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Testimony for the Higher Education Appropriations Subcommittee, 2/18/2020

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the committee:

I am here to advocate for our students, and, for the Connecticut State Universities. In the 21st century, higher education is a human right that must remain accessible and affordable. It is a public good that generates social and economic progress. The Connecticut State Universities play an integral role in creating this social and economic progress for our students.

College graduates earn more than those without degrees, enjoy better health, greater job safety and report being significantly happier than individuals lacking a college degree. Society also benefits from having individuals with college degrees: volunteering is more likely, donations to charities are higher, voting and political involvement are higher, and community involvement is greater*.

The Connecticut State Universities serve a transformational role. We serve first generation students, non-traditional students returning to finally finish a first or second degree, traditional college-age students, and students whose first language is something other than English. They are a diverse ambitious group of individuals who deserve our support.

The transformational nature of the universities is epitomized by one of my former students. She took intro psychology with me 13 years ago. After graduation from our education program, she became an 8th grade English teacher at a public school here in Connecticut. That work has made her realize that she wishes to become a child therapist, and she contacted me for advice on how to apply to clinical psychology graduate programs. She is determined to achieve her graduate degree in psychology, and apply her expertise to helping children. She will transform the lives of others through this work.

All of our students benefit from the ability to take advantage of a first class education, and we must work to maintain that ability. For too many years, financial support from the state, in the form of the block grants, has steadily declined. In order to compensate for that decline, the Board of Regents has been forced to raise tuition. This year, e.g., the Board just approved a 4% increase in tuition and fees for the universities. This creates barriers for some of our students, and resulted in delayed degree completion, or worse, no degree completion. This can have a lifetime impact on individuals in the form of lower earnings, higher likelihood of poverty, and a host of other negative effects. The legislature could send a strong message by increasing support for the Connecticut State Universities. It would be a message that says “We support and value quality public higher education, because we recognize that it is a public good and an investment in our future.”

*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> 1

Thank you for your time, your support for public higher education, and your service to the state of Connecticut.