

Good afternoon committee members,

My name is Andrew Custis, I am 30 years old, and I am a student at Gateway Community College majoring in a psychology degree program. I started in the Summer of 2018. My goal is to graduate this May, 2020. I am a member of the US armed forces and have been for 10 years. I am also a Victim's Advocate within the Department of defense and have been for 5 years. A victim's advocate supports and empowers members who have been through traumatic events, specifically related to sexual assault and domestic violence. Through the military I have received 7 years of training in leadership and mentorship to assist the members I supervise within the military.

I knew I needed to continue my education outside of these experiences and I ended up choosing Gateway Community College. I chose Gateway for its location, multitude of programs, and its military reimbursement. I stepped into the education system knowing I wanted to pursue a Psychology degree and Gateway made the pathway accessible. Not only was their advising incredibly helpful, with 213 veterans currently enrolled, the Veteran services representative Rick Palinko was thorough and adamant about making sure I was taken care of in the school. The Wellness Center has also been my support system for professional growth and personal preventative maintenance. After my first class in the summer of 2018 I was hooked. My first professor, Joseph Maynard, was incredible. Just a simple American history course put me on a strong track for my degree program. I continued filling my requirements as well as taking one class a semester for personal interest, **to keep myself rewarded. Rewarded with more education.** It did not stop in the classrooms. I eventually ventured into some clubs and the Student Government Association. I was offered the position as Campus Activities Board

chairperson by the SGA president at the end of Summer 2019 and accepted it knowing the challenges ahead. This opened more doors than I had expected. I worked closely with student clubs, faculty departments, and the inner workings of the student government. With my background I made the best of these situations and helped me become connected with students every week. Every experience opened more doors and opportunities for growth. Not only could I learn from other students and organizations, but I could lend my experiences and skills. **I was able to give back.** This ramped up the motivation for what I was doing within the school. I became more involved with the school government and began to give more than just my skills and experiences back to the students. I was able to show them what rights and privileges they have at their fingertips. This access was under utilized with the limitations the students experienced. What I found on campus was Gateway, at the time, had no Director of Student Activities. This impacted how much students understood what was available to them.

With proper leadership training or seminars to promote courage and empowerment, there would be easier pathways for students to take advantage of what Gateway can offer. In this experience I was not only looking through the scope of the small, but also the big picture. **How does my experience benefit the students, the organizations, and the school itself?** As a liaison to the students from my position as Chair to the Campus Activities Board, I was meticulous in structuring the campus clubs to follow college guidelines. There are few things that could alleviate these concerns. I know the Director of Student Activities was recently hired, but even with his current support his one slot is not enough to support a commuter student body of over 6,000. More funding would also allow for quality leadership training and workshops for the students and student leaders. I also have two support systems within the school. Rick Palinko, the Veteran Representative at the school, does not have a permanent position. As an advocate myself

and on the path to being a clinical psychologist, Gateway's new Wellness Center only has two counselors for the entire student population. With how much I promote their services alone, the demand for more staffing is definitely needed. **An emphasis on students' needs as a priority, programs for student leadership skills, and appropriate staffing to serve students is what I am asking all of you to consider today. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.**