who I am today.

You know, a -- a lot of you probably don't know this, but many hospitals in Connecticut will refuse our Medicaid patients. You know, we expanded Medicaid, but it doesn't necessarily mean it gets access to care; correct? You know, I've heard
dozens of testaments from our patients, that are not only thankful for our faculty and for dedicative clinical excellence, but just making them feel more human because we're actually trying our best to see our patients, you know. You know, when my family was in this situation, it was both humiliating and put a pretty big distrust -- distrust in the medical system, which I'm sure all we have seen before, too.

And, you know, it's really the -- the dedication that UConn had in just giving a little belief, and regardless of what financial you are, what hardship you went through, you know, that made me want to attend here for medical school. And that's what inspired me to kind of go on my own career.

While I was at UConn, I spent a lot of time trying to bridge the gap between people that really needed better healthcare, and that group, specifically, is where I got my MPH degree. It was seriously mentally ill patients, which is the patients who have bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, major depressive disorder, and posttraumatic stress disorder. And -- and I feel -- a lot of you already know, most often these patients are enrolled in Medicaid and this population, 97%, of them were or 333 that were in this clinic, and they don't have access to primary care or psychiatric care. It's really challenging for them. And unfortunately, they get sent to an emergency room, where they don't focus on that stuff, they focus more on acute care. So -- and the outcome and what you find is, is two outcomes; one, care is about eight to 20 times more expensive, and also a lot of these people die about 20 years earlier than the average person, which is awful.
So, while I was here, UConn was one that inspired me to do this. They gave me the care to do that and I got to be part of the integrative primary care psychiatric program where we provided healthcare for these patients that didn't have that beforehand, too. And ultimately, what we found was that with increasing primary care visits, decreased the emergency rooms visits, decreased inpatient visits, too. And it saved the Medicaid budget, just so you guys know about, and I published this, too, $700 dollars per Medicaid patient annually. And so, just for 333 people, and it was all the people that were in the specific clinic.

It inspired me to become -- go Hopkins, go to that specific residency that I trained in, and it inspired me to come back here to finish my training and inspire the young physicians of -- of today.

Just so you guys know, too, the experience, you know, demonstrated that UConn Health really is important, because we're willing to take, you know, help state cost savings. It might look like we're getting hurt in one way, but in other ways, when we're actually helping these patients now get good access to care, it's cheaper and better for their health, it's better overall, in the long run. And -- and 72 -- 720,000 people in the state of Connecticut, or one in six adults or two in five children, have some form of Husky insurance or Medicaid.

The research is clear, that access to primary care and preventable services at an early time, lowers what -- or increases life expectancy, reduces comorbid conditions that -- that can develop, we find cancers earlier, people live longer, the cancer
is found they are better treated, and it's a lot less costly.

And if the state does not continue to support our, you know, our public academic medical center and ensure that UConn Health remains financially stable, there'd be less providers that can guarantee this service to the state and to our patient population, and people would be forced to go to the emergency room. It'll increase the Medicaid budget and it will, leading to worse patient healthcare outcomes.

So, you know, I -- I came here today mainly because, you know, UConn gave me so much. And I -- I -- I'm one of those voices of so many here that really can say thank you for giving the support. And I wouldn't be here today if someone didn't believe my family and give me inspiration to work harder, you know. And I really hope that you -- you know, your team and this testament at least stands out, because there's someone like me sitting there, probably going through the same thing at a young age and these impressions really make a difference and our patients really appreciate it. So, thank you for your time.

PATRICK MURPHY: I want to thank the members of the committee for hearing my testimony today in favor of continued support for UConn. My name is Patrick Murphy. I'm an Assistant Professor. I arrived at UConn about two and a half years ago and I live in Simsbury.

While I was at MIT, I discovered a novel mechanism used by the endothelial cells lining arteries to regulate inflammation. I believe dysfunction of this response may underlie inflammatory diseases including heart attack, stroke, and
neurodegenerative disease. I won a $1 million dollar NIH research grant to study this, which I brought with me here to UConn Health.

I was attracted to UConn Health by what I saw as a really strong commitment by the state to develop a local biotech industry. And I saw evidence for this in the recruitment of JAX and their faculty. This collaboration was familiar to me in Cambridge. We had the Broad and the Whitehead Institutes just across from MIT. And so, there's consistent collaborations between these private institutes and MIT. And I saw many biotech companies spin off from this. And so, this seemed like a familiar situation to me and something that I could profit from.

Since arriving, I have taken advantage of these excellent resources. I've been using cutting edge CyTOF and single cell sequencing at the facilities, so that kind of sounds like jargon. I'm happy to explain it more but these are cutting edge techniques to look at what individual cells are doing. And I use those tools at JAX. I collaborate with their investigators. I have two world class investigators that are on a research grant I just submitted from the JAX faculty.

My goal at UConn is to better understand and to treat human disease with novel biological insight. UConn Health has been a great place for me to do this work. I regularly obtain human tissue samples through a core which was setup at UConn to pass tissue samples through to us investigators. This allows me to test our biology in actual human samples. And this would have been nearly impossible to do at MIT, where they don't have that same collaboration with the hospital.
When I was beginning this work, I also contacted Hartford Hospital, and was disappointed to hear that, although, the clinicians there were very interested in the projects I had, they simply did not -- didn't have the time out of their clinical schedule to be able to work with me. So, I'm grateful for that collaboration and what UConn Health has been able to do, to allow those collaborations.

I regularly meet with this clinical collaborator in his office and my office, and we discuss what potential these tools we're developing might have for better diagnostics in patients. And we've discussed patenting some of these ideas, and we're moving along with that process.

Strong academic center at UConn Health makes all this possible, entices scientists, like myself, to the region, creates innovation, develops patents, companies, and jobs. UConn and UConn Health wouldn't be the flagship institutes that they are without the support that you've given. So, thank you for that and I hope it continues.

I do want to touch briefly on an area where I see some room for improvement, and that's in the ballooning fringe benefit rates that we have. Compared to many other institutes, we pay $15,000 to $20,000 dollars more per personnel in the lab. And that translates ultimately into lost opportunities for research grants, when research grants, we win these two out of ten times, so the frequency of actually winning a grant is very low, and is highly competitive. Any loss in our ability to the do the work through increased personnel cost, costs us on that. And I personally had to turn down a very
talented PhD/MD candidate to my lab because of these increased fringe rates. So, I hope you consider that and the -- the toll that it has on us researchers, and think about what might be done to reduce those.

And then I want to reiterate, again, my support for UConn and UConn Health and the -- the tremendous institutes that they are and the support that you've given them -- to them. So, thank you.

BIJAN ALMASSIAN: Good evening. My name is Bijan Almassian. I'm the Co-Founder and CEO of CaroGen. CaroGen is at the TIP or Technology Incubator Program at University of Connecticut Health Center. Over 240 million people across the globe suffer from Hepatitis B virus infection. Currently, there is no medications to cure these patients. Our company CaroGen, in collaboration with Yale School of Medicine, are developing immunotherapy to potentially cure these individuals. We have a platform that can be utilized for other diseases, basically we engineer and make artificial virus. We make the bad virus a good virus to deliver the -- basically to [inaudible - 00:59:14] to make sure that we use it as a vaccine prevention -- for prevention as well as for the treatment.

We have active collaboration with UConn Health to also develop immunotherapy for potential treatment and cure of colon cancer. We recently started working on immunotherapy for patients who are suffering from ovarian cancer. Being at TIP facility is really a blessing for companies like ours. Thanks to all of you for supporting bioscience community with your investment in Connecticut Innovations. We are the result of that
investment that Connecticut Innovations provided pre-seed, seed, and [inaudible - 00:59:58] and now we're talking with major pharmaceutical companies in the world to develop our outreach for global use.

We also benefit from UConn facility and CORE -- the state of the arts facility, because as a small company, we cannot afford to -- to buy those equipment, so we collaborate, not only in terms of discovering new medications, we also use the equipments that we cannot afford.

As you well know, the technologies of the futures, include biotechnology, [inaudible - 01:00:32] data, robotics, and your investment in UConn Health and companies like us, prepare us to be the -- the future of the technology future for the benefits of the economy of our state. We hope that you continue your support of our UConn Health and also the smaller startup companies like us. Thank you very much for your consideration.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Thank you for your all testimony. And Patrick, we're going to have a conversation with UConn about how we think they can work on that a little differently.

PATRICK MURPHY: Great. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you all for your testimony.

PATRICK MURPHY: Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. [clapping] Next community colleges and after them, UConn again. Before we go, I just -- start in, I just wanted to say, there's a young -- a new young lady right down
there, would you like to introduce yourself, ma'am, to the group?

SENATOR ABRAMS (13TH): Are you calling me a young lady?

REP. WALKER (93RD): [Laughing]

SENATOR ABRAMS (13TH): Thank you so much. You just made my evening. I'm Senator Mary Daugherty Abrams. I represent the 13th District, which is Meriden, Middletown, Cheshire, and Middlefield. Thank you all for being here tonight.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. And the older gentleman over here [laughing] He just [laughing] -- see, he can't even hear. Would you like to introduce yourself? [laughing]

REP. RYAN (139TH): I'll turn my hearing aids back on now. [laughing] I'm Representative Ryan from 139th District. I serve Bozrah, Montville, and Norwich.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Thank you very much. Go right ahead, sir. Yeah.

KAREEN LAWSON: My name is Kareen Lawson and I'm currently a student at Asnuntuck Community College in Enfield, and I'm a resident in Hartford.

First off, I would like to thank everyone involved with allowing me to come here and be able to speak with you guys today. It has been a long journey getting here, but I'm highly grateful for the opportunity that has been bestowed upon me. These types of opportunities are seldom given to someone who is -- or has been incarcerated. All I ever wanted and prayed for was an opportunity to prove myself. I wanted to prove to my mother, my family,
my peers, and my fiancée that the mistake I made is not who I am and that this is not the end of my story. So, all we ever want to do in life is make our parents proud of us, proud to call us their sons or daughters, proud of the accomplishments we've made, and proud of the men and women that we've become.

When you find yourself in the position I am in, and many others who are or were incarcerated, you tend to believe that life is over. You begin to believe that no one will ever hire you again, no one will take you serious, and no one will ever give you a chance to have a career. Basically, you feel as you will forever been seen as a convict. Hope is something that is tremendously needed for someone who is incarcerated. Without having hope or an opportunity, it is hard for someone in prison to realize that there is a way for you to be able to make a positive situation out of the negative one you are currently in. It is hard for someone to want to alter their mindset or focus on changing, if they believe that there is no prospect of being able to have a productive career once they are released.

I know that I can maximum my situation and build a new life for my family. The opportunities that the Pell Grant and state funded programs is providing is extremely necessary. Not only has it provided us with an opportunity to go to school, but it's also providing us with the opportunity to have a career.

I cannot begin to tell you how -- how much confidence has been restored in me since I began this journey at Asnuntuck Community College. The instructors there have been significant in my progress of being becoming a CNC machinist. Right
from the start, they treated us like students and not inmates. They have taken a personal interest in wanting to teach and prepare us to be able to have the proper knowledge to have prosper -- a prosperous career in this particular field.

That was the first thing I noticed and appreciated from the start. I came in with some pre-notions that maybe we wouldn't be taken seriously and nothing would come of this experience. I realized early on, that I was wrong, and it -- this is the opportunity that I needed to take full advantage of.

So, I just wanted to reiterate how important this program is and funding is at Asnuntuck Community College, and as well as the other colleges here in Connecticut. This gives us a sense of hope, a sense of pride, a valuable opportunity to take care of our families, and become positive influences within our community.

So, again, I want to thank everyone involved with this progress. Thank you legislators for continued support and funding of the community colleges and public colleges. And I want to express how extremely important it is to give people of my circumstance hope and an opportunity to have a career after their release. So, thank you.

REBECCA DELVALLE: Hello, my name is Rebecca DelValle. I'm from Ansonia, and I'm a proud student of Housatonic Community College that's in Bridgeport. I look forward to graduating this May from HCC.

I'm honored to share with you what my experience has been in college and how it has impacted the lives of our six children. Our children have seen the
outcome of our hard work and possibilities that come from that hard work. We are finally starting to see a light at the end of a very long tunnel. And have shown our children, that when you point your mind and effort into something, the possibilities are endless. I say our, because my husband is also at HCC, and together, we'll boldly walk across the graduation stage this spring.

I am graduating with a major in Small Business Management with a concentration in Entrepreneurship. I can speak to you tonight about what a different it made -- what a difference it makes in the lives of students, when they can meet regularly with Academic Advisors and Workforce Coaches on campus. For me, this has changed my earning potential for the rest of my life. And I share all of this with our kids, the next generation of Connecticut workers.

On campus, I learned about a program called the Family Economics Security Program, FESP. In order to participate, you had to have taken some college classes and hold down a part-time job. As a busy mother, you could imagine what I was thinking in the beginning, would this time away from my children be right? Would any tradeoffs away from them be worth it? Well, I'm here to tell you, it is so worthwhile. I will not be graduating with an any college debt due the various financial literacy classes I have taken. And my confidence has grown significantly as a student and as a member of the Greater Bridgeport area.

There are many parts of this program that have been funded from the Fairfield County's Community Foundation. But I am here before you to say what a life change -- to say the lifechanging actions of
Counselors and Advisors in guiding me through this educational journey has been transformative.

As legislators, I understand that you are faced with many difficult choices about what has value for students. Please know that by investing in this type of staffing on our community college campuses by funding more Advisors and Counselors, will make so many more students like me get the -- get to the successful finish line and become even more productive citizens of Connecticut. Thank you for allowing me this -- this opportunity to share my story with you and God bless.

MONICA MALDONADO: Good evening, Appropriations Committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of community colleges. My name is Monica Maldonado and I am the Student Government President at Gateway Community College in New Haven. I represent the voice of Gateway's student body, and I am here tonight to talk about my hopes and dreams as a community college student.

I'm a non-traditional first-generation student. I worked for several years as a project manager before deciding to become a student at Gateway in 2017. Today, I am proud to major in Environmental Science and Toxicology, while I also pursue certificates in Water Management, Meditation, and Interdisciplinary Peace, Collaboration and Conflicts.

Although, I did not start my community college life thinking that I would be sitting here before tonight, my experiences with the dedicated faculty, staff, and my fellow students, have helped me grow into this position. I have sat on a number of boards and am currently a member of the Student Advisory Committee to the Board of Regents and the
Student's First: Academic and Student Affairs Consolidation Committee.

Community Colleges are essential to our state. Many community college students plan to transfer to four-year institutions, but also students in four-year institutions can take affordable courses at a community college. They offer many certificate programs that upon completion, let students go directly into the workforce.

I ask that this committee continue to fund certificate programs based on Humanities because these type of programs are essential for students to be able to explore and discover parts of themselves they wouldn't have otherwise known existed. Certificate programs that are outside the standard curriculum are essential for student success. In my experience, there was one certificate program that absolutely changed my life. The Interdisciplinary Peace Collaboration and Conflict certificate program, with its combination of anthropology, meditation, and ethics, plus the core understanding of peace and conflict between nations, helped me to find my voice which I have been able to use to advocate for others and to speak to you today. I hope you can understand the importance of funding certificate programs such as this.

At Gateway Community College, I am being challenged to learn more. I'm excited to engage in topics I never dreamed about, and I am inspired to empower my fellow students. I was able to establish Gateway's first Earth Day Event: Choose 2 Reuse, I moderated a panel of professionals, and am hosting an event to educate students to become informed voters. Gateway Community College has made me a better person.
As you consider the difficult choices of what to fund for students, please remember that community colleges give people a second chance at life. I have shared a classroom with students who have spent years in prison, mothers who have returned to school, students in recovery, and students with disabilities. Community colleges are a stepping stone for people to transform their lives.

Thank you for allowing me to share my story with you. I'd like to express my gratitude for your continued support of the community colleges.

SAGE MAIER: Madam Chair, Representatives, and members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Sage Maier and I’m a student at Tunxis Community College. As the current Student Government President and Chair of the Student Advisory Committee for the Board of Regents, I have heard concerns from students across the state in fear of what the newly projected budget will bring to higher education. The threat of raising tuition has been the most consistent of concerns. With tuition increases, students within our CSCU system will suffer and Connecticut will be at risk of losing students and an educated workforce as a whole.

Governor Lamont has recently stated that Connecticut is going on a debt diet. While someone is on a diet, they often cut the things that they somehow feel are bad for them. In our case, higher education is not a piece that should be cut. In fact, our college education is one of the biggest accomplishments that we will embark on throughout our lives. Students and our education are the
nutrients of our state. We are the future and we will help to build Connecticut.

As a student that comes from a single-parent family, I know what it's like to struggle. I was fortunate enough to have a mother who put herself through school to raise my sister and me. She always encouraged a better future through a great education. We found that great education here in Connecticut. However, this came with a cost, one that put my family through such struggles, that we had to limit grocery shopping and heating our home.

I sit before you today as the voice for thousands of struggling students with similar stories as mine. I ask that you assist in advocating for us to help keep tuition down.

I'd like to thank you for allowing students like me the ability to explore, to prosper, and to thrive in our community colleges. My work with the Tunxis food pantry, the clubs on campus, and diversity initiatives, I have seen the power of people in bringing a community together.

Without you, we could not succeed in our education or in achieving our goals. Recognize that passionate students dream of the day they will earn their college degree. Please help those of us who work tirelessly to get to this point. Thank you for your time and consideration.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. And thank you for all your testimonies. [clapping] You guys have done a fantastic job. UConn again. After UConn panel, the Board of Regents CSU system. Go right ahead.
ARMIN RAD: Hello, everyone. My name is Armin Rad. I'm from Manchester, Connecticut. And I'm currently a PhD candidate in the Biomedical Engineering Department at the University of Connecticut. State funding for UConn is -- is critical to my education and the cancer research I'm performing.

By 2025, cancer is gonna be number one cause of death here in the United States. For our current US citizens, on average, unfortunately, one person in every household will get cancer at some point in their lives. The more we progress in terms of cancer therapy, the more complicated it gets for -- for the physicians to choose the right course of treatment for each patient.

During my five years of research in cancer treatments, I have developed a system to create tiny tumors outside of the patient's body from the patient's own cancer cells. With this technology, we have provided a comprehensive system to evaluate the efficacy of the drug treatments for cancer patients. This research has resulted in a concrete biotech product that is currently under panel review with UConn.

Due to Connecticut's generous investments in UConn, I have been able to start up my own biotech venture company with this technology. A startup that would not have been possible without the presence of the UConn Technology Incubator. Our startup team has already successfully received five grants totaling $90,000 dollars, involving five UConn students with launching this -- this company, and registered in Connecticut as an LLC. The next step is to hire ten more staff scientists, and to bring additional grant money and VC fundings to -- to Connecticut. My
vision is to grow my company, and to eventually have a research and manufacturing center in Farmington, Connecticut. In terms of employment, my vision is to employ an additional 200 scientists and engineers in the next ten years here in Connecticut.

UConn is a uniquely qualified position -- is in a uniquely qualified position to stimulate Connecticut's economy on the STEM front, especially in the opportunity-rich biotech field. UConn is a highly respected research institute that provides the scientific backbone for technological breakthroughs. This would enable me to employ high-quality STEM students with cutting-edge scientific knowledge produced by UConn. We are also building a partnership with UConn Health and Hartford Hospital to receive patients' biopsy samples.

Additionally, the Global Entrepreneurship Master's program, started by the CTNEXT division of Connecticut innovations at UConn, helps develop business strategies for individuals looking to begin their own startups. Without the support of this UConn program, it would have been difficult for me to launch my own startup company, integrate my scientific research into a promising biotech product with plenty of investor interest, and merge my company into the economy of Connecticut.

All this progress is ultimately due to Connecticut's unwavering support and financial funding of UConn in the past ten years. Thank you for all you do to support UConn. And please continue your important investments.

RIMISHA ASIF: Good evening. I'm Rimisha Asif, a sophomore and a Student Support Services student,
also known as SSS, attending the UConn Hartford campus.

As a first-generation student attending college, I felt nervous what the college experience would be like. But through the SSS pre-college program, I became prepared and it helped me build my confidence and create relationships with my new community. SSS has been my stepping stone in becoming a determined and passionate student who desires to graduate from the UConn School of Business with an Accounting degree. It gave me a wonderful experience that shaped me into an independent woman who is now the leader and co-founder of UConn Human Rights Club.

Through SSS, I earned six college credits before starting my first year of college, which helped ease the burden of my study, and I was able to participate in club activities, and be part of the UConn Hartford Undergraduate Student Government. The Hartford campus gave me amazing opportunities for club involvement activities, which helped enhance my leadership skill and knowledge. Programs like SSS grant students with opportunities that open doors to success, which is made possible through the funding from the state.

SSS allowed me to be part of the UConn nation, and because of SSS, I have been given the chance to speak here today. By reducing our funds, then programs like SSS will not be able to offer opportunities such as SSS study abroad, which gives -- which gives students potential for increase in GPA, self-confidence, and employability. Cutting our funds will limit the opportunities that are offered to students like myself.
Additionally, if -- if funds to the University are limited, then I'm afraid that the university has no choice but to increase our tuition and fees, which would result in a decline in enrollment and retention. For example, if the cut -- if the cuts lead to fewer acceptance into UConn, then as a society, we waste talent that can benefit our labor force and our society as a whole. After all, soon our success as a state will be in the hands of students who will contribute to our economy once we achieve our education.

The proposed budget cut will discourage students from seeking advanced educational opportunities. I strongly believe that education is the key factor for us to get out from any possible future recession and bring prosperity in our community.

I am so thankful to be part of the UConn Hartford campus. It has given me opportunities which has helped me develop, not only as a student, but as a person. I'm committed to seeing that other students have the same opportunities, and I trust that you are, too. Thank you for your time and giving me the opportunity to speak here tonight.

GARRETT D'AMATO: Hello, there. Please excuse my sniffles if they come about. My name is Garrett D'Amato. I am from Middlefield, Connecticut, and I am a senior at the University of Connecticut in the Honors program and in the Accelerated Law program. I am also a first-year law student at the same time at UConn School of Law. I'd like to also thank the committee, as well as the state and university for giving us all the chance to speak today on its behalf.
So, at UConn, I had the privilege of being a tour guide for two years. And as such, I had the ability to influence thousands of students in their choice on whether or not they'd come to our university. Every tour would end the same exact way. It was the speech of why I came to UConn. And ironically enough, it started off by saying, I didn't want to go.

Senior year of high school I was, for some reason, so against it. Both my parents went and they now work in the state; call it teenage rebellion. But I just thought, you know, I had to make my own path and I thought it was too big and all of these things. And I came down to realizing two things.

The first thing, tuition. Through this committee's generous support -- through the state's generous support of our university, it's been able to keep one of the most competitive tuitions for one of the best public universities in our nation. With this in mind, it allows students, like myself, to leave college with virtually no debt, in some cases. And that is completely thanks to that funding that you guys are able to give us. Beyond that, we're able to become immediate contributing members of society in the state of Connecticut, and that's a huge draw to the university.

The second thing I realized, and the second thing I would say to every student was, you can make any large campus small, but you can never make a small campus large. And in the context of this meeting here, small campuses don't get the funding. Small schools don't get the funding that UConn does. But the funding allows one of the most vibrant student lives that I've seen at any university in the US,
any that I toured, especially. With that, the investment in student life allows students, like myself, to explore interests, to go into things that you never thought you would. I've gone to nationals with the crew team and I've gone around the nation with my acapella group. And those are all things in connections with people that I've made thanks to the funding from UConn. It's also one of the things that attracted me to the university and attracts thousands of other students to come here.

So, I would like to kind of end by saying, as students and residents, we constantly hear about Connecticut's financial situation and the worries that we all have about it. And I firmly believe that investing in our state's higher ed is the first step in solving that problem. I hope to be, in the next two years, the youngest member admitted to the Connecticut Bar Association, and when that happens, it will be completely thanks to the state of Connecticut and the funding that they've given the university.

So, I end by saying, I implore you to invest in our state's education, because the products of that investment end up investing in the state afterwards. Thank you very much.

NANDAN TUMU: Chairperson Walker and members of the committee -- Chairperson Walker and members of the committee, I want to kind of touch upon what Garrett said, as well. My name is Nandan Tumu. I'm from Farmington, Connecticut in the 21st District. I'm an Honors Computer Science major, graduating in 2020.

At UConn I serve on the Board of Trustees and as the Chief Justice of the Undergraduate Student
Government. I'm honored to be here and speak on behalf of my fellow students. I will be focusing my testimony on the unique opportunities I've been fortunate enough to take part in at the University of Connecticut. Broadly speaking, I've received opportunities in the areas of undergraduate research, student leadership, career guidance, and entrepreneurship at the university.

The University of Connecticut provides the opportunity to engage in cutting-edge research. Over the past three years, I worked in a research lab concerned with the development of autonomous vehicles. I got to build one-tenth scale models of autonomous cars and write the code that they operated on. We competed internationally, winning second place at Cyber-Physical Systems Week in Portugal. The lab facilities provided by the new Engineering and Science Building, helped us greatly in our development process.

My exposure to undergraduate research has shaped my undergraduate experience. I believe that UConn has provided me a level of student leadership opportunity that very few universities in the world do. As an undergraduate, I serve on the Board of Trustees, University Senate, and the Senate Executive Committee. I have been able to both learn about the operation of the university and advocate for interests -- with the interest of students at the highest levels of the university. Everything from tuition and fees, construction, and new courses and general education requirements pass through bodies where students have a seat at the table. These opportunities for leadership, teach students the skills necessary to function in the real world.
UConn alumni care about current students. The best career guidance opportunities I've had, I -- I've have -- I've had, have been through the UConn Consulting Group. We work on real projects with real clients. I've worked on projects with international conglomerates, billion dollar healthcare systems, and new startups. This groups -- this group works because of engagement with experienced alumni and a rigorous recruitment process. Members benefit from skills development from mentorship, from recent and not so recent alumni, who take the time to help current students. The real-world experience and guidance I've gained in this group have shaped the way I work and think about problems.

Finally, UConn has provided me with entrepreneurship opportunity. Two recent UConn alumni, Ryan Englander, Matt Lin, and I, all from Connecticut, have started a company called Vitalyx. We are building technology to target and kill cancer cells using CRISPR/cas9 techniques. UConn has provided institutional support, including the Innovation Quest program that connected us to legal resources and mentors who walked us through the entrepreneurship process. Our company is incorporated in the state of Connecticut.

The state's bioscience initiatives combined with the resources we've been given by UConn, make Connecticut a perfect place to start our business. We are blessed to live in a state that takes education so seriously. In part, due to state funding, UConn has seen a rise in the quality of education and other programing it provides, and has, in turn, kept more high-achieving students here in Connecticut.
Cutting off or reducing state funding to the University of Connecticut risks damaging the progress we have made in these past years and risk sending the wrong signal to prospective students and others. Providing opportunities like those I've been fortunate enough to take part in, would not be possible without your continued support.

As you look to develop the state's budget, I implore you not to cut the budget of the University of Connecticut. Thank you for your time. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

AKSHAYAA CHITTIBABU: Good evening, Madam Chair and members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you all for taking the time to listen to our stories and giving us the opportunity to share them. We deeply appreciate the Assembly's past support of the University of Connecticut, and humbly ask for its continued support as we continue to further our core values of innovation, leadership, global engagement, and diversity as one of the nation's top leading public universities.

My name is Akshayaa Kethinni Chittibabu. I'm a senior undergraduate from Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, pursuing an individualized Honors major in Health, Policy, and Social Medicine and a minor in Sociology on the pre-medical track. As an out-of-state student, coming from a math and science magnet school in Massachusetts, the decision to come to UConn over other institutions was influenced by several factors: UConn's reputation as a leader in science and technology, the university's boundless academic and service opportunities for students from all backgrounds and fields, and generous funding through the STEM Scholarship made possible by Next
Generation Connecticut supported by the Connecticut State Legislature. Most importantly, I look great in navy blue. [laughter] Jokes aside, my decision to become a UConn Husky has been the best decision of my life, indisputably. It has shaped me into who I am today.

During my career at UConn, I've had the incredibly good -- the incredible good fortune of being named both the Harry S. Truman Scholar and a Marshall Scholar, making me the first student in UConn's history to win both of these awards. Out of the public -- out of the Boston region, where I interviewed for the Marshall, I was the only scholar through a public institution. The rest of the scholars came from private institutions like Princeton, Harvard, and MIT. This was unsurprising to me, because this is the caliber of UConn and of the students it produces. I would not be where I am today without UConn and the opportunities, mentorship, and endless support that it has afforded me. This fact constantly pushes me to pay my opportunities forward. From the minute I stepped foot on this campus, I have not only been taken seriously as a student, but I've also been challenged to be the best version of myself, as a scholar and leader.

In my first semester, I walked straight into the Head of the Sociology Department's office, impassioned by the huge problem of cervical cancer screening practice in rural South India and wanting to do something about it. Professor Bandana Purkayastha, not only heard me out, but took a chance on baby-faced 17-year-old me, holding me to the research standard of an advanced undergraduate, guiding me through the process of the Institutional
Review Board approval process, and helping me apply for research funding through UConn, so I could eventually conduct the field work in India in the summer of 2016, where I was able to establish a novel health education program that benefited 26 villages. She continues to be one of my most treasured mentors to this day.

Experiences like this have been common for me at UConn because of how incredible our faculty are and how willing UConn is to support student research in curiosity. Continued funding is crucial for us to continue this level of academic excellence in all major fields.

Of personal importance to me, I'm the first student of color to win either of these national awards in UConn's history. I'll tell you why this is important. I've always been passionate about reforming the American Healthcare System to be more equitable. However, deciding to pursue a career in public service was initially intimidating to me. After all, growing up, I had never seen people who looked like me sitting where you all are sitting.

When applying to the Truman and Marshall, both awards based on American public service, I realized the importance of our leadership being as diverse as our American people. It brings me great pride that UConn and the state of Connecticut are both incredibly committed to making this happen. While I am the first person of color to win either of these awards in UConn's history, I certainly will not be the last. Last year, I was the only Truman finalist from UConn. This year, there are three finalists, all people of color, from California, Connecticut, and New York.
The diversity of excellence on our campuses is astounding, and continued funding to UConn is invaluable to seeking out the student excellence and nurturing it. Huskies are future doctors, lawyers, educators, and legislators, like our very own Senator Mae Flexer. Huskies are scholars. Huskies are leaders, some of Connecticut's very best. Let's continue to raise them to be. Thank you.

[clapping].

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. [laughter]

SARAH HOELGER: Thank you, Representative Walker and the members of the committee for allowing me to speak today. My name is Sarah Hoelger. I'm 21 years old and I'm from Bethel, Connecticut. This past May, I graduated from Western Connecticut State University, summa cum laude with a Bachelor's in Psychology.

And if I hadn't chosen to attend Western, then I don't think I'd be here, more than four years later, preparing to pursue my PhD in Developmental Psychology at the University of Notre Dame starting this fall. Because when I first came to Western, I was 17 years old and I had been homeschooled my entire life. So, I really enjoyed that opportunity. It -- it taught me a lot of awesome lessons, but that meant that entering college was my first time in a formal school setting, like doing school at a
desk in a classroom. And so, I really wasn't sure what to expect or whether or not I'd be successful. But I, very soon, came to realize that, whether or not I was a successful student at Western, was entirely up to me. Because Western constantly offers so many opportunities for students to succeed and flourish, as long as students pursue these opportunities and work very diligently to earn them.

And I'm so grateful to have been at the receiving end of a very long chain of opportunities, which began my freshman year when I took a psychological statistics course. I was dreading that course, because I hated math and the professor was very notoriously difficult and intimidating. And I actually didn't do too well at the first half of the -- the course, but I worked really diligently for the semester and I ended up getting an A. In -- in the process, I kind of incidentally came to love research and stats, even though they involved math. And that professor that I thought was scary, turned out to not be as scary I -- I believed. And she allowed me to become involved in her research lab, which has amounted to four years of research investigating resilience and success in high-risk college students.

And so, working in that lab has resulted in the opportunity for me to co-author several publications and a book chapter, and I've been able to present posters at conferences. And this past weekend, I was in New York giving a paper presentation on how to use these findings to help struggling students. And so, we've continued that endeavor and we're currently designing in the lab, designing interventions to help anxious and high-risk students. And I've been able to witness how -- how
effective these interventions have been, not only as a researcher but as a supplemental instructor. I've been able to be a kind of TA in stats courses. And I've been able to -- to share my passion for stats with those students, but I've also learned to really appreciate intervention research which has kind of sparked a passion that will continue into grad school.

And so, while I was getting involved in this research over my years at Western, I also joined the Kathwari Honors program, in which I was very uniquely challenged by interdisciplinary honors courses. I also met so 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 general. And in that vein, I also had the privilege of being mentored by Dr. Kukk, the -- the Director of the Honors program, who has taught me and so many hundreds of other students, what it really means to be a compassionate achiever. In fact, in general, all the faculty at Western, but particularly Dr. Nelson and Dr. Kukk, have been incredibly supportive and encouraging. They always make it clear that they sincerely want the best for their students. And they've challenged me to pursue numerous opportunities and held me to high standards of excellence, and have even kind of considered me a junior colleague.

These opportunities have taught me three really valuable lessons, which I don't think I would have learned elsewhere. They taught me to always pursue opportunities and to never expect them to be handed to me. They taught me that the best and most worthwhile experiences are usually, if not always,
the most difficult. And finally, I was always surrounded by individuals who demonstrated how to be unwaveringly and wholeheartedly compassionate to everyone they met, which is a lesson I'm most grateful for of all.

And so, I am infinitely thankful to Western for providing the affordability and financial aid for me to pursue all of these opportunities and to learn all these lessons, because they've -- they've, you know, changed me as a person and as a -- as a researcher, as a scholar. And they've uniquely prepared me to enter my doctoral studies.

And so, I really hope that the committee will consider -- will -- will continue to help Western to support students to take advantage of these kind of opportunities in the future. Thank you very much.

VICTOR NAMER: Good evening, Representative Walker and esteemed members of the committee. It's a pleasure to be back here again, this time on testimony. When it came time to decide which university I would attend, I faced a difficult choice. I was accepted into every public and private institution --

REP. WALKER (93RD): I need your name.

VICTOR NAMER: Thank you so much, Representative Walker. My name is Victor Namer from Western Connecticut State University. Thank you. I got too excited. [laughter]

REP. WALKER (93RD): That's great but we still -- we want to put you on the record, so I'm saying.

VICTOR NAMER: Oh, yeah. [laughter] Yeah.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Go ahead.
VICTOR NAMER: When it came time to decide which university I would attend, I faced a difficult choice. I was accepted into every public and private institution that I applied to, and WCSU was but one of the many schools I had my radar. That all changed when I attended Western's Open House, where I was introduced to the Director of the Honors program. He told me that the possibilities at WCSU rivaled those of Ivy League schools, but at a fraction of the cost. He shared stories of students from WCSU going on to Fulbright programs, graduate schools like Harvard and Yale, and working at the UN. To tell the truth, I was skeptical, wondering how such possibility could emerge from a small state university in the hometown I grew up in. I took a chance, and now I'm here before you today to tell you why it -- how and why it ended up being the best decision of my life.

When I think back at my time at WCSU, I think of one word: opportunity. During my time here, Western has provided me with more opportunities than I could have ever imagined. Over the course of my stay, I have studied abroad in two other countries, Thailand and Spain, become semi-fluent in another language, traveled to 17 different countries, and all for the same price as paying my regular tuition, room, and board at WCSU.

I have completed three internships, including one right here at our proud state Legislature. I've gained practical job experience working on campus as an associate operations manager, a teaching assistant, and a research assistant, all things that are not commonly found in undergraduate universities. And to top it off, within the span of five years, I am graduating with two degrees, a
minor, and all while becoming a global citizen. I would argue that Western has made me incredibly marketable in -- in both the job market, and when I apply to graduate schools.

It was through Western that I began volunteering in my community, which led to one of my internships, which led me to my current job working with CityCenter Danbury, a 501(C)(3) organization committed to the revitalization of the downtown Danbury area, a job I love, I might add, where I get to give back to the community that raised me. Alongside many of my peers, I'm about to graduate and I plan to stay in Connecticut -- I plan to stay in Connecticut to work for a year or two before going for my Master's degree. Looking back, if it wasn't for WCSU, I would not have these opportunities, nor would I be able to walk out of my undergraduate program with virtually no debt. It is in understanding these opportunities that I was allowed to thrive. And I ask you, the committee, to please fight for our funding. Thank you very much for your time.

ASMA RAHIMYAR: Good evening, members of the Senate Appropriations Committee. Thank you for taking the time out to hear our stories tonight. As a Southern student, I'd especially like to acknowledge Senator Abrams and Representative Walker, both of whom are Southern alum.

My name is Asma Rahimyar. When my mother was preparing for her citizenship test, she used the English letters of my name to practice her handwriting. Soon enough, the entire expanse of empty page would become riddled with dozens of carefully measured Asmas. When I won my town's
annual poetry contest, my mom was sitting in the fifth row. She stood up even before I translated the verses into Dari, and my nerves were quelled at the sight of her familiar smile. When my birthday comes around, my mom will leave a card on my desk before I wake up. They are often bright pink, frequently adorned with flowers, completely void of words, and always brimming with her love.

When my father knows I'll be staying up to study for an exam, he makes me a cup of coffee, puts a blanket around my shoulders, and prays two extra rakat. When I come home from school, my dad will make sure I finish my dinner before we discuss Plato's Republic or Kant's Categorical Imperative. And when I fall asleep in the midst of thumbing through flashcards, he will turn off -- my light off and replace my book with a pillow. When I ask my dad why he works weekends, why he has made a copy of each 100% score I've received, and why he wakes up at 4:00 a.m. each morning, he responds with a wink: bareh tu, hazar dafah, for you, one thousand times over.

When you decide whether to invest in my education, I want you to know that I am a sophomore at Southern, double majoring in Political Science and Philosophy and minoring in English. I want you to know that I hope to pursue a career in human right's law. And I want you to know that a Southern education has allowed for me to converse with ambassadors at the United Nations, extoll Rumi with Khizr Khan, and explore the full extent of my curiosity without the oppressive weight of debt. I want you to know that I carry a folded-up postcard of Kabul everywhere I go as a testament to who I could have been, who I aspire to be, and who I am due to the sacrifice of
parents who broke their own hearts to give my brothers and I a chance at knowing wholeness.

My parents fled Soviet-occupied Afghanistan before I was born. My mom once played the same card game five times in a row, as if the monotony of it were enough to distract from the airstrikes overhead. Her dreams of becoming a journalist were lost in translation and sometimes, underneath the cloudless sky, she tells me to live out the dreams that she never could. My dad lost nearly half of his graduating class. As the rows of empty desks increased in length, my dad continued to study. As the tortures raged in the basement of his medical school, as his friends disappeared, and as he became afraid of saying goodbye, my dad retained the stubborn hope needed to return to deserted libraries, and the quiet courage to believe that it would all be worth it. It is because of his fervent commitment to education, that one of my brothers graduated with a degree in information technology, that the other is pursuing a PhD in mathematics, that the youngest, still in seventh grade, dreams of becoming an engineer, and that I fall asleep with ink smudged across my palms each night.

My brothers and I have all attended Connecticut state schools. And I want you to know that, when you invest in our education, you are not only allowing for families such as mine to send three children to college at once, you are investing in the wildest dreams of a man and woman whose prayers once revolved around staying alive. You are investing in the little American girl of a grandfather buried an ocean away. And you are investing in moments when I leave class after having compared Adam Smith and Karl Marx's economic
theories, when I look up at the expanse of limitless sky above me, and when -- when I am struck by the miracle of my life's trajectory.

When you invest in Southern students, so, too, are you investing in my friend, whose eyes light up at the mention of Oscar Wilde and who struggles to pay bus fare. You invest in the student I tutor, who stays up until 3:00 a.m. each day to complete her assignments after having spent the day supporting her disabled mother. English isn't her first language, and yet no language barrier can impede the passion with which she dreams of becoming a doctor. You invest in the student who works three separate jobs to pay for a chance at a better future. And you invest in the middle-aged woman who needed my help correcting the grammar of an essay she wrote about the death of her sister. She was adamant about the placement of her punctuation marks, lest they shift the focus away from her hope.

Please know that increasing the price of tuition will mean the stunting of our passions, the endangerment of our futures, and the infringement of a basic human right. The last time I was in this city was for my parents' citizenship ceremony. I am here, eight years later, to tell you that our students are the bearers of legacies, the manifestation of prayers, and the carriers of folded-up postcards. I promise you that we are worth the investment. Thank you.

RACHEL ELLIS: Good evening, and thank you for allowing us the time to come speak to you tonight. Representative Walker, it is amazing to see a fellow Southern Owl up here.
My name is Rachel Ellis and I am a junior at Southern Connecticut State University. I am the proud daughter of a Jamaican immigrant and two parents who did not graduate from college. I would like to share a little bit about my experience at Southern. In 2016, I was a senior high school student with a 3.7 GPA and the president of my school's student body. I was accepted into all the schools that I was -- that I applied to. This included Rutgers, Montclair State University, University of New Haven, Southern, and Delaware State University. I decided to leave the state and go to DSU. I was on track to attend that school, but two months before beginning, my father, the sole breadwinner in my family lost his job as a hospital administrator. Because neither he or my mother had a college degree, finding a job to support my college aspirations, my siblings, and pay the bills was extremely difficult.

At 18, I was faced with one of the realities that many of my peers have been faced with. Even though I want to, and I had the grades, college might be too expensive. After many difficult conversations and the scholarship package that I was offered by Southern, it became apparent that an out-of-state school was not an option for me.

At that time, I bought into the stigma that a state institution would not offer me the best opportunities to be successful in the professional world. However, I knew that I needed to go to college and that Southern was the most affordable opportunity for me to do that. I could not have been more wrong about how I felt about Southern.
Within my first semester at Southern, I had three professors that drastically changed how I viewed myself and my education. One in my first year seminar class that we call INQ, one in an African-American literature class, and one in a theater class. I was offered the opportunity to train to become a Peer Mentor and I met my absolute best friend. This all happened for me in my first semester at Southern. At the end of that semester, my father found work again and the conversation of possibly transferring to another school was had. I could not imagine going anywhere else to complete my undergraduate degree.

Southern's campus has become a second home to me and many of my peers. I have been able to take on leadership positions at Southern, such as being a student worker in the office of Student Conduct and Civic Responsibility, a Peer Mentor, an Orientation Ambassador, and a Resident Advisor. I'm able to motivate and support other students' growth at SCSU. If you know nothing else about Southern students, please know that we work.

This semester, I worked three jobs and with scholarships, loans, both subsidized and unsubsidized, I will be just able to afford my semester. I cannot imagine how I would do it if my tuition was increased. Over 80% of my peers are working students. Through those student worker positions, I have met some administrators at Southern who have inspired me, pushed me, and challenged me to attain greatness. My dean knows my name.

As a social work major, being able to go to public university in the heart of New Haven has been a tremendous asset to my education. But who knows, my
policy classes have made me realize my potential as an advocate for those with disabilities and who are struggling with poverty. The opportunity to go to Southern has had a lasting impact on the person that I am. Keeping Southern affordable and accessible to people like me, needs to be a priority, because I am the future of this state. I do thank you for your time. [clapping]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you all. Social work. [clapping] Thank you, all. You did a fantastic job. Thank you. UConn. And after UConn, Community College of Board of Regents.

JOE RAPISARDA: Hello, everyone. My name is Joe Rapisarda and I am a veteran, entrepreneur, and MBA student at UConn. I have been a Connecticut resident for my entire life. I was born, raised, and attended schools in New Britain, including a Bachelor's degree from Central Connecticut State University. My professional resume includes service in the United States Army, a position as a Veterans Commissioner for the City of New Britain, and four years finance experience at United Technologies Corporation.

Today, I would like to share my experience of how I realized the path of an entrepreneur was right for me, and how UConn's entrepreneurship programs have supported me throughout my business ventures. My story starts in 2013 as a 20-year-old, when I had just gotten home from a deployment to Afghanistan, and began attending college at CCSU. I wanted to be involved in business but didn't know at what capacity. The iPhone 4 had just been released and many people began realizing how easy it was to break glass screens. One of my friends, who attended
UConn, was an engineering student and knew how to replace these iPhone screens. The two of us quickly organized a business entity and began buying broken phones, fixing them, and then reselling them. This venture funded my entire summer and we were operational up until the iPhone 5 was released, and the increased cost in screens took us out of business. This was my first taste of entrepreneurship.

After graduating from Central, I began working at United Technologies Corporation in various finance and operation roles. I even had the privilege of being accepted into their Financial Leadership program, which I have since graduated. While at UTC, I started my MBA part-time at the University of Connecticut. It wasn't long after starting school at UConn, that my entrepreneur spirits started to kick in again, and I was eager for an experience like I had in the summer of 2013.

Last August, I decided to leave my position at UTC to complete my MBA full time, while chasing a vision of starting a new business. This was not an easy decision, but what made it seamless was knowing I had the support of UConn and the school's resources, including veterans benefits. Simply put, UConn gave me the confidence to leave my safe job and pursue a -- a dream of starting more businesses.

I speak to you today as a co-founder of a blockchain startup I created with two other UConn students. Our product is a data management app that allows people to share their gym and health records with businesses in return for benefits and premium reductions. Our business was conceptualized in a UConn classroom, built in a UConn classroom, and
will always been known as a product that came from UConn. The entrepreneurship education I am receiving at UConn is a large part of our success. We have had the opportunity to compete and win grant funding through UConn Gets Seeded and we are now working our way through Accelerate UConn. These programs have helped my team develop our business in a way that would have been much harder to do alone. At the start of my post-graduate career with UConn, I would have never imagined I would be where I am today. If I were not -- if it were not for the funding of these programs, I feel as though myself, and other student entrepreneurs, would not be able to develop the skills needed to start a successful business.

Finally, I would like to remind the members of the committee the importance of -- the importance of investment in entrepreneurship for the future's economy -- the future state -- the future of the state's economy. We have a community of highly talented students who want to build businesses that will remain here in Connecticut. An investment into entrepreneurship is an investment for future generations. We are the dreamers, creators, and -- and -- and innovators. Thank you for your time.

GIOVANNI NINIVAGGI: So, hello. My name is Giovanni Ninivaggi. And I am a senior at UConn, studying Math and Physics. So, I am originally from southern Italy. I immigrated here when I was about four years old and I've lived in Connecticut ever since.

So, when I went to UConn, I actually went in -- declared in Accounting as a major. I did this because I knew I'd have to take out loans to fund myself through college. But in -- in addition to
that, I also have six younger brothers and sisters that I want to be there to help financially support when the time comes for them to go.

So, I quickly discovered that business was just not for me. And as I was searching for a suitable profession, I discovered the McNair Fellows Program, which is a two-week introduction to research experience and preparation for graduate school for low-income, first-generation college students or groups underrepresented in PhD programs.

So, I wouldn't be here without the McNair Program. I knew nothing going in. I thought graduate school was just a direct continuation of college afterwards. But in no time, I was sure that I did want to go to graduate school once I figured out what it really was and had -- I also had access to all the tools and information needed to help get me there.

After the Fellows Program, I participated in the Scholars Program which differs, in that, it's a nine-week research intensive program instead of just an introduction to see it. So, after having gained experience of actually doing it, I realized this is really what I want to continue doing.

So, I find this very -- what I found very important about the program is, that it helped give me the time and the chance to experience multiple different research areas before I had to choose one to continue into graduate school. This is absolutely critical, since classwork is very different from research, and the only way to know if you're going to like it, is to just do it.
When I first started, I was in an experimental mechanical engineering group creating manual materials, until I realized I was pretty much useless working with my hands. And afterwards, I started doing theoretical work, which is important.

The McNair Program creates a community of motivated individuals dedicated to supporting one another in our journey to pursue research. I am blessed to have had that opportunity. I was considering cutting my losses and dropping out to work in the restaurant business with my family, as I was deciding to switch majors, to just cut my losses. So, I've come a very long way. I've -- got accepted into the -- into -- I've gotten accepted into the Institute of Optics at the University of Rochester, one of the top optics programs in the country.

So, for this reason, I love sharing my experiences with younger students so they can figure out what their path is, not simply earlier than I did, but before it's too late, and also sharing it with the Appropriations Committee to underscore the value of these funds for programs at UConn.

It's vital to keep these programs going, not only because it will help those of us that have had the experience, but also because we will venture out and impact many others who began in the same situation. It is critical that the state of Connecticut continues to support programs such as the McNair, so -- so researchers, like me, can succeed.

FREDERICK VAN AUGUR: Good evening, Representative Walker and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you tonight and speak on behalf of the UConn community. My name is Frederick Augur and I'm a native of North Branford,
Connecticut. I'm a third-year Political Science undergraduate in the UConn -- in the UConn's Honors program and a Fast-Track Master's student at the Department's -- the UConn's Department of Public Policy.

I speak today in opposition to any considered cuts to the University's state funding, and I concur in full with my classmates who have spoken before me. From personal experience, I can say without reservation that the University of Connecticut offers residents unparalleled value and higher education.

Starting my first semester at UConn, in the heat of the 2016 election, I had the unique opportunity to take class with, and later conduct original research under Professor Paul Herrnson, one of the nation's top scholars on American Elections. Less than a year removed from high school, Dr. Herrnson's expertise, combined with support from the university's enrichment programs, enabled me to call, interview, and, in one case, personally meet with nationally-syndicated journalists, campaign directors, and political fundraisers.

Throughout my time at UConn, I've had opportunities to take a class taught by special advisor to President Bill Clinton, to hold paid research positions, and to earn credits towards a Master's Degree starting my third year of college. In the next two months alone, I will be presenting original research with my advisor at two national conferences and participate in the Department of Public Policy's Internship and Professional Practice program, whereby I will earn credit towards a Master in
Public Policy through an internship with a Connecticut state or local government.

These experiences are less a testament to my personal accomplishments, and more a testament to the incredible opportunities offered by our state's flagship academic institution. UConn has become a widely-respected public university, and it attracts top talent, both in students and faculty, as a result.

An equally impressive testament to the value of UConn is that I've been able to experience all of the above without incurring student debt. In a country with skyrocketing college costs, UConn has been able to offer students a first-rate experience at a bargain price. UConn's ability to offer such value is a direct result of the financial support that the State and the General Assembly has offered our university over the past several years. Your continued support will sustain this opportunity for future generations.

There are few institutions in the nation that could provide me with the opportunities that UConn has, and those that do so, do so at a price three to four times that the cost of UConn. UConn offers unparalleled value to its students, and the value it has offered to me and my family is among the reasons my parents remain Connecticut residents.

UConn is among the most valuable institutions for the future of this state, and cutting its funding would be counterproductive and imprudent. Thank you very much for your time.

CRYSTAL DANGERFIELD: Hi. My name is Crystal Dangerfield and I'm a junior at the
University of Connecticut and I'm majoring in Communications. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the Committee and General Assembly.

Coming all the way from Tennessee, I never expected to find myself in Connecticut, but my love for basketball is what brought me to UConn. I couldn't see myself in any other uniform. Their standard of excellence, both on and off the court, is what sold me.

I knew that making the choice to come here would benefit me most and that I would leave as the best version of myself as a basketball player and as a young woman. No other program or university like UConn. And since I've been here, I've gained way more than I could have ever imagined. Academically, I'm working towards a degree in Communications that'll allow me to be competitive in the workplace. The courses in that field have taken -- I've taken provide relevant knowledge, practical exercises, and research activities that I will for sure be able to lean on and leverage when my basketball career is over.

Though my immediate goal upon graduation is to play professional basketball, my love for sports in general and sports -- and shoes are most important to me. [laughter] Go figure. [laughter] My Communications degree and resources from the basketball team have equipped me -- equipped me enough to help me position for a career acting on the athletic wear and shoe designs. Who better than a former athlete to have worked on what current athletes and their fans would want. And you know what they say, a girl can have her -- never have too many shoes or clothes. [laughter] Thank you again
for the opportunity to speak tonight and your support.

JESSICA WEAVER: It's very hard to go after an NCAA champion. [laughter] Chairwoman Walker, ranking members, and other esteemed members of the Committee, my name is Jessica Weaver. I am a senior Political Science Major with minors in Human Rights and Entrepreneurship at the University of Connecticut. And I am here tonight to talk to you about funding for the university that has given me so much.

When I was applying for colleges, UConn was my top choice. The robust Honors program, research opportunities, and the Special Program in Law were appealing factors that drew me towards being a Husky. Now, my parents, like many, were a bit confused why UConn was my first choice. In their adolescence, UConn was the safety school and was not their top pick.

Since the 1980s though, UConn has risen through the ranks and given me more than I, or even my parents, could ever imagine. So, let me tell you and take you through my journey in why my parents are now very, very happy I chose UConn.

In my first semester, I was a paid research assistant and studied the psychological impact of war memorials on veterans, thanks to the Honors program and the Political Science Department at UConn. I also had my first year experience class taught by a law professor from UConn Law, thanks to the Special Program in Law.

I was also cleared -- by my third semester, I was cleared to take graduate classes in Public Policy,
thanks to the Master's in Public Policy Fast Track program.

In my fourth semester, I was able to intern full-time at the Capitol in Washington D.C., thanks to the UConn Congressional Honors Internship program.

In my seventh semester, I was a Marshall Scholar finalist, thanks to the UConn Office of National Scholarships and Fellowships. I also went to Poland as a COP24 Fellow, where I was able to attend the UN Climate Conference in Katowice, Poland as a COP24 Fellow thanks to the Office of Environmental Policy. No, I still don't know many -- much Polish, so. [laughter]

Now, in my last semester, I not only have been appointed to the President's Committee on Social Responsibility where I contribute to discussions regarding the supply chains to the University employees for our notorious apparel, but I will also be traveling to Chicago to present my thesis research, thanks to the office of Undergraduate Research who provided me a travel grant.

The University of Connecticut has given me opportunity after opportunity to advance myself, not only in my academics, but in my career prospects, as well. Getting the chance to conduct research, engage in experiential learning, and take me around the world, literally, has changed my entire thought process of what I can achieve in this life. I have been able to start clubs like Partners in Health Engage, which I have lobbied members of Congress regarding global health policy, and competed in Bollywood competitions across the country. Yes, I said Bollywood. [laughter] I have petitioned for
financial literacy courses to be offered at UConn, and assisted in the creation of a Business in Human Rights Conference at the university; all of which were only possible with UConn's support.

I could not have achieved half the things I have so far in my life, if it were not for the critical support and guidance of programs at UConn that desperately rely on funding. I went to this state school being told, it was just a stepping stone for something more. But really it has been the launching path -- pad to a successful future. I now see endless possibilities for my future because my experiences at UConn have opened my eyes to what I am capable of.

After I graduate this May, I will be a UConn student at the Master's in Public Policy Department, where I will finish my Master's with one-year tuition free. It's another incredible program the university offers.

One of our sayings at UConn is students today, Huskies forever. I'm a student today, I will be tomorrow, but I'm proud to be a Husky forever. I implore you to fund our university and the incredible programs it offers. Thank you.

[clapping]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you all for your testimony. Thank you so much. And yes, shoes are awesome. [laughing] Next, Community Colleges, Board of Regents. And then after that, the Charter Oak State College. Can you pull the mic down for them, please? Thank you. Oh, you got it? Got it. There, you go. Okay. You guys want to start?
BLYTHE SERRANO: Good evening. I'm Blythe Serrano. I live in Norwalk. And I'm extremely thankful to have the opportunity to testify for Norwalk Community College this evening.

When I first came to NCC two years ago, I shared many of society's misconceptions about community colleges. I was worried that my classmates would be unmotivated, my professors uncaring, and the campus unwelcoming. I thought the community and the institution's name had to be a misnomer. But it turns out that I couldn't have been more wrong.

By the end of my first week, I already felt at home on campus. I auditioned for NCC's Spring Musical just a few days into the semester and was immediately welcomed into a group of some of the kindest and most talented people I've ever met. I joined the Women in STEM Club, which solidified my desire to go into a STEM field by providing a fun and supportive environment where I could work on projects ranging from a quantum levitation track to an automated hydroponics system. I'm now president of the club, and hope to use my role to show other women and underrepresented minorities that there is a place for them in STEM. I also began attending Student Government meetings, and I'm currently serving as secretary.

During my first semester, I also decided to enter NCC's Idea Pitch Competition with a project I'd been working on, the Light-Up at Night Pet Collar. As a finalist, I was partnered with a mentor from NCC's Entrepreneurship Task Force, who helped me refine my presentation. I ended up winning first place and a spot in NCC's Summer Entrepreneurship Institute. There, I developed a business plan, with which has
since won several competitions in and outside of NCC. I later applied for an Innovation Grant through CTNext and the University of Bridgeport, and was awarded $2,500 dollars to the further development of my prototype.

Still, in my first semester, I applied for, and was accepted into NCC's Honors program. Through this program, I've had the opportunity to take challenging classes in a variety of fields. In each of these classes, I was surprised, not only by how much I learned about each academic discipline, but also by how I learned to approach problems and questions in different and unexpected ways.

Last semester, I applied concepts from my physics classes to my Honors philosophy class, writing a paper titled, "The Entropy of Justice." I also had the opportunity to do a capstone project mentored by an NCC professor. Currently, I'm investigating how microtonal music effects the human brain, and its potential for use in music therapy programs.

My non-honors classes have been excellent as well, largely, thanks to the extremely dedicated professors they're taught by. During my second semester, I went to my calculus professor's office with questions almost every day. I ended up getting an A in that class, and in every subsequent math class I took, all the way through multivariable calculus. The public health class I'm taking at the moment, encouraged me to switch my career ambitions from physics to computational epidemiology.

I can't overstate how grateful I am for the support and opportunities I've found at NCC and the Connecticut State funding that's made them all possible. The thing that has surprised me most
about NCC, however, is how diverse, hardworking, and supportive my peers are. I was only 14 years old during my first semester, but I never felt that I was treated differently because of how young I was. Last semester, my physics lab partner was more than twice my age, her son is studying at NCC as well and was just accepted into the Honors program.

NCC students come from all over the world. I've taken classes with people from Ecuador to Indonesia to Armenia to Hong Kong. A few days ago, I was sitting with some friends between classes, when one of them remarks that collectively, we spoke seven different languages. I can't think of any other environment that has so much diversity and community at the same time.

Thanks to all of the opportunities NCC has provided me with, I was recently accepted into Northeastern University's Honor's program with a $32,000 dollar Merit Scholarship. One of the main reasons I was able to take advantage of everything that NCC has to offer, is because I was awarded a significant scholarship from the NCC Foundation, which allowed me to take on only a part-time job at the Makerspace on campus. However, many of the brightest and most hardworking students I know have to work over -- over 40 hours per week, often in two or more jobs, just to be able to afford the cost of tuition. Imagine what they could do if they didn't have to? Thank you for your time.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Uh-huh.

CARMEN ANDRADE-SOLIS: Don't know how I could top that, but sure. [laughter] All right. Good evening. My name is Carmen Andrade. I live in New Milford, Connecticut. I was originally from Mexico,
but I came here in 2002 and grew up in New Milford ever since. I currently attend Northwestern Connecticut Community College. I am a freshman there right now. And it has been the best semester ever. I am right now in General Studies, but I hopefully, will next semester, be in the Veterinary Technology program.

So, I believe community college has a very important impact in many lives in the state because they provide affordable education for people who cannot afford to go to state and private universities. People can take the same level classes as state schools but not spend thousands or more dollars than they have to.

NWCC has given my sister and I an opportunity to continue our higher education and take our next step in our lives to follow our dreams to become veterinarians. I knew since we were five years old that they wanted to help animals and become vets. And our parents have pushed us to do whatever we wanted to do in our lives. And -- but we couldn't afford, both of us, to go to a state university like UConn and --

LUPITA ANDRADE-SOLIS: We got accepted.

CARMEN ANDRADE-SOLIS: We got accepted [laughter] to all the --

LUPITA ANDRADE-SOLIS: We got accepted.

CARMEN ANDRADE-SOLIS: We got accepted to all the schools in --

REP. WALKER (93RD): I thought you didn't want to talk. [laughter]
LUPITA ANDRADE-SOLIS: I got a little nervous there.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Yeah.

CARMEN ANDRADE-SOLIS: Okay. So, we got accepted to all the schools that we applied to. But the thing is, when we did the math, we cannot afford to like have both of us go through the same type of schooling. But NWCC had the same like classes and the same program that we wanted to do either way. So, it was a great opportunity we couldn't just miss.

And the fact -- it was like the best decision we ever made, because it felt like a family. It felt like a community. It felt like we belonged there. They helped us every step of the way that we've needed. They haven't felt like -- they haven't let us feel less of ourselves because of our situation that we are in or the fact that we look different and things like that. Like, they make us feel like we're a family together. And they should have the proper funding to continue to have the -- like the good programs that they have and like the -- the good -- the great classes that they have. You want to say something?

LUPITA ANDRADE-SOLIS: No.

CARMEN ANDRADE-SOLIS: Oh.


LUPITA ANDRADE-SOLIS: That's okay.

CARMEN ANDRADE-SOLIS: But they make us feel like a family and we really appreciate it. And we are proud to represent Northwestern Community College. Thank you.
REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Lupita?

LUPITA ANDRADE-SOLIS: Thank you. [laughter]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Thank you, ladies. Okay.

SHIRLEY TYSON: Hi. We're from the 15th District. It's Naugatuck Valley Community College. My name is Shirley Tyson. I'm 51 years old. In 2016, I was diagnosed with epilepsy and then I was laid off my job as a dislocated worker. I was scared and did not know what I was going to do. But I was offered a grant to go back to school to have me retrained.

Once arriving on Naugatuck Valley Community College, I felt lost. I wasn't sure where I was going to do what I was -- what was going to happen. I was introduced to the Academic Center for Excellence and I also was introduced for the Center Achievement for Students of Success, that -- that help students with disabilities. It was -- it has been a great time with all these benefits offered to me free, because since I've been unemployed, I wouldn't have been able to offer these other services.

The books at the library, I was able to borrow from the -- borrow from the library with laptops. Tutoring is free. And also, the Student Activity Center was free, as well. I'm not sure what the students would do without these funds. This is my last year and I'm grateful for everyone that helped me and if I started naming names, the alarm would go off [laughter] because so many people have helped me with my journey. And I just appreciate your time taken out to hear our testimonies today.

And also, I know the need for the children in our area is very important. This week, our Mayor said
that there is 60% of diversity in Waterbury. And we only have two tutors out of the two colleges for our students whom English is our secondary language. So, there's definitely a need for the funds to continue, if not increase it. And I just want to let you know, because I always thought it was about my destination, but it's actually about your journey.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Yeah.

SHIRLEY TYSON: Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Yeah. Okay. Hard act to follow. [laughing]

ELIZABETH ORTIZ: Good evening. My name is Elizabeth Ortiz. I was born in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico. I moved to Waterbury -- Waterbury, Connecticut fresh out of high school. I am currently a full-time student enrolled in a Marketing program at Naugatuck Valley Community College. I have the pride and confidence I know I will need to achieve my goals in the business field.

The reason why I chose Naugatuck Valley Community College is the diversity, the convenience, and to expand my horizon in the workforce. I am the first in my family to attend college. I am working towards a better, brighter future.

When I enrolled in Naugatuck Valley, I was terrified, and wasn't sure what direction I was taking until I encountered the Academic Center for Excellence, our tutoring center. I felt a great sense of relief and would describe the tutoring center as attentive, captivating, and extraordinary.
I am grateful for the amount of support Naugatuck Valley has to offer, not only to me, but to every single student that walks a different path in life. The encouragement and help from the tutoring center is still helping me to strive to better myself. All the academic tools that Naugatuck Valley has to offer to further my career has greatly impacted my life. This -- the -- the institution is helping me achieve my goals by providing the proper resources, such as the library; with the high price of books, I am able to rent the current textbooks and enjoy a good book; fitness center, that helps us succeed in the health pursuit, because without wealth, there -- without health, there is no wealth; and a staff that cares for the success of these students.

Naugatuck Valley Community College is an important institution to future students. If we educate our students in Connecticut and wish for them to stay in Connecticut and -- and contribute to our state, we must be sure that the proper supports are in place to make our graduates succeed in life. There is thousands of me that depend on the education, support, and resources that Naugatuck Valley Community College offers. And with a funding cut, where would that leave us? So, please don't limit us.


ELIZABETH ORTIZ: Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): And lastly, we have Charter Oak State College. Good evening.

XING WANG: Good evening. Good evening, Representative Walker and distinguished members of
the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for allowing me the time to speak today. My name is Xing Wang and I live in Norwich, Connecticut. Most of my friends call me Teddy. I am a senior and currently in my last year in the Cyber Security bachelor's program. I’m an active and participating member of the Student Association at my school and also have the privilege of serving as a representative for my school on the Student Advisory Committee of the Board of Regents.

I'm here today to share a little bit about who I am and why I feel that Charter Oak State College is so critical to the state and share why the college needs your support.

I'm an immigrant who came with his single mother to this great country at the age of 12. The American dream was instilled in me from an early age, and it's something my family strives for. Unfortunately, we face many obstacles along the way including financial hardships. I stopped attending college for a few years to help support my family. It was not easy to earn a living without a degree. I stumbled and got lost several times along the way because I did not see any options that could help us out of our financial limitations.

When I learned about Charter Oak State College, I felt that it was an opportunity for me to get back on track to getting a degree, which would open doors to a sustainable career. Charter Oak's online-based format caters to the working class, like me, who works full-time; some people even multiple full-time jobs just to make ends meet. It allows flexibility, so I can pursue an education without having to bend to a traditional setting. It offers low, affordable
degreed for people, like me, who are trying to make a better life with limited resources. This is why I feel that it is so important that you continue to support Charter Oak, because it serves a very important role in our state. I know there are others who have struggled, stumbled, or gotten lost at least once or twice, and it feels like there's no alternative. But Charter Oak offers that alternative, and it cannot do it without your support.

After graduation, I hope to get back and work for the State of Connecticut with my degree in Cyber Security. I will not forget how much Charter Oak State College, and the State of Connecticut has made a difference in my life. Thank you for listening to my testimony. Thank you for your time.

AMY JIMMO: I guess that puts me up. [laughter] Good evening, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Amy Jimmo and I'm a sophomore at Charter -- Charter Oak State College. I'm a resident of Seymour, Connecticut. This June, I will obtain my Associate's Degree and become the first in my family to earn a college degree.

It has taken me 13 years to achieve this degree. I had given up on this dream, believing that life had other plans for me, and I could get by on experience and skill. In my career, I found myself making lateral moves and being overlooked for promotions, despite having ten-years' experience. I was frustrated, because I knew I was capable of more, but being held back because I didn't have a degree to help me advance. My biggest barrier to return to school was that I am what you would call an adult
learner. I work full time and cannot afford to quit work to return to school. The traditional setting of an on-campus school does not work well for adult learners.

Two years ago, I heard about Charter Oak State College and its fully online setting and affordable cost. The flexibility and low cost renewed my dreams of pursuing my degree. Charter Oak State College gave me the opportunity to pursue my degree while continuing to work full time and still be a part of my family. I would not be able to do this without Charter Oak's unique setting. It has changed my life and given me hope for the future. I am here today to ask for your continued support in funding Charter Oak State College.

I am asking for myself and for the other adults in our state who are in similar situations. We need Charter Oak to help us continue to grow and give back to the state. I plan to continue to pursue my Bachelor's Degree in Sociology at Charter Oak. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak.

CYNTHIA JAMES: Good evening, Chairman Walker. I am Cynthia James. I am from the 13th District with Senator Abrams, Representative Serra, and to all the members of the Appropriations Committee. I am a 56-year-young Middletown, Connecticut taxpaying resident, cancer survivor, and a graduate student at Charter Oak State College.

When I count my blessings, I always add in this great state of Connecticut, my home, and Charter Oak State College. Connecticut is where I live and Charter Oak State College is where I earned my Bachelor's Degree in Healthcare Administration at 55
years old. I am an Operations Manager at Yale University, Smilow Cancer Hospital; not only am I an employee, I'm a patient. I am here to encourage you this evening to continue supporting Charter Oak State College, which offers nontraditional roots to earning your college degree.

There are many initiatives and funding bills that help women, and women of color find jobs and housing. They are very much needed and very much applauded. But, the funding for our colleges, not only help women, and women of color, find jobs, they help women, and women of color, get an education, so that they can own their jobs, be entrepreneurs, and own their own homes, so work in management, and to be in the decision making process.

As a middle-aged African-American woman in Management, I feel having my Bachelor's Degree is an example to younger women, and women of color, that they, too, can go back to school, chip away at education barriers that stand in their way of -- of landing a better job, and getting a better place to live and raise their families. I believe having this degree, has opened many doors for me. I am living proof that an education can open doors to an office and to a home.

That's why I'm here today, asking you to continue supporting Charter Oak State College, so that it will continue to be there for other young ladies like me. [laughter] [clapping]

REP. WALKER (93RD): I want to thank all of you for coming up here and testifying. Your stories were amazing. Your commitment was amazing. And your dedication to making sure that you paid it forward or paid it back to the people that are coming behind
you was amazing. Thank you for what you're doing. Thank you for hard -- how hard you're working. And remember, stay in Connecticut. [laughter] That is the number one thing. And I also want to say, anybody that has testified today, and anybody out in this audience, can be back here where we are right now. So, please, don't think about any limitations to what you do. There is no limitation, as long as you pursue your education.

So, before we leave, I just want to thank -- did he disappear -- oh, there he is. I just want to thank the gentleman that's the head of the Board of Regents for all that he's done. He is the one who helped design and develop this quite some time ago when he became head of Board of Regents. Mr. Ojakian has been amazing in trying to make sure that we provide our students in Connecticut with the best opportunities with what little money we have. He always rubs nickels together. He gets the, I think it's called the -- the -- the Commuter Pass or --

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: The U-Pass.

REP. WALKER (93RD): The -- what is it called?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: U-Pass.

REP. WALKER (93RD): The U-Pass. He created that. He knew what you guys needed and he was going to make sure that everybody got to school no matter what. We look forward to it and I look forward to our continued work on trying to maintain what you guys need, which is your education.

So, right now, we're going to take about a two-minute break so that those people that want to leave, can leave, and then we can go right into the
next phase of our public hearing, because we're not finished yet. Thank you all. Thank you.