

My name is Dina Levitre. I live in Middletown, teach English at CCRI, and am a member of NEARI. Teaching at CCRI is much more than a job to me; it's a calling. As I often say to my daughter, an early childhood teacher, we don't really choose teaching. It chooses us!

My colleagues and I are deeply passionate about what we do — providing a high-quality education to our students at CCRI. We chose this career because we believe in the power of the classroom — in helping students of all ages, no matter their socioeconomic status or background, to learn, grow, and build better futures for themselves and their families. Every day, we see firsthand the transformative impact education has on our students' lives, and we are proud of the work we do. We are not just educators; we are a vital part of Rhode Island's economy and future.

We didn't become educators to write testimony or study state budgets; we did it because we love teaching. However, the profession we cherish has become increasingly difficult over the years. Frequent advances in technology, for example, require us to pursue constant professional development and revision of course materials, which we are more than happy to engage in, because we genuinely want to do what's best for our students. Nevertheless, despite our dedication, our pay has not kept pace with the rising costs of living. Many of us are forced to take on second jobs or work overtime just to make ends meet.

Despite our dedication and commitment to the College and our students, we are struggling. Fair raises are not just about compensation—they're about recognizing the hard work we do and ensuring we can continue to give our best to our students. We want to stay here, to grow here, and to keep serving this state we love.

We celebrate the raises our colleagues in State Government, including some of those at CCRI, have received, a 5% raise last year and a 4% raise this year. They truly deserve it, but we have not received the same increases and are falling further and further behind. The governor's current budget proposes only a 2.5% raise for us — a number that will not allow us to keep up with the rising cost of living. It's not just about numbers, though; it's about fairness and the ability to support ourselves and our families while continuing to give our all to our students.

I attended a meeting at the Warwick campus right as COVID restrictions were easing. I have no recollection of either the purpose of the meeting or the attendees. However, I will never forget the feeling I had as I turned off East Avenue and drove up the hill. I was happy and relieved to be back on campus and just kept thinking, "This is my place and these are my people" and I know my colleagues feel the same. Faculty and staff are vital to CCRI's success — to its classrooms, its programs, and the futures we help build for our students. We deserve fair raises and we need your help to get there. Please increase funding for CCRI to help ensure we can recruit and retain the talented, dedicated faculty and staff our students deserve. Thank you for all you do for the citizens of Rhode Island and for taking the time to read my message!

Sincerely,

Dina Levitre

Associate Professor of English, Community College of Rhode Island