

**Tahira Gordan
Asnuntuck Community College**

Good evening,

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France, and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Tahira Gordon, and I'm a Massage Therapist student at Asnuntuck Community College. I am here to ask you to keep college expenses affordable. I am a 45-year-old mother of a 24-year-old son and a 10-year-old daughter. I recently had to retire from my job of 20 years because of a work-related injury. My plan, once my son finished college and I finished paying his tuition, I would return to school, and participate in my employer's tuition reimbursement program. Well low and behold I was injured on the job and unfortunately, I had to retire. So that put a wrench in my plans. During the time of waiting to see if I could return to work after having neck surgery, I started taking classes at Asnuntuck to prepare for a possible career change because their tuition was most affordable. At this time, I can only afford one class at a time which does not qualify me for scholarships because I should be taking at least 6 credits. This has become very disheartening, but doable it just may take a little longer to finish. However, the thought that the tuition for Connecticut State colleges may go up is scary for me. The decision I might have to make, is the choice whether to sit on my behind and do nothing for the rest of my life or eat peanut butter and jelly in order to pay for college. Not only that I still must save and prepare for my ten-year old's college tuition.

Mentally this is hard for me and others like me, that have worked for years and then have their jobs taken away. With the mental health crisis becoming its own epidemic we must stop and ask the question; do we want to put anymore stress on Americans and the people of Connecticut? We know that a college education is a necessity to get a decent job and, in this day, and time you practically need a PHD in order to do so. Just take a minute and think of all the Connecticut parents who during this COVID pandemic have lost their jobs, homes, retirement plans, savings for their children's tuition, all due to the rise in layoffs and businesses closing. Think of the helplessness they must feel to say to their children that you cannot go to college because they cannot afford it, and in turn crushing that child's

dream. Think of the adults like myself that must get an education after all these years because they lost their jobs, and now cannot find another job because of education requirements. On top of it they still have families to support. Can you imagine the mentality of that parent, the feeling that there is no hope, and how that affects their mental health? Financial aid does not always cover all tuition costs, and for some \$100 more a month may be too much. Speaking on behalf of other students that I have had conversations with there are several students that are in the same boat as me, non-traditional students, been laid off, had to take care of parents, and so on. These students have expressed possibly not returning to Asnuntuck due to affordability. One disturbing thing that I heard the most was their mental state. As the President of the Spiritual Mind and Body club at Asnuntuck, I have students that have reached out for regular meditation, and yoga practice due to having to choose their education, or their living situations and needing an outlet. Their ages range from young adults, middle age adults, and older adults, and the amount of resource information that I have given to help with mental health is astounding. Their concern isn't about not getting an A in a class or having a large workload, their concern is if they cannot afford to pay for college, and what kind of life will they have if they do not have the proper education.

This all comes back you, and why Connecticut State College students, and me need this committee to keep the State of Connecticut College tuition affordable. Keeping college tuition affordable in the State of Connecticut will create opportunities for those who have lost jobs over the past year and need to change their career paths. Keeping tuition low may help with the lack of enrollment crisis. Most importantly taking college courses at an affordable rate may help with the mental health crisis, because face it, Americans have had a lot to go through financially over the past year and it is still not over. With a since of importance, I am urging you to keep college tuition in the State of Connecticut affordable. I need it, parents need it, students need it, Connecticut Residents need it, Americans need it. Thank you for your time.