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Members of the Appropriations Committee and a special shout out to a fellow Southern Owl Representative Walker, my name is Antione Connor. I am a senior at Southern Connecticut State University, majoring in Communication Disorders.

For years, I've been fighting and losing against the same system that placed me in front of you all today; a system that I dreamed, would take me out of the ghetto and change the cycle of failure that I was born into. This country prides itself for championing the notions of equal rights, equal opportunity, and freedom. Yet, this nation functions on an infrastructure that makes it difficult for people of color to obtain a college degree. It perpetuates a dynamic in which my white counterparts find it surprising that it takes longer than 4 years to finish a degree while my black peers find my accomplishments admirable, where a four-year education is considered second nature for a white student, but my fellow black peers are told that "just graduating high school is enough." While I have been able to overcome this systemic mold, others like me have not always been as fortunate.

I have done so much to get to where I am, and I refuse to give up my seat – a seat which was never created for me, but one I forged out of my blood, sweat, and tears. Working the night shift to make ends meet while also sleeping on the floor of my grandmother's studio apartment, I realized what my purpose was. Not to be the first person in my family to graduate college, but to become the voice of people like me, using my struggles, demanding for change on behalf of those who found themselves voiceless.

At Southern, I not only have the opportunity to receive a college education, I am also embraced by an institution that allows me to voice my concerns and speak out on this very issue.

The lack of resources to help those who are less fortunate achieve higher education, is the main reason why students of color graduate at a much lower rate than those of their white classmates. After already surviving through an under-resourced high school, a financial aid packet from FASFA is not enough. Students residing in low-income neighborhoods lack access to the educational resources that will help educate them on better ways to support and fund their college careers.

While the work is not easy, you can assist with the lack of resources that are offered to students who fall in a much lower tax bracket. Your decisions and actions can level the financial playing field. Please understand that you can change the lives of many students like myself. My ask is that you do all you can to increase funding for the Connecticut State University System and public higher education. Supporting public education is the key to a better Connecticut.

While I am living proof that one can defy the odds and win this battle, with your help, we could win the war.

Thank you.