

**TESTIMONY OF KAITLIN HIGGINS SUBMITTED TO THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
FEBRUARY 10, 2016**

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***H.B. No. 5044 - An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending  
June 30, 2017.***

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Co-Chairs, Ranking Members, and members of the Committee, in my two years as an AmeriCorps member coordinating the Youth Health Service Corps (YHSC) at Northwestern CT Area Health Education Center (AHEC), I saw its tremendous value in community and AHEC's impact throughout Connecticut. AHEC's programming gave students of all ages, from elementary school through university, exposure to crucial information and awareness about public health and health care. Furthermore, I personally witnessed how incredibly engaged it helped young people become in their communities, taking active roles in making positive change for themselves, their peers, their families, and the community at large. AHEC's programming, including YHSC, the Collegiate Health Service Corps (CHSC) and Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) are sustainable, with program participants continuing for several years and developing meaningful mentorships with inspiring and trustworthy young adults. Personally, I believe that spending two years at AHEC through AmeriCorps also gave me extremely valuable experiences and challenges that have helped me pursue graduate education and further career opportunities that I would not have had access to without my time at AHEC. I am a resident of Plantsville.

The CT AHEC Network directly supports primary care workforce development in the state by "connecting students to careers in health, professionals to communities, and communities to better health." Funded since 1997, the CT AHEC Network provides state-wide services to more than 10,000 residents, annually (<http://www.publichealth.uconn.edu/ct-ahec.html>). As the demographics of the state continue to change, the primary care workforce must expand and respond to meet those changes: the CT AHEC Network is an invaluable resource to address these challenges.

The CT AHEC Program utilizes federal, state and private funding to support:

- Inter-professional education and community based training programs for health professions students
- Promotion and retention of primary care providers in collaboration with state agencies
- Cultural competence and medical interpreting training to health professionals and trainees
- Dissemination and recruitment of health professional trainees in the National Health Service Corps
- Continuing medical education programs for public health and health care professionals
- Pipeline educational programs to raise awareness of health careers for pre-health professions learners

As part of the primary care workforce development in the state, the CT AHEC Network provides leadership for the State Innovation Model grant's Community Health Workforce Development and Integration (<http://www.healthreform.ct.gov/ohri/site/default.asp>) bringing collaborative stakeholders together to build infrastructure, policy and sustainability to the development of a Community Health Worker workforce in Connecticut. CT AHEC's support of the Health Occupations and Technology Careers in Connecticut (HOT Guide) provides residents with an invaluable resource to learn about health and biotechnology careers ([www.healthcareersinct.com](http://www.healthcareersinct.com)).

Supported by federal, state and private dollars, the CT AHEC Network's Program Office is located at UConn Health. The 4 regional AHEC Centers, in collaboration with the Program Office, extend UConn Health's reach state-wide. The CT AHEC Network responds to local community health needs which include oral health, veteran's mental health, youth and adult mental health first aid, teen health literacy, homeless and migrant farm worker access to health care.

I have been fortunate to be part of this program which allowed me to further my life and educational experiences. I cannot express the consequences and unreplaceable void this would leave for the state of Connecticut. I personally feel that if CT AHEC Network is not restored its funding that it would be very detrimental to the community. Thank you for your consideration of my testimony. Below is my contact information for your convenience.

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