

George P. Wang
University of Connecticut
Appropriations Committee
February 10th, 2016 Public Hearing

As a public university, the University of Connecticut has a mandate to provide access to higher education for the citizens of Connecticut. It has a mandate to help improve the human condition by empowering the citizenry. It has a mandate to facilitate the processes of our society by spreading the very knowledge that makes an informed democracy possible. Today, I will testify against budget cuts that hinder the University of Connecticut in executing these mandates. Today, I will testify for an investment in Connecticut's future.

In general, cuts in state funding to public universities have led to negatively impacted operations. Slashes in state funding lead to a unstable budgets. To the educator who is considering applying for a position at an institution of higher learning, this means unpredictable job security. To the researcher who is considering applying for a position at an institution of innovation, this means unpredictable support for research. All of this would hinder the University of Connecticut as it seeks to expand research, faculty, and student enrollment. Despite all of this, the UConn managed to increase its student enrollment last year, bringing in a total of 5,200 freshmen – 145 of whom are valedictorians and salutatorians. Our professors and researchers have developed solutions for many of the challenges we face today. We've increased the efficiency of solar panels (Kumar.) In conjunction with other institutions, we've developed a cheap and quick test for sickle cell (Tasoglu.) We've announced plans to be able to regenerate human limbs by 2030 (Laurecin.) These are just some of the many accomplishments we've had in the past year. I would urge the state to not put our future accomplishments at risk.

In September 2015, the Governor, citing an instable stock market, announced approximately \$4 million in cuts for the University of Connecticut. Two months later, the Governor proposed an additional \$21 million in cuts to the state legislature. Without an effective way of fighting these cuts, the University announced that it was considering additional tuition hikes in the next four years in order to help reduce the projected deficit. The Board of Trustees recently approved a plan that would see in-state tuition increase by \$700 this year and 7% each year for three years after that. Out-of-state students will see a 3% increase each year for the next four years, approximately a \$950 raise each year. All of this has led to concerns that the University is becoming unaffordable for many Connecticut citizens. One professor at the University of Connecticut questioned whether or not the hikes would disproportionately affect low-income families who are seeking to send their children to the very flagship university that their taxes help fund. Perhaps this is true. I can't say for sure. What I can say, is that the proportion of out-of-state students at UConn has gone up from three percent 2014 to 2015. Diversity has gone down: in 2014, 33.8% of freshmen came from minority groups, compared to 32% in 2015.

Budget slashes such as these are forcing UConn to implement budget cuts across the board in order to make up for lost state funding. Students are beginning to see the impacts: we've seen library hours reduced and we've seen the mailrooms so wracked by cuts that many students

didn't get their textbooks until halfway through the semester. Financial aid has gone down, academic units have been consolidated, and academic programs have been reduced.

All of this is happening despite the fact that Investment in public education is vital and beneficial to the state of Connecticut. State investment in public education ultimately generates increased revenue for the state. Higher education tends to generate economic growth around it: from job creation to public benefits from research. Money also comes directly from the college graduate. On average, a UConn graduate makes \$51,900 as a starting salary. Compare this to the average \$19,000 that a high school graduate makes. Through income taxes and sales taxes, the state ends up making money from a better educated populace. As the Connecticut and national economy continue to evolve, investment in higher education becomes more and more imperative, if the state wishes to remain competitive.

Ever since its founding in 1881, the University of Connecticut has remained a cornerstone of Connecticut society and the economy. It has served to provide education for citizens of Connecticut: to provide the tools for the state to overcome challenges abound. I will finish by asking that the state acknowledge our achievements. I ask that the state recognize our dedication to progress. We have fulfilled our mandate to to society, but now we need your help to continue our work. Today, I have testified against budget cuts that have put our work at risk. I have testified for an investment in Connecticut's future. Today, I hope that you will recognize the benefits that such an investment would have.