

**Testimony of Jody Barr
President of the State University
Organization of Administrative Faculty**

for the

Public and Outside Witness Hearing

of the

**House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education and Related Agencies**

Tuesday, March 25, 2014

**Testimony of Jody Barr,
President of the State University Organization of Administrative Faculty
for the
Public and Outside Witness Hearing
of the
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education and Related Agencies
Tuesday, March 25, 2014**

Good morning. My name is Jody Barr and I am President of the State University Organization of Administrative Faculty. I would like to thank the Committee for allowing me to testify this morning, about the need for strong federal support for higher education.

My organization represents 760 nonteaching professional staff at Connecticut State Colleges and Universities, or CONNSCU, a statewide system of 17 academic institutions including 12, two-year colleges, four universities, and the state's only fully-online public college. Our members work in a range of capacities, including admissions, registration, athletics, and public relations. Our members operate and support the technology infrastructure for the schools and maintain the 911 emergency calling systems. Importantly, some of our members provide financial aid counseling to students trying to put together the resources to start school and to complete their studies.

Connecticut State Colleges and Universities serves more than 120,000 full- and part-time, credit and non-credit students. The system provides access to affordable, lifelong learning to students. But it also plays a key role in the state's economy by preparing students to meet the workforce needs of Connecticut employers. These schools drive economic activity in their communities and play an important role in the state's efforts to attract new business and industry.

Providing education is one of the most important roles of government. While the gain from higher education is large for individuals, it is also large for our nation. Public investment in higher education makes our country more productive, grows our economy and fosters good citizenship. Making higher education available to everyone helps promote economic equality and social cohesion.

Tuition at Connecticut's public institutions is lower than the average of New England public institutions and CONNSCU struggles to keep tuition affordable in order to make higher education broadly available. But making higher education accessible to low-income students requires that the federal government be a strong partner. We urge the Congress to make higher education a priority in its spending decisions. In particular, we urge that the Committee provide the highest level of funding possible for Pell Grants; at least funding that continues the maximum grant award of \$4,860 as proposed in the President's budget. Pell Grants help make higher education accessible to low-income students and also helps them to succeed by providing a consistent source of support until they achieve their degree or certificate. Pell Grants also help to reduce the amount of borrowing, so that students are saddled with less debt as they embark on their careers. Maintaining and increasing the level of other funding is also critical for Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, Federal Work-Study, and Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP).

As I mentioned earlier, some of our members are financial aid counselors who work with students to cobble together the resources needed to pay their tuition, buy books and pay for transportation. Below is a sample of their stories about the students they have helped.

Gloria was a first-generation college student from a family that relied on minimum and low-wage jobs. After paying the bills, there was nothing left over to put away for college. Had it not been for Pell Grants, state grants, scholarship money and a Work-Study job on campus, she would not have been able to pay for school. She graduated after four years and is now employed at a college herself. She was so thankful for the financial support that she pursued a career as a financial aid counselor so that she could help other aspiring students.

Edward's parents divorced when he was six. Edward's mom worked as a sales clerk – a low-paying job from which she did not earn enough to always cover even the most basic needs. There were months when they lived without electricity. Edward stuck with his education because he wanted to do better for himself. When he was a senior in high school he applied for federal financial aid and for scholarships. He also took out federal loans. Today, he is in college and planning to attend graduate school. Without financial aid he said, "I would probably be working a dead-end job."

Nick's father lost his job and the reality of college slipped further and further away. Nick's mom told him to keep studying to pursue his college dream. Just before his high school

graduation, Nick's father found a new job, but at a lower rate of pay. But with the help of a financial aid counselor, Nick was able to put together state grants, loans, a Merit Award and a federal Work-Study grant to pay for school.

Angela came from a low-income family. With the help of loans and grants she was able to get through college and eventually through medical school. She feels proud, but also overwhelmed by the \$400,000 she owes in student loans. She is thankful for the federal and state grants she received as an undergraduate student and tells people that without federal grant money, she would have never achieved her dream of becoming a doctor.

These students' lives were transformed by their ability to attend college. Their futures are much brighter because the federal government made an investment in them and their education. But these kids are not the only winners. Our nation wins when we invest in education and the workforce development system. It is critical to our long-term economic vitality that we continue to make these investments in Pell Grants, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, Federal Work Study and GEAR UP.

Thank you.