

February 18, 2020
Appropriations Committee Higher Education Subcommittee Hearing
Testimony from Rakim Grant
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Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

For college, there is already an enormous barrier to entry: that is tuition costs. I know so many people *just as smart as me, if not brighter* who will never step foot on a college campus dropped out after just one semester because they simply don't have the money.

My own brother was accepted to UConn years ago. And he never went because it's a giant financial gamble and we just didn't have the money to put up the chips.

One of my close friends who has some of the most profound ideas I have heard and is one of the most articulate writers I know, left after just one semester because of financial pressures and the already unbelievable cost of attendance.

Personally, just to keep up with the *current* tuition I reach out to my entire family, every semester for as much support as I can get. And that's on top of the \$15,000 of debt that I pile on every year. Last semester I worked 3 jobs, *6 days a week* so that I would not be forced out... as others routinely are for not being able to keep up with their bill.

Can you imagine how this affects people's academics?

But I don't tell you this so you can feel sorry for me. I was still able to just barely make the Dean's List and I am still one of the lucky ones. At least I have been afforded the opportunity to be here.

Understand, It's not just us students who will pay for the increased cost of tuition. The state and our society as a whole will too. By alienating our young geniuses, who have so much to offer, but can't afford higher education, we will all pay by never seeing their contributions to society come to light.

The cost of education has increased tremendously over the years, yet our state funding remains stagnant. And has for a long time. Because of this, every year we are being asked to invest *just a little* more in our education.

Well the vast majority of us don't have any more to invest. Five percent a year, every year, which is the current norm and what we are told to expect if nothing changes, is simply not trivial

to most of us. At the current rate in the next 20 years earning a degree from SCSU will cost half a million dollars: tuition will be over \$100,000 a semester.

If we keep moving in this direction college will no longer be a place where one can educate themselves and hope to make it out of poverty or the lower middle class. University will become reserved for only the obscenely wealthy and there will be major consequences to that.

We can't keep balancing the budget on the backs of our students. So, we're asking you to help us because this is not sustainable. I want the next generation to have the same opportunity we did and if nothing changes I can guarantee you there is not a chance of that.

And I would just like to close with a few questions and figures about this budget.

Why are we spending more than *\$600 million* to keep people in prison and not even half that to keep them in schools?

Why is the proposed increase in funding for prisons nearly \$20 million and to public higher education just a little north of \$10 million? What does that signal?

And why does the governor say he wants to decrease recidivism while using not a penny of that \$20 million budget-increase to go towards programs and services that have been proven to actually keep people from going back to prison.

Why is the funding for aid to discharged citizens only \$3,000 *for the entire year* and the community support budget being cut by *nearly \$1 million* if that's really his intention? Funding for their legal and medical services will be cut by millions too.

So where is that \$20 million going? What is it really supporting?

Governor Lamont wants to allocate \$1.25 million to recruit 100 new state troopers on Day 1, but only \$250,000 for just four staff for the chief public defender, \$8.9 million in funding for the Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS) (to aid in incarceration efficiency) and less than \$80,000 for juvenile corrections training.

His true intentions seem clear to me. If recidivism and crime are going down, he wants to make sure incarceration goes up, and by funding increased policing and high-tech tools for them he will ensure that.

It may seem weird that I'm talking about post-secondary education and prison as if they're connected. Well, it's because they are. When people have no opportunities or the kind of education that offers a real future, they turn to crime.

And while our prisons create criminals our schools create that opportunity and education everyone needs, yet we only care about those half as much? That's how the budget reads.

I guarantee you if it was as easy to end up in the CT university system as it was to end up in the CT justice system, our outcomes and statistics would be much different.