

March 4, 2021

Appropriations Committee Higher Education Subcommittee Hearing

Testimony from Dr. Stephen Monroe Tomczak

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Members of the Appropriations Committee

I come before you today not purely as a faculty member in the social work department at Southern Connecticut State University, but as a graduate of that institution. And as an alum, I have a particular concern with whether our state will continue to invest in students like me so that we can become productive, contributing members of this state's economy as the vast majority of us do, or whether we will abandon the historic mission of the Connecticut State University system to give middle and working class students like me a chance at, say, becoming a college professor.

The benefits of making these investments reach deeply into every facet of our communities. University graduates are 24 percent more likely to be employed and 2.4 percent less likely to receive workers' compensation. Lifetime taxes of university graduates are 215 percent greater than those without degrees, which makes them a greater contributor to governmental services, social programs, and the overall public good. Employment in the nonprofit sector is twice as likely for university graduates and volunteering is 2.3 times more likely. Crime rates are lower and philanthropic contributions are higher in communities with more college graduates.*

But in order for the state to gain these benefits, investments have to be made to make public education affordable. When I attended Southern in the 1980s, we paid about \$500 a semester in tuition. A student in that time period could have a summer job and save up the money necessary to go to a school like Southern. I was lucky to grow up in a time period when the state invested in kids like me, who wanted to improve themselves by getting an education. In 1989, the year I graduated, the state contributed 74 percent of the cost of tuition. Today, my students spend ten times this amount, currently over \$5,900.00 per semester. There is no way that they can cover this with summer income, which is why most of them are working not just one, but often several jobs.

This is the direct result of declining state contributions to public higher education. The state share of the cost of tuition at the CSUs in 2015 was 33 percent - less than half of what it was when I went to school. If you took the tuition we paid in the 1980s and just adjusted it for inflation, my students would pay slightly over \$1,200 a semester, about one fifth of what they currently pay. Even worse, if you were take the tuition that my mother in law paid when she attended Southern in the 1950s – roughly \$50 a semester – and adjust it for inflation, my student would pay \$488.03 a semester, actually less in nominal dollars than what we paid in the 1980s!

Our students at the CSUs live here and stay here in Connecticut after graduation and will be the ones to continue to move our state into the future. Your decisions represent a direct investment in them and also in your own future as a resident of our great state. We ask you to join us in Opening Minds and opening doors, not closing them. The next generation of Connecticut State University

students deserves better. We should invest in them, the way a prior generation of state leaders invested in me.

Thank you for the time to speak before you today, thank you for supporting public higher education in Connecticut and thank you, also, for your service to our state.

*Trostle, P. It's not just the money; the benefits of college education to individuals and to society. *Lumina Foundation Issue Papers*, 2012. Retrieved from:

<https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/its-not-just-the-money.pdf>