

February 18, 2020  
Appropriations Committee Higher Education Subcommittee Hearing  
Testimony from Dr. Stephen Monroe Tomczak  
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Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

I come before you this evening not only as an associate professor and assistant chair in the Department of Social work at Southern Connecticut State University and chapter president of SCSU-AAUP, but also as an SCSU alumnus. I know that many members of this committee are also alumni of our excellent state universities. Together, we are living proof that our four regional state universities – Central, Eastern, Southern, and Western – educate a vast majority of Connecticut students who indeed learn here and live here after graduation.

It is this understanding that I hope will guide you as you consider levels of state support for our public institutions of higher education. I also hope you will consider the fact that the benefits of a higher education degree are not merely a higher paycheck for graduates. Indeed, the benefits reach deeply into every facet of our communities. University graduates are 24 percent more likely to be employed and 2.4 percent less likely to receive workers' compensation. Lifetime taxes of university graduates are 215 percent greater than those without degrees, which makes them a greater contributor to governmental services, social programs, and the overall public good. Employment in the nonprofit sector is twice as likely for university graduates and volunteering is 2.3 times more likely. Crime rates are lower and philanthropic contributions are higher in communities with more college graduates.\*

But in order for the state to gain these benefits, investments have to be made to make public education affordable. When I attended Southern in the 1980s, we paid about \$500 a semester in tuition. A student in that time period could have a summer job and save up the money necessary to go to a school like Southern. I was lucky to grow up in a time period when the state invested in kids like me, who wanted to improve themselves by getting an education. In 1989, the year I graduated, the state contributed 74 percent of the cost of tuition. Today, my students spend ten times this amount, currently \$5268.50 per semester. There is no way that they can cover this with summer income, which is why most of them are working not just one, but often several jobs.

This is the direct result of declining state contributions to public higher education. The state share of the cost of tuition at the CSUs in 2015 was 33 percent - less than half of what it was when I went to school. If you took the tuition we paid in the 1980s and just adjusted it for inflation, my students would pay slightly over \$1,000 a semester, less than one fifth of what they currently pay. Even worse, if you were take the tuition that my mother in law paid when she attended Southern in the 1950s – roughly \$50 a semester – and adjust it for inflation, my student would pay \$464.00 a semester, actually less in nominal dollars than what we paid in the 1980s!

With that in mind, as our state seeks to create a workforce of the future, I ask each of you to recognize that higher education is an investment in that future vision. As so many of our students struggle under increasing levels of debt and others are forced to drop out because the financial burden becomes untenable, I also ask that you recognize your decisions to support public higher education in Connecticut represents an investment for the long-term strength and future of our state.

Our young people live here and stay here in Connecticut after graduation and will be the ones to continue to move our state into the future. Your decisions represent a direct investment in them and also in your own future as a resident of our great state.

Thank you for the time to speak before you today, thank you for supporting public higher education in Connecticut and thank you, also, for your service to our state.

\*Trostle, P. It's not just the money; the benefits of college education to individuals and to society. *Lumina Foundation Issue Papers*, 2012. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/its-not-just-the-money.pdf>