

## ***Jasmine Weeks***

Hi my name is Jasmine Weeks and I am a 21 year old currently pursuing a masters in nursing and have a bachelors in psychology. I am here to urge the commission to prioritize student supports and equity in funding. I began my college path at 17 years old with no family wanting to support me, 3,000 miles away from home, and a learning disability. It took me getting my masters, having a supporting husband, and financial security to realize how impossible my undergraduate was without university support such as mental health services, advising specifically for students of color, and disability services.

The financial aid I received was only enough for tuition, meaning I had to work for rent, food, and various university fees not included in tuition. Because of this I constantly was missing out on enough sleep, having to make unhealthy choices between rent and social health, and constantly losing out on study time to work more hours. The stress and loneliness I felt through my first year of college was enough to push me to quit. Upon meeting with my academic advisor I realized that I was just a number, it was the advisors specifically through the black and african american cultural center that pushed me through. They were eager to find a way to make school easier for me. It was from them I learned about different job opportunities that understood school came first, they pushed me to try counseling services, they showed me grants, and other school services I never was told about like the foodbank. A combination of the school services I was introduced to not only raised my grade average, but raised my spirits, I did not feel so stressed and lonely anymore.

I have first hand experience knowing what a student needs to persist and thrive while obtaining their degree. Being overwhelmed with working, maintaining my grades, and whether I go to see a movie or eat three full meals is not it. Students need a support system, they need a combination of health services, mental health counseling, food banks, job training, and someone to relate to. Young adults are already an at-risk group for mental illness such as depression and anxiety, by throwing us into education versus health situations only makes it worse, just ask the overwhelmed staff in counseling services at most higher education institutions.

We need to ask institutions why the budget is unfairly shifted to certain parts of the college when the sake of a human's health is on the line? My recommendations on how institutions can invest equitably within their institutions if/when they get additional funding is to be transparent in using the funds. Institutions should use an evidence-based method of calculating funding to ensure it is used equitably. I would like to thank the commission for the opportunity to testify and appreciate your consideration of holding institutions accountable for their spending of funds.

## ***Will Pettway***

While attending Columbia College Chicago, I had to sacrifice time with friends to be able to pay for my education. As a first gen college student who decided to study Theater, I had to work multiple jobs my entire college career to ensure that I'm fed and housed on top of rehearsal. I was exhausted and over stretched to make ends meet.

Affordability was an issue and the access to financial aid wasn't as helpful as it should have been. And there is a cultural stigma associated with being a broke/working student who isn't spending their parents' money. I have 10 siblings and come from a low-income family, what supports exist for those who's resources are already divided many ways?