Good afternoon, Senators.

My name is Holly Brown. I have a Master's degree in science education and I am currently a Ph.D. student studying behavioral ecology at the University of Connecticut. As a graduate teaching assistant, I am responsible for teaching some of our youngest voters. And I am not talking about STEM students. I teach UConn's introductory biology laboratory course for **non**-science majors.

In other words, my students will most likely never end up in STEM occupations; they are lovers of English, political science, art, family studies, history. However, their knowledge of basic scientific principles has been deemed by liberal arts programs around the world to be an integral part of being a well-rounded, better-informed citizen. Why? I believe that STEM courses for non-science majors are the most important classes we teach in terms of building up a base of informed voters. And that ensuring that high quality STEM education is available to EVERY student is in our best economic interest. The principles that they learn in a class like mine will affect whether they vaccinate their children, whether they use antibiotics properly, whether they buy organic or conventional. Their health care costs, their purchasing decisions and the way that they choose to vote will in turn shape the economy of this state for many years, and possibly many generations to come. I've had a number of students tell me, with absolute confidence, that they didn't care about biology at the beginning of the semester; then turn around at the end, and tell me about how much they gained from the class, and how much they enjoyed it. They engage in lively discussions about climate change, species extinctions, habitat loss, and energy consumption. Their ability to make informed decisions about how to balance economic growth with protection of natural resources will impact Connecticut's high property values, and value as a site for outdoor recreational activities.

The job of being an informed citizen has become more and more complex. The building in which I teach was built in 1962. In 1962 there was no Internet. There were no cell phones. We did not know how to amplify DNA, much less grow tissues, or clone whole animals. For our freshman, DNA fingerprinting and maps of the human genome have always existed, food has always been irradiated, and secondhand smoke has always been an official carcinogen. They have never used a card catalog to find a book, and an Internet search for the word "gene" returns 111,000,000 results.

I believe that the question facing you is not "Can we afford to invest in STEM education in CT?" but "How can we afford NOT to?" I urge you to invest in the future of the state of Connecticut by supporting STEM education for our children, our youngest voters, and future politicians, advocates and other informed citizens.

Thank you.

Holly Brown

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