

Testimony from Stephen Szymanski
Proton OnSite, Wallingford, CT

Good afternoon Chairman Kissel, Chairwoman Mushinsky and members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee. My name is Steve Szymanski and I am Director of Government Business at Proton OnSite in Wallingford. On behalf of myself and our President and CEO Robert Friedland I thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today.

I am testifying today as both a concerned citizen and a representative for a growing and dynamic technology company in our state. As the former, I speak for many who express concern about the cost of higher education both here in Connecticut and nationally. Having just completed paying for a four year college degree for my older son at a private University, I know all too well what that end of the cost spectrum looks like. In addition, I am also three years into paying non-resident tuition for my younger son at a competing State University. So I have a good perspective on the competitive marketplace for UConn relative to its public University peers.

From my perspective, CT residents do not have to sacrifice a world class college education due to financial constraints, as I can attest to the quality of programs and facilities that we have personally been exposed to at UCONN. As a teaching University, research institution, and workforce development partner, UCONN has consistently exceeded my personal expectations for value and quality.

My second purpose in speaking to you today, is to explain why my company places high value on the quality of graduates that we see entering the workforce from UCONN. Proton is a technology company started 16 years ago in Connecticut that is continuing to grow and add jobs. As a small company we compete against the large businesses in the State for candidates. In this competitive environment, we have had difficulty, and in some cases, great difficulty finding people for these positions. This year alone, we have hired 10 new employees, many of them in the engineering disciplines. These are professional jobs that require a diverse skill set, including excellent communication, written, and organization skills, along with the requisite engineering foundation. Proton has had an excellent experience with UCONN student interns and new graduates in meeting these important qualifications. Most recently, we had a chemical engineering intern working in our manufacturing department providing outstanding process engineering and development support for new product initiatives, and we have recently hired a manufacturing engineer who is in the process of relocating from Virginia to Connecticut to take the position. (Think about that!) In both cases, we were extremely pleased with the quality of skills, maturity, discipline, and professional characteristics exhibited by these UCONN engineers. Their UCONN education provided an excellent foundation for the jobs we are trying to fill, and enables a clear economic payback for the public investment in our flagship University.

I should also mention that the connection to our new manufacturing engineer was made through some collaborative research we are doing with UCONN. Small companies like ours heavily rely on leveraging Universities to help with research that we cannot afford to staff or do not have the equipment or facilities to execute. UCONN's investment in facilities and personnel for research in STEM fields provides resources and capabilities that enable our own research programs at Proton. We would not be able to make the technical advances we need to stay competitive, if it were not for the excellent research support we get from collaborators like Dr. Radenka Maric and Dr. Bill Mustain. So even if we are not

directly hiring UCONN students, post-docs, and tenured faculty, they are having a direct impact on the success of our business, and on our opportunity to grow and flourish in this state.

We work with a number of leading Universities across the country, due to the research specialization that tends to arise in our technology field. We have active collaborative programs ongoing with Northeastern University, Penn State University, Illinois Institute of Technology, and University of South Carolina, to name a few. While we have gotten excellent support from these research institutions, our preference would be to expand our relationship with UCONN. Having a local R&D partner who knows how to work with us and understands our priorities, is a powerful ally for a small business to have. As UCONN expands its research capabilities and facilities over the coming years, we will be actively looking for opportunities to expand our cooperative activities to promote technological innovation and job growth in the state.

I would like to close by re-emphasizing how UCONN provides an excellent value to all residents of our State. First, it provides the knowledge and skills required for our future work force. A continued enhancement of STEM field academic and research capabilities, as embodied in the NEXGENCT program, will directly benefit companies like Proton and our State economy. The Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology has estimated that for each job created at companies like Proton, an additional 1.31 jobs are supported elsewhere in Connecticut's economy. In addition, when compared to peer institutions across the country, UCONN scores very competitively in terms of tuition and fees, Pell Grants, and overall value. From my own previously discussed experience, you can pay a lot more for a college education, but it is really hard to beat the quality of the experience and skills you will receive at UCONN. At Proton we place a high value on these skills, and strongly support the direction and leadership of President Herbst and Provost Mun Choi, and their efforts to provide a world class education at an affordable price.

Thank you for your time and attention in these matters and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.