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Appropriations Committee Public Hearing March 2021 on the Governor's FY 2022-2023 Proposed
Budget for Higher Education Agencies

Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Elle Van Dermark and I have been teaching at Asnuntuck Community College for 11 years. I have not known a time that we were not in crisis. I was hired after the exodus of retirements during the Great Recession and during my tenure at my beloved college, we have pivoted from one crisis to the next.

I am testifying today on HB-6404 PACT funding. While funding for the state's Community Colleges has been volatile, surrendering that funding to a system office who services and serves no students must stop. We can begin by eliminating the millions of dollars being funneled away from vulnerable students and to the Board of Regents, CSCU system office, and the imaginary behemoth that is called the One College. Connecticut needs to do better for its citizens.

Governor Lamont reported there was a surplus in year one and another anticipated in year two during his budget address. He went on to say we have the largest reserves in the state's history and posits the credit agencies increasingly positive ratings for the state as evidence.

However, he acknowledges the pandemic has sharpened the disparities for the people who are struggling in Connecticut and specifically admits access to education is a particular vulnerability.

Those vulnerabilities can begin to be addressed by including part time students and Dreamers in PACT. Broadening who we support in their educational pursuits is both a racial and justice issue. We can do better by including part time students and Dreamers in PACT funding.

Despite the gilded reports from Gov Lamont's budget, this budget fails the working people of Connecticut, those who are most vulnerable, those who could and would be helped by things like -

- Fully funding Debt Free Community College with a permanent line item in the budget.
- Ensuring access to education by supporting part time students who must work to support their families while they attend college.
- Broadening access so Dreamers can participate too.

Gov Lamont importantly acknowledges, "The Budget is a representation of our core values." I agree and those values must prioritize racial disparities in access to community college education.

We need a commitment to the students, staff, and faculty at the community colleges that demonstrates the budget is in fact a moral document. In order to be that, it must address racial justice and equity through funding education at every level – but particularly the Community Colleges.

The Community Colleges – each college- needs line item increases that are encumbered to each of the individual colleges.

As the BOR and CSCU system office continue their assaults on our students, staff, and faculty, their payroll increases and fringe skyrocket with no meaningful oversight. Meanwhile staff and faculty across the system are experiencing disruptions in pay and suffering the consequences of the “Shared Services Model” that promised to streamline Human Resources. This week we learned some faculty and staff in the CSCU received half their pay or no pay at all.

Worse yet, the system office reports these issues may not be corrected and restored in the foreseeable future. This is the result of the BOR and CSCU's *streamlining*. This is a reflection of how the staff and faculty are valued.

How can the Governor and Legislature continue to trust and fund the Board of Regents, CSCU system office, and the farce of a structure they continue to call the One College when what that funding does is line the pockets and retirement accounts of those it really serves – the One College staff?

The staff and faculty at Connecticut's 12 theoretically, albeit barely, independently accredited community colleges watch in horror as tens of millions of dollars are siphoned away from students and the colleges that serve them. Funding administrative growth does not help our students.

While the number of Black and brown students who have suffered disproportionately during the pandemic and the two decades prior to it, continues to increase – the governor's budget fails to invest in our future by providing the funding that would support our most vulnerable students.

The Governor claims to be concerned about the “grave discrepancies.” But he, and you, can demonstrate a commitment to addressing these injustices by directly funding the 12 independent community colleges.

We must commit to doing better and we can begin by educating all the good people of Connecticut, because our state depends on an educated and informed citizenry, and so too does the democracy of these United States.