Thank you to the Joint Committee on Finance for holding this hearing in Ellsworth today.

As chancellor of UW-Eau Claire, I appreciate that Governor Scott Walker has made reinvestment in the UW System a priority in his proposed budget. As you are aware, there has not been any new investment in the UW System by the state for more than a decade.

In fact, UW System funding has been cut in six of the last seven biennial budgets. We have made difficult budget reductions at UW-Eau Claire while doing our utmost to protect the student experience.

I am not here today to recount past reductions — I am here to urge you to support increased funding for the UW System in this budget.

I also want to take this opportunity to express my disappointment with the capital project budget proposed by the governor. UW-Eau Claire has many aging buildings that require renovation or replacement, and the governor’s proposed budget does very little to address those very real critical infrastructure needs.

There is no doubt UW System campuses, including the three universities in this part of the state — Eau Claire, River Falls and Stout — are key to the future success of Wisconsin. We have a proven track record of accountability, efficiency and quality.

In terms of accountability, the UW System was the first in the nation to develop accountability measures tracking key indicators such as student retention and graduation rates.

We are efficient. Did you know that the cost of a four-year UW degree is nearly $10,000 less than the U.S. average — and $10,000 to $30,000 less than surrounding states?

Yet, at the same time, our quality is very high. There are many measures I could cite to demonstrate that point, but my time is limited, so I will share only one: U.S. News & World Report has ranked UW-Eau Claire as one of the best regional universities in the Midwest for 22 straight years. I am providing committee members with this sheet (hold up sheet) that outlines many other quality measures.

Ultimately, however, the most important thing we do is educate students who are prepared for success. I am proud to tell you that, for the third consecutive year, UW-Eau Claire has a placement rate that exceeds 96 percent. That means that within six months of graduation, 96 percent of all Blugolds are either employed or continuing their studies in graduate school.

That kind of student success is the direct result of the quality of the education our students receive because of our dedicated faculty and staff.

And so, I leave you with this final request: In addition to supporting increased funding for the UW System, I ask that you also support the “two plus two” pay plan included in the governor’s budget. Recruiting and retaining top-notch faculty and staff is my biggest challenge and highest priority — and it is past time that the hard work of faculty and staff is rewarded.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.