



Testimony of

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*Presented to the*

**Higher Education and Workforce Advancement Committee**

*of the*

**Connecticut General Assembly**

February 24, 2015  
Hartford, Connecticut

*Executive Summary*

*The Connecticut AHEC Network is an important part of the state's ability to respond to emerging health care needs and has a proven ability to work collaboratively with other organization to address the health care needs of Connecticut's most vulnerable citizens. The Connecticut AHEC Network seeks to restore level of funding in the amount of \$456,000 from the state legislature to support the infrastructure created by the Connecticut AHEC Network over the past 17 years.*

My name is Jorge Martinez and I am pleased to appear before you this evening to describe the work I perform at Northwestern Connecticut Area Health Education Center (AHEC) partnering with community organizations to address local health issues and providing outreach to vulnerable populations. My testimony is drawn from my experience as an Assister during the roll out of the Access Health Connecticut Marketplace.

It is imperative that funding for the Connecticut AHEC Network be restored to \$456,000. The Connecticut AHEC Network provides Connecticut residents with critical resources and programs that are both timely and essential in developing a health care workforce which is cost effective, culturally competent and responsive to the health care needs of the state.

For the past 17 years the Connecticut AHEC Network has successfully linked local communities with the resources of the University of Connecticut, its Health Center and other academic institutions and health professions training programs across the state. With the focus of supporting and developing Connecticut's health care work force, the Connecticut AHEC Network provides state-wide coverage and programming to thousands of residents through its collaboration with more than 200 community based partner organizations.

The Connecticut AHEC Network is based at the University of Connecticut Health Center and is implemented through four regional centers located in the Willimantic, Hartford, Waterbury, and Bridgeport. The four centers enable the Connecticut AHEC Network to carry out local programs with great efficiency. As a statewide program, it functions locally to provide high quality, efficient, effective and flexible services that meet local needs.

The Connecticut AHEC Network's mission and goals directly support health care workforce development in the state. Focus areas include:

- **Recruiting underrepresented minority and disadvantaged students into the health professions.** The Connecticut AHEC Network engages more than 7,000 learners annually from 30+ secondary schools, 9 colleges/universities and 10 health professional schools state-wide.
- **HOT Guide** - Through our on-line health careers manual (HOT Guide – Health Occupations and Technology Careers ([www.healthcareersinct.com](http://www.healthcareersinct.com))), the Connecticut AHEC Network provides current and accurate information on Connecticut based health professions programs, admissions prerequisites, training, credentialing and roles of over 85 health careers to students, parents, teachers, guidance counselors, librarians more than 1 million times each year.
- **Providing continuing education that improves the care received by vulnerable populations.** The Connecticut AHEC Network sponsored 70 continuing education offerings for the state's health care professionals with over 1,600 participants annually. Topics included chronic disease management, immunization and public

health, cultural competence, utilization of medical interpreters, Community Health Workers, etc.

- **Developing and supporting community based inter-professional training opportunities for health professions students.** The Connecticut AHEC Network's Urban Service Track produces a cadre of well qualified health care professionals committed to serving Connecticut's urban underserved populations.
- **Partnering with community organizations to address local health issues and providing outreach to vulnerable populations.**

As part of my duties at Northwestern Connecticut AHEC I fulfilled the role of In-Person Assister as part of Access Health Connecticut's effort to implement the Affordable Care Act in the state of Connecticut. Two of the other AHEC regional centers functioned as Navigator organizations during this effort. This is an example of the Connecticut AHEC Network's ability to quickly respond to the emerging health care needs of our state and play a collaborative role addressing the health care needs of Connecticut's most vulnerable citizens.

As an In-Person Assister I worked closely with the New Haven Health Department, my Navigator Organization. I completed training to be certified and worked through the open enrollment period to education and enroll uninsured citizens in health care plans available on Connecticut's state based exchange. I also provided services at Access Health Connecticut's walk-in center in New Britain, often being the only Spanish speaking Assister at that site. I worked with a second assister at Northwestern Connecticut AHEC who exclusively covered the Litchfield County area. While roll out was rocky at times, Northwestern Connecticut AHEC, dedicated to the mission of Access Health Connecticut, never wavered. During the open enrollment period Northwestern Connecticut AHEC **educated over 1700 citizens about health insurance options on the marketplace and enrolled over 300 citizens in affordable exchanged based health care plans.**

### **Request**

Within its limited funding, the Connecticut AHEC Network reaches a significant number people across the state. To be able to continue our important work, I am respectfully requesting that AHEC funding in the amount of \$456,000 be restored to the AHEC line item in the Higher Education and Workforce Advancement budget.

### **Summary**

Connecticut AHEC seeks to secure a sustained level of funding in the amount of \$456,000 from the state legislature to support the infrastructure created by the Connecticut AHEC Network over the past 17 years.