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COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT
ADVANCEMENT

Rep. Elliott, Co-Chair

Sen. Derek Slap, Co-Chair

Wednesday, January 26, 2022

1:00 P.M.

**STRONG SUPPORT FOR EXTENDING FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
TO CSU's**

Buenas tardes, boa tarde, good afternoon!

Representative Elliott and Senator Slap, thank you for this opportunity to testify today. Senators Witkos, Flexer, and Lopes, Representatives Haddad and Exum, it's good to see you.

My name is Mary Ann Mahony. I live in Collinsville. I am professor of History and the Director of the Latin American, Latino, and Caribbean Center at Central Connecticut State University. I speak to you today based on 18.5 years of experience at CCSU. To resolve problems of student indebtedness in Connecticut, Free Community College Tuition should be extended to the Connecticut State Universities. Let me explain why. First, at CCSU we are classified as a Minority Serving Institution: 38% of our undergraduates self-identify as minority. Our

students are debt averse. This is historically true for Hispanic students, but since 2008, all students are debt averse. As many as 40% of our students work full time to pay their expenses. Others work between 20 and 30 hours per week. They attempt to do this while also carrying a full load of five classes. Obviously, this situation is frequently unsustainable. Let me give you some examples.

A Latina CCSU Junior with a 3.0+ GPA took a 30-hour-a-week job at Starbucks near the CCSU with a shift beginning at 4:00 A.M.. She assumed that she could work her shift then attend her classes. Her GPA at the end of the semester was a 2.0—in other words, she just missed academic probation. These were the worst grades she had ever received.

We lost a first year Latino student this fall—at least temporarily—because of a family financial emergency. He has taken a full-time job, third shift, and thought, mistakenly, that he could come back to school full time and succeed. It didn't work.

Last year, a Latina Honors student dropped out. The lesson this CT Dreamer learned was that trying to work 40 + hours a week while having a full schedule of classes was unsustainable. Now that she has become a Permanent Resident, she qualifies for federal financial aid and we are happy to report that she is back and on the Dean's List.

Finally, another student—not Latino—works full time as a waiter in one of Connecticut's top restaurants. He has one course left to complete his degree—his senior seminar class. But he works 45-50 hours a week an hour away from his home. He has dropped the Senior Thesis class twice.

These students are the future of Connecticut. All but one have federal financial aid, although I don't know specific details of their grants. Still others are paying their way through school because they don't qualify for Financial Aid or qualify, but only for loans. Rather than taking on student loans, they try to go to school and work. We are losing them. They cannot do both. Free community college tuition should be extended to the CSUs.

Sincerely,

Dr. Mary Ann Mahony