

Mister/Madam Chair, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Connor Herbert. I am a sitting senator for the University of Cincinnati Undergraduate Student Government and I represent the College of Arts and Sciences. I am a first year student double majoring in Political Science and International Affairs and minoring in Computer Science. I am here today to share my unique experiences regarding higher education and to provide some insight on some of the topics that poignantly affect Ohio undergraduates and, in particular, undergraduates at the University of Cincinnati.

I'll start, if I may, with my own experiences. I was blessed with the opportunity to be involved with student government during the middle of my first semester, and consequently, I have been exposed to a number of topics regarding Higher Education administration and services especially in pertinence to the topics at hand—student trustee voting and executive session rights, sexual violence prevention and awareness programs, mental health literacy programs, same-day voting rights, and tax exempt textbooks— and how they affect UC undergrads.

Student trustee voting and executive session rights are a particularly hot topic at UC this month as the Board of Trustees will be discussing a 6% tuition hike for the incoming undergraduate students and the vote by the Board in June will forego the vote of a student trustee, as UC's student trustee lacks the very right to vote. Furthermore, the student trustee's representative status precludes them from participating in any discussions held during executive sessions that, due to the nature of the board, likely impact the student-body at-large. While the primary argument against student trustee rights might very well be that membership on the Board implies a willingness to put personal interests aside when discussing and voting on matters that directly impact the institution and by their very nature the student representative cannot immediately separate themselves from their status as a student, I'd like to remind everyone in these chambers that the same goes for municipal, local, state, and national government. Citizens, and in the case of higher education institutions, students, are the primary

stakeholders in their respective governing bodies; and in respect to that idea, the lack of required voting and executive session rights for student trustees leads to a situation of “tuition without voting permission.”

Moving away from that topic, undergrads are nationally caving to increasing amounts of stress that necessitate increases in grants for mental health services or at the minimum, mandates for literacy on mental health for students. I believe, for instance, that my mental health is great, but I know that were I to go to a therapist or counselor I would be told that my mental health is quite the opposite: I get minimal levels of sleep, I rarely take breaks to debrief, and my future aspirations and current frustrations all lend to high levels of stress. If you asked any other college student, they would likely tell you something to a similar effect, and national statistics point to the fact that the mental well-being of students is being waylaid across the nation for relatively unproductive and wasteful programs. At UC, for instance, we pour money into an athletics program that, while a great experience for the students that participate in it, annually generates negative revenue for the university. That being said, I do not advocate for the demolition of athletic programs across the state of Ohio as they are culturally and communally significant here and across the nation, but rather, I sit in front of you advocating for greater funding explicitly directed at improving mental health services across Ohio higher education institutions.

Among other factors that impact the mental wellbeing of college students is the pervasiveness of sexual violence on college campuses coinciding with a relative lack of awareness around the topic and the existence of “rape culture.” One recent activity that the Ohio Department of Higher Education embarked on was the Changing Campus Culture initiative and according to Clery Act data it did much in the way of promoting the act of reporting sexual violence incidents, but campus atmosphere reflects that it has not done much to address the underlying problem of sexual violence.