

March 4, 2021

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee Higher Education Subcommittee

SUBJECT MATTER: Governor's Proposed FY 2022-2023 Budget for Higher Education Agencies

H.B. No. 6439 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

Submitted by Patty O'Neill, Ph.D., President of the Connecticut State University American Association of University Professors and Associate Professor of Psychology at Western Connecticut State University

Dear Committee Chairs, Ranking Members and members of the committee,

My name is Patty O'Neill and I am the president of CSU-AAPU, which represents the professors, librarians, counselors, coaches, and trainers at the four regional state universities. I am also an associate professor of psychology at Western Connecticut State University.

I'm here this evening to talk to you about protecting and investing in Connecticut's most precious natural resources. Those natural resources are not coal, oil, or diamonds. Rather, they are our people. And faculty at the four regional state universities are dedicated to developing our state's most important natural resources - our people - into the entrepreneurs, business owners, policy makers, inventors, writers, volunteers, and public servants that continue to breathe life, vibrancy and vitality into our state.

The majority of students who attend the four CSUs come from Connecticut and stay in Connecticut after graduation. They stay to raise families, start businesses, volunteer, and give back to our state in countless ways. Many of our students are also first-generation college students or come from underserved communities. For these students, the CSUs can offer a leg up to the middle class and a way to build better life for themselves and their families.

That's why now, as we continue to face a pandemic that has laid bare the inequality and inequity in so many areas of our lives – including in higher education – that our state must make a full investment in our regional institutions. The faculty at the CSUs have faced ever-dwindling resources as funding for our institutions continues to decline. Faculty are perpetually faced with

the challenge of doing more and more with less and less. In the end, such disinvestment hurts our students and our state.

Year after year and for generations to come, the power of an educated, mindful, critically thinking population is undeniable. Faculty at the regional universities help develop students of all ages and from all walks of life to not only meet the needs of the future workforce, but also to meet cultural changes and challenges with fortitude and integrity.

Undeniably, quality public higher education is an economic driver for our state. But it's more than money. It's also about culture and about values.

Connecticut State University faculty are opening minds and opening doors for their students so that they can become engaged, critical thinkers who contribute to our state's economy and culture. But starving the faculty of resources starves our students because faculty teaching conditions are our students' learning conditions. Supporting public higher education means supporting faculty, supporting students and - ultimately - supporting the future of Connecticut.

Our students deserve the opportunity for a quality, affordable and accessible higher education that will bring them to their fullest potential. When we do that – invest in our most valuable natural resources – then all of Connecticut will reap the rewards for generations to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you this evening and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.