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Senior Standing

Members of the Appropriations committee, my name is Tia Meares, I am a Sociology student at Central Connecticut State University, and I am here to ask you to support funding for our college.

CCSU had an early COVID-19 response last March. This was different from other schools as we had just received word that a CCSU student had potential exposure to an individual with COVID-19. As a precautionary measure, the campus closed immediately. In this time, we had challenges surrounding students obtaining their belongings from storage units, adapting to new work and school environments from home and the overall feeling of loneliness and uncertainty.

However, CCSU continued to support their students. CCSU's Central Activities Network, conducted the first virtual concert in the nation on April 17th, 2020. As the Vice President of the Central Activities Network, I can speak on behalf of the team that we didn't stop there. We continued to host unique events like a virtual talent show to keep students spirits high. We extended our event programming in the summer, which was not typical for us, but we saw the need for community. We had drive-in movie nights, celebrity guest speakers and a firework show. This time allowed us to try out what virtual programming even meant, and we continued to modify this so come Fall 2020 we were ready for on-campus events with social distancing and safety protocols.

As of today, we have fallen into a more comfortable routine as students and overall university. Yet, we still have challenges involving "zoom fatigue" and the need of support from the state. We would like help with funding to continue to connect with each other through social and educational programs on campus. The importance for these interactions is to support students' emotional well-being because statistically speaking, students who are mentally healthy will perform better in school and that's the main reason we are here is to get an education. Central is a community engaged environment and we want to be together again and some of these opportunities include being a part of the city of New Britain and service projects in Hartford. For instance, I started my internship last semester at the Friendship Center, a homeless shelter in New Britain and I have seen first-hand how urgent the indeed for service and funding is to them. I have also been a part of Habitat for Humanity at CCSU and I was lucky enough to have the experience of contributing to build trips in both Florida and Hartford in the past two years. Their main mission is to help those in need and provide them a safe and affordable home and they are struggling to meet that goal.

We have led with understanding and empathy to do the best we can and now we need help from you to make our experience what it used to be or even better. That is why I encourage all of you to prioritize funding for our university so that students will always have access to the opportunity to connect.