

TESTIMONY
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
Monday, March 15, 2010

HB5027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT HEALTH CENTER'S FACILITIES PLAN

Senator Handley, Representative Willis and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, my name is Andrea Gross and I'm a fourth year medical student at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine. I am here today to speak in support of **HB5027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT HEALTH CENTER'S FACILITIES PLAN**

Why do I support this plan? I believe the UConn Health Center provides key community resources that are not available elsewhere, and any plan that ensures the future of a financially stable health center will have my support. I wanted to speak to you today because I have grown up in and around the UConn Health Center. My father has been a faculty member at the Health Center for over twenty years, and as a high school student, I spent my summers volunteering at the Surgicenter in Farmington. When I learned to drive, the Health Center was the first place I went outside my hometown of Simsbury. During my senior year of high school I continued my experiences at the Health Center as a student researcher in a basic science laboratory. After high school I was admitted to the eight year combined program in medicine, attending first UConn Storrs and now the UConn medical school, from which I will soon graduate. In addition, throughout the years I have been a patient at the UConn Health Center's primary care, cardiology and endocrinology clinics. All of these experiences have given me a unique perspective on the experiences of staff, physicians and patients at the UConn Health Center and it is that perspective which I would like to share with you today.

The faculty and staff of the UConn Health Center are an incredible group of individuals. The administrative and secretarial staff that I worked with in high school consistently went above and beyond for patients. They are dedicated to facilitating the delivery of the best quality care to all patients. By increasing the number of beds and financial support for the hospital you will be helping them do the same for even more people.

The part of the health center with which I am most familiar is the academic faculty and staff. Just as the administrative staff work tirelessly on behalf of the patients, so too do the academic faculty work for us, the students. In the course of our training we receive lectures from basic scientists and clinicians on a wide variety of subjects. Though the lectures delivered by the basic science researchers were often helpful, I almost always found the courses taught by clinical faculty to be even more valuable. These clinicians brought with them not only the basic facts which we needed to learn for our next exam, but also the perspective about how these seemingly abstract pieces of information actually apply to caring for patients and being a better doctor. Encouraging this kind of connection between clinical and basic science is essential to learning medicine, and will only be enhanced by increasing the facilities and staff of the UConn Health Center. After all, it is one thing to read or hear about a new discovery in medical science. It is quite another to hear about that

discovery from someone involved in making it happen and seeing how it influences the care of that doctor's patients.

One of the most powerful experiences of my training occurred in our second year when we were learning about HIV/AIDS. The infectious disease physician who had been teaching us about the cellular mechanisms by which HIV attacks the body brought in one of his patients who was suffering from the disease. She spoke to us for an hour about her experiences, not only of the disease but also of how she had been treated by various doctors. She taught us what a difference kind, empathic and well trained physicians can make in the life of a patient. We learned from her, and from all the patients that we see in our third and fourth years of school, that knowing the science is only a small part of being a physician. The larger part is being able to connect with patients in a meaningful and constructive way. The UConn Health Center provides an atmosphere which supports that kind of training, and having more academic clinicians and facilities to enhance that experience would be of incalculable benefit to the training of the next generation of physicians and their patients.

-I know that the state has limited resources and is looking for ways to maximize the positive impact of those funds. I can not think of a better way to improve the community than by investing in the UConn Health Center which is a community in and of itself. We serve a wide variety of patients - from the very poor to the wealthy. One of my favorite parts of medical school has been working at the South Park Inn Homeless Shelter in downtown Hartford where we hold a twice weekly free clinic staffed by UConn faculty members and students. By supporting this bill, you would be supporting not only the large number of patients that currently look to the health center for their care, but also the training of physicians that will be well prepared to handle the needs of those patients in the future. Like me, a large portion of the 80 people in my medical school class have strong roots in Connecticut, and historically a large percentage of us will eventually practice here in the state. Who knows, we may be the doctors for you or your family in the future, and I know that by supporting this bill you will help us be even more prepared for that task.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak today, and please support HB5027.