

Megan Baker
Appropriations Committee Testimony
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Hello, my name is Megan Baker. I am a first-year graduate student at Southern Connecticut State University. I am also a first-generation immigrant; my mother came to the United States with her father and three brothers from the Philippines when she was just seven years old. I remember my grandfather telling me stories about having to shovel neighbors' driveways in shorts and a tank top because even though he did not own the proper attire, he had to feed his four children on a single income. My mother worked very hard all throughout her high school academic career because there is nothing that my grandfather emphasized the importance of more than education. She placed at the top of her class in high school and was accepted to Dartmouth as an undergrad. Despite her high accolades, college almost was not an option for my mom.

When it came to selecting my undergraduate institution – and even my graduate institution – I always predicated my decision on one component: opportunity. I wanted to attend a university that provided me with opportunities to expand upon the foundation built by my mom and her father. After visiting Southern's campus, I immediately knew that it was the school for me; I was accepted into the University's Honors College with a Presidential Merit Scholarship which waived my tuition and fees, and alleviated the financial struggle my mom had faced 30 years prior.

Southern presented more opportunities to me than I thought possible. I conducted research in the Political Science Department that was eventually published. That work generated further research collaborations and led to my entrance into graduate school. The funding from my scholarship, the genuine care and support I received from the university's administration and

faculty, and the vital preparation I received for life after graduation is a privilege that I am lucky to have received, and everything my mom could have wanted for me after facing the hardships of her experiences.

The allotted time for this testimony is not sufficient for describing the importance of the public funding for higher education that I received through Southern Connecticut State University. In addition to my receiving of the Presidential Merit Scholarship, Southern awarded me with a state-funded travel abroad to further my studies in Europe. As a member of the University Choir, I was able to travel to Greece, Portugal, and Rome over the course of the past four years through the generosity of a family foundation that was created by one of the members to pay forward the opportunities the institution provided him.

By attending Southern, I was able to not only receive a top-tier quality education within the school itself, but I was able to branch out and explore educational facets outside of campus and outside of the country; I built cultural bridges with choirs abroad through a shared love of music, and studied ancient Roman and Biblical texts while at St. Peter's Basilica, the Sistine Chapel, and Ostia Antica.

Southern gave me an extremely valuable experience and is credited with cultivating and molding me into the confident, capable person I am today. Allowing students and Connecticut residents to have these aforementioned experiences only serves to better our home community. Public funding for higher education should not be regarded so finitely in budget numbers and dollar amounts; we are talking about students' future – we are talking about Connecticut's future. Properly fostering the educational growth of the next generation should be considered as an investment.

Many of my peers in the political science department seek internships right here at the state capital; last year, I interned at a government relations firm and enjoyed every minute of the experience – it made me reconsider looking for a graduate school out of state. A lot of my colleagues find internships here as legislative aids for their hometown representative or senator. The students here want to give back to the state in which they grew up or attended undergrad; they want to find jobs here and work towards bettering the state. Cultivate an environment where students want to stay, where they feel nurtured and supported. So, please, invest in students – in students like me – because they will play a vital role in the state’s future success and understand the value of reinvesting in the community that provided them the opportunity to succeed.