

March 4, 2021

Sarah Vedder

Undergraduate at SCSU

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.

To the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Sarah Vedder and I am currently a senior at Southern Connecticut State University. I am grateful for my experience at Southern and the opportunities afforded to me.

I come from hard-working, blue collar family, and I am the first in my family to attend a university. When I started SCSU at nineteen, I was taking care of my sick mother while we were being evicted from our home. I have worked every day since I was fourteen and I know the crippling weight of feeling as though my aspirations aren't obtainable. Without the affordability of Southern, I would not have been able to attend college.

I never imagined or expected anyone to believe in me like the professors at Southern have. From English to photography to philosophy, and even to my worst subjects like statistics and political science, I discovered inspiration and support at every turn. During my second and third years, I had the unique opportunity to work as a peer mentor, a position offered only to students showing academic excellence, an excellence achieved because professors believed in me. As a peer mentor, I worked alongside professors helping incoming students transition into college. I participated in class discussions, gave lessons on time management, taught new students about resources available on campus, and overall, showed them how to thrive academically.

At Southern, I have participated in social justice events, I have spoken on panels regarding trauma and addiction recovery, and I have had poems, stories, and artwork published in Southern's journals and newspaper. I have networked with professors, grad students, alumni, and peers, creative connections I utilize now and know will continue.

For the past two semesters I have worked as a teaching intern, and earlier this afternoon taught my own lesson to a sophomore-level class. This internship has prepared me to attend graduate school and follow my dreams of being a teacher at the collegiate level.

In my final semester as an undergraduate, I am working with an advisor to complete an honors thesis. This is rigorous work that includes meeting with my adviser weekly to discuss drafts, talk through challenges, and sometimes just receive encouragement. In the course of this past year of work on my thesis, I have surprised myself at how far I've come as a writer, and I find it hard to believe that professors would be as available at any other university.

I am grateful to the faculty here for believing in my potential and I am forever indebted for the lessons and experiences this university has granted me. The faculty here are the kind who agree

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to meet for coffee simply so that I can pick their brain. They understand that Southern students are built differently: we are full-time workers and full-time students, we are parents, we are U.S veterans, and many of us bear the burden of little to no financial support. This school is not *just* affordable and accessible, it is quality education that has made me into the academically successful, aspirational, empathetic, active community member I am today. This is not simply a university I will graduate from and leave behind; it is the place I dream of returning to as a teacher myself, someday.