

Greetings members of the commission. My name is Brandon Bisbey and I'm a tenured faculty member at Northeastern IL University. I am a member of University Professionals of Illinois Local 4100 and I am chair of the legislative committee of the NEIU chapter of UPI.

During my 12 years at NEIU I've seen firsthand the devastating effects of disinvestment in public higher ed in Illinois, the most obvious of which have been high levels of faculty attrition and our precipitous decline in enrollments over the last decade. When I was hired in 2011 my department had 8 tenured faculty—we are now down to 3. It has been extremely difficult to attract and retain talented faculty since Rauner's manufactured budget crisis and the subsequent inadequate funding from the state. Just this year, my department lost a brilliant young faculty member who had just earned tenure and was a major asset to the institution because they could not abide the labor conditions caused by our lack of funding. These were the same conditions that led to strikes at several of our public institutions, many represented by UPI.

In 2011, NEIU's enrollment was nearly 9 thousand, now we are at about half that much. While demographic changes are certainly part of this picture, they can't explain this drop by themselves. Many current, former, and potential students have been pushed out of, or away from my institution by rising tuition costs. NEIU's student body is largely working-class. Our students are immigrants—documented, undocumented and “Daca-mented”--, veterans, transfers from community colleges, most of them work at least one job while they study. They come to us because we teach classes at times and in modalities that fit with their lives and work schedules, because we understand them, because we know how to meet them where they are and help them get where they want to be. But every semester we see many of them struggling

to pay for course materials, or to make rent, or sometimes even to eat. This August, I found myself scrambling, once again, to try to cobble together enough funding to help a brilliant grad student of mine—an undocumented, working-class migrant—finish his MA coursework. We are simply unable to offer the kind of support that UIC or U of I can give students because we don't get the kind of support those schools do from the state. Regional comprehensives like NEIU, Gov State, Chicago State, Northern, Eastern, Western, UI Springfield, are the true motors of economic mobility in IL but languish because their missions aren't based on research and their data don't align with standards written for larger institutions with more economically privileged student bodies. Given the makeup of our student bodies, this has grave implications for economic and racial justice—NEIU was the first public Hispanic-Serving Institution in IL—over 30% of our current students are Hispanic or Latino. We have wonderful students and engaged, talented, productive faculty and staff who give it their all despite our situation—but we need adequate support.

Illinois is sometimes described as an oasis of progressive social policies in a desert of Midwestern conservatism. This is clearly true in terms of certain policy areas, like reproductive rights. My hope is that it can become true with regards to higher ed as well. I hope to see an IL that bucks the tragic national trend of disinvestment in higher ed and begins to treat it as the public good that it is. But time is of the essence, things get worse for us and our students every day that we don't have adequate funding. We need action now. Thank you.