

**Testimony of Dr. Biree Andemariam**  
**Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee**  
**March 15, 2010**

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

Dear Senator Handley, Representative Willis and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee,

My name is Dr. Biree Andemariam. I am a resident of Hartford, CT and I am here today to speak in support of **HB5027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT HEALTH CENTER'S FACILITIES PLAN.**

I am a hematologist and an oncologist working as a faculty member at the University of Connecticut Health Center. I care for people living with blood disorders and cancer. My role at the Health Center is multi-faceted and includes not only direct patient care, but also teaching the next generation of physicians, and conducting cutting-edge research.

I joined the Health Center in 2007, immediately after completing my medical and subspecialty training in Boston and in New York. I was recruited to U-Conn to help develop a clinical and research program in blood disorders, the only one of its kind in the State. I was drawn to U-Conn because of the opportunity to build this program and because I was given the resources and infrastructure to conduct clinical research.

The Health Center is a unique asset to the State and a gem for the central Connecticut region. It is the only academic medical center in the region AND it provides care to ALL, without regard to quality of insurance. The Health Center's academic mission fosters an environment that is critical to the growth and development of junior physician scientists like me. This is why I feel so strongly about the State's continued investment in an integrated academic health center that provides top-tier medical education, patient care and biomedical research. In fact, this plan is critical to U-Conn's ability to attract new physician scientists and students, as well as its ability to continue to teach the next generation of medical professionals.

At our center for blood disorders, we care for patients with anemias, bleeding/clotting disorders, and blood and bone marrow cancers. We treat individuals who have run out of options in the community by offering novel treatments and clinical trials. We provide a medical home for adults with hereditary blood disorders, many of which are rare.

One example is our adult sickle cell disease program. Sickle cell disease is the most common hereditary red blood cell disorder. It causes profound anemia, widespread organ damage, severe pain, and early mortality. Adults with sickle cell disease often cannot work due to severe debilitating pain. Because our society links health insurance to employment, these individuals are disproportionately found to be on government-funded health insurance. Without private insurance, they find it difficult to find care and, therefore, get most of their care through hospital emergency departments. At U-Conn, we have developed a medical home for these forgotten individuals who have been wandering in almost a no-man's land. In addition to providing

medical care for these patients, we also are conducting research which we hope will lead to improved therapies and, potentially, a cure.

I'd also like to take a moment today to applaud the effort in this bill to promote greater collaboration among the region's hospitals. Such collaborations are critical to enhancing the quality of patient care. Currently, we collaborate closely with Connecticut Children's Medical Center to insure that adolescents with lifelong blood disorders are appropriately and seamlessly transitioned to our care at U-Conn. Such collaborations are vital to quality care. HB5027 would further strengthen these existing partnerships and potentially create new collaborations that benefit the citizens of our State.

One of the first things I realized when arriving in Connecticut was the competitive climate in the medical community. I could not understand why area hospitals would rather refer patients to Boston or New York for second opinions or clinical trials. I quickly realized it was out of fear of losing the patient and therefore losing revenue. This bill benefits all the area medical centers in one way or another and puts the emphasis back on patient care once and for all. The citizens of Connecticut should never feel as if they have to leave the State to get top-notch care. As the State's only public university hospital and medical center, U-Conn can and should play a lead role in promoting collaboration for patient care, medical education, clinical research and clinical trials. HB5027 is an important step in the right direction.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today and for your support of the U-Conn Health Center. I close by asking your support for HB5027.