• 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 am a non-traditional 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, Mediation, and Interdisciplinary Peace, Collaboration & Conflict.

• Although I did not start my Community College life thinking that I would be sitting here before you 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 Students First: Academic and Student Affairs Consolidation Committee (ASACC).

• Community Colleges are essential to our state. Many community college students plan to transfer to four-year institutions, but also students in 4-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 types 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, mediation 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 am 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.