



Appropriations Committee March 4, 2021

Good evening Chairwoman Walker, Chairwoman Osten, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Gregg Crerar and I am President of the SUOAF/AFSCME bargaining unit, representing administrative faculty at our state universities and at the Board of Regents System Office. We have more than 800 members working as Administrative Faculty at Western, Central, Eastern, and Southern CT State universities and the System Office for the Connecticut State Colleges & Universities (CSCU). Our members work in student-facing positions such as Admissions, the Registrar's Office, Financial Aid, and student advising, as well as administrative areas like IT, finance, alumni affairs and fundraising. We are the CSCU employees who provide the smiling faces and student experiences that CSU graduates will remember long after graduation. We are also the ones who provide behind-the-scenes support and services to students and colleagues, making it all possible.

Earlier today, I heard testimony at the opening of the appropriations meeting from Interim President Dr. Jane Gates, CFO Ben Barnes and many other colleagues from the CT State Colleges & Universities. While our views on many subjects are similar, we also have vastly different ideas about some of the challenges and opportunities facing our system and our state. My union members and I appreciate how you are advocating for our students, faculty and staff. It is apparent that with both state and federal funds, the CSCU system is in better shape than was anticipated back in September 2020, but there is still the need to work through some tough decisions about how our scarce and diminishing resources are allocated as we all try to get through COVID and come out better and more prepared for the future.

Today, I am testifying to request that the Appropriations Committee look to find ways to enhance funding for the Connecticut State University System, not only to help alleviate the impact Covid-19 has had on our system, but also to fix the existing structural funding problems. An investment in the CSCU System is an investment in Connecticut's future. Before Covid-19, CSCU was already in a difficult financial position due to shrinking budgets and declining enrollment. We have continually seen drops in the percentage of total revenue from the State to the university system, and it is now down to the point where only 31% of our operating expenses are derived from the State (compared to 44% in 2004), placing an unusually high burden on our students, many of whom come from underprivileged families and communities. From our perspective, continued reductions in State support result in an unfair burden on students, faculty and staff and makes it impossible for our system to stabilize the level of support and services we provide. Since Covid-19, we have seen those problems worsen due to a significant drop in enrollment and students living on campus. We have reached a point of diminishing returns. The value of the education our students receive from our system is at stake. We need your help to turn the tide and help take some of the burden off of our students and their families.

Despite these challenging times, SUOAF members have gone the extra mile to find creative ways to maintain the best possible service to our students. In fact, I would like to make the statement that our hall directors are our "first-responders," our unsung heroes. On a typical day, a hall director will interact with 240+ students; they will deliver meals to students, counsel them on academic and personal issues, help them get through personal crises, support the students in quarantine and isolation residence halls due to COVID exposure or

diagnosis, , and do rounds in those COVID DANGER ZONES. They truly are the go-to heroes that our students need right now and frankly it is almost criminal that our hall directors have not been able to obtain vaccinations like their counterparts at UConn have.

Beyond COVID, beyond getting our hall directors access to the vaccine and beyond the current contract negotiations, additional resources must be allocated to CSCU so that we are able to provide our students with the educational opportunities they deserve. We believe easing the financial burden on the CSCU through greater State support will allow the System to put a stay on tuition increases, invest in innovation, and seek additional opportunities for public/private collaborations that will shape the future of the state's workforce and economy, all while benefitting our students in real and tangible ways.

The CSCU system has many obligations to the students of CT. We – my members and the teaching faculty – are the heart of CSCU system, the people “in the trenches” every day making sure CSCU “works”, and we are the reason Connecticut's daughters and sons choose to attend our state universities. We owe it to them to not make them feel second class when they see the level of funding allocated to our System's big brother, the other state system up in Storrs. I am here tonight instead of spending time with my family because tonight like on many nights, I am putting CSCU students first. I ask you to join me in that effort by increasing funding to the Connecticut State University System.

Thank you for your time.