TESTIMONY OF CHERIE POIRIER SUBMITTED TO THE APPROPRIATIONS AND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON FEBRUARY 10, 2016

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

Co-Chairs, Ranking Members, and members of the Committee, I, Cherie Poirier, an Eastern AHEC, Inc. employee, submit this testimony to support the CT Area Health Education Network regarding H.B. No. 5044 for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017. Eastern Area Health Education Center (AHEC), Inc. is a non-profit organization targeting youth, minority students, nontraditional and first generation college students with the goal focused on preventing these students—our future--from dropping out of school and increasing healthcare services to our communities who need it the most. As AHEC is a national organization, Eastern AHEC, Inc. is part of Connecticut's AHEC Network (CTAHEC) and is the first non-profit AHEC to open its doors in Connecticut (1996), marking 20 years as an established organization.

The CT AHEC Programs and networks directly support primary care workforce development throughout the state by "connecting students to careers, professionals to communities, and communities to better health." Funded since 1997, CT AHEC provides state-wide services to more than 10,000 residents annually, and growing (http://www.publichealth.uconn.edu/ct-ahec.html). As the demographics of the state changes, the primary care workforce must expand and respond to meet those needs. The CT AHEC Program is an invaluable resource addressing these challenges at both a state and local level.

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

- Inter-professional education and community based training programs for students focused on health professions;
- 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 in the pipeline, raising awareness of health careers for the pre-health profession learners.

Additionally, as part of the State's primary care workforce development, the CT AHEC Program 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. Likewise, 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 and opportunities in the state (www.healthcareersinct.com).

Supported by federal, state and private dollars, the CT AHEC Program Office is located at UConn Health in Farmington, CT. The 4 regional AHEC Centers, in collaboration with the Program Office, extend UConn Health's reach state-wide. The AHEC Program builds partnerships that address community health needs including oral health, veteran's mental health, youth mental health, first aid, teen health literacy, and access for the homeless and migrant farm worker.

Each AHEC network serving its Connecticut region is forceful, powerful and necessary. We provide our communities, those you serve, with access to health care resources and programs for higher learning. We have been influential in developing a successful healthcare workforce—enhancing access to culturally and linguistically appropriate healthcare education. It increases the diversity, quality, and distribution of future healthcare professionals.

Without this network, essential programs such as Medical Interpreter Program, Youth Health Collegiate Services (YHSC), Collegiate Health Service Corp (CHSC), Covenant Soup Kitchen Health Clinic, Retention and Recruitment Initiative (RRA), Veterans Mental Health Initiative, and others mentioned above will no longer be offered to our fellow Connecticut state residents who need it the most. These programs have been heavily relied on--by many--throughout the years. I personally feel that if the CT AHEC Network is not restored its funding, our services to our communities would be disbanded, leaving an unreplaceable void, making it nearly impossible to reinstate in the future.

Please do not eliminate Connecticut AHEC from the 2015-2017 state budget.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service.

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