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Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Megan Baker, I am a second-year graduate student pursuing my Master's in Political Science at Southern Connecticut State University, and I am here in front of you today to share my personal narrative in an effort to relay the importance of funding in higher education.

My Filipino grandfather immigrated to the U.S. as a young, single father with my mother and her three brothers. Growing up, my Lolo often shared with me the multitude of adversities he faced as he forged a path on this new frontier, fueled by the prospect that doing so would secure a better life for his children and their future; "But every obstacle that threatened to stymie my progress," he would tell me, "paled in comparison to the abhorrent poverty, heinous corruption, and exorbitant level of unemployment under Ferdinand Marcos." Above all else, he emphasized the privilege I held as a natural-born citizen in a country where I could speak out against injustices in a capacity not available in every other country. He always told me that with education and passion, seeking the betterment of one's country and the world around them are the utmost displays of patriotism.

I became the embodiment of my grandfather's aspirations when I received the opportunity to attend Southern with the financial assistance of a state-funded Presidential Merit Scholarship, enabling me to receive a college education without the financial struggle my mom had faced 30 years prior when she applied to undergraduate institutions. Inspired by these stories relayed to me during my upbringing, I dedicated my collegiate career to studying policy, using legislative approaches to alleviating socio-economic ailments in an intersectional and multi-faceted capacity. Further state funding allotted to state higher education granted me the

opportunity to attend graduate school on a scholarship where I concurrently expanded my breadth of knowledge and worked in a position where I increased civic engagement and political participation on my campus. Southern equipped me with the educational tools and skills that I plan to then reinvest back into the state; upon graduation, I hope to work in a state office, researching current and potential policy initiatives, measuring their prospective and retrospective impacts, all in an effort to assist Connecticut in cultivating the best environment for its residents.

I lost my grandfather late last Fall, but, even in his absence, the truth in his teachings remains: education, passion, and a little bit of nurturing are all you need to change the world around you. Which is why public funding for higher education should not be regarded so finitely in budget numbers and dollar amounts. My narrative and the narratives of those also speaking today are a microcosm of the realities of our peers – the scholars of our state schools. Properly fostering the educational growth of the next generation should be considered as an investment, not just in the singular future of any given student, but in Connecticut's future as well. So, please, continue investing 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 with the ability to succeed.

Thank you.