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I attended high school in one of Chicago's North Shore suburbs, a notoriously academically competitive area where each high school boasts some of the highest college acceptance rates, graduation rates, and state championship titles for everything from sports to academic competitions. As lucky as I was and still am for that kind of academic environment, the college acceptance game in my area is a challenge like no other. Since my high school peers and I all live in the Midwest, the go to colleges to apply to are members of the Big 10 athletics league, which has a large presence. Though for a lot of kids who live elsewhere with similar GPA's and test scores, these schools would be considered "safety schools," kids in my area don't have that peace of mind. Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, Northwestern, Indiana, even Illinois, they can't all accept hundreds of kids from the North Shore. Thus, we were pushed to look farther from home for places to attend college. For me, I looked at a lot of East Coast schools, but none as intensely as UConn.

I fell in love with UConn because it is limitless. Academically, I feel as though I could study anything here and graduate feeling prepared for the world beyond Storrs. I got to campus and changed my major from marketing to political science, I'm considering picking up a French minor, my professors are interesting people who have done extensive work in their fields. I'm an extremely involved student; I go to eleven different extracurricular meetings a week. I'm president of the Junior Panhellenic Council, serving as a senator of the Undergraduate Student Government, volunteering to tutor children in the Manchester area, parliamentarian of Gamma

Phi Beta, I work as a stagehand at the Jorgenson Center for the Performing Arts, am a member of the UConn Law Society, and that isn't even half of my schedule. I can do almost anything at UConn because UConn has the ability to accommodate that.

UConn was my way of bringing myself back to the East Coast. Until my family moved to Chicago when they relocated my father, my family had lived in Connecticut for three generations. Coming to Connecticut was not only meaningful, but purposeful. I hope to stay in the area after graduation. UConn was my way of laying down roots here in Connecticut to build my future here as well as return to my past.

I am the oldest of three children, with a brother who is a senior in high school. Midway through last semester, he came to visit me and tour the school. He's planning to pursue a business major and continue studying Chinese in college, and after seeing UConn firsthand, he sent in his application on his flight back home. We're waiting for him to hear back, but we'd both love to make our family a UConn family.

Plenty of my friends from high school inquired about my decision to go to school so far away from home. I recently interviewed for an internship and the interviewer marveled at UConn, animatedly chatting with me about the basketball team and him reading about our rise in the college rankings. The UConn name holds a certain cache that is not the same at every school. We are nationally ranked and nationally known. As someone who is hoping to remain out east after graduation, it mattered a lot to me to go to a school people in the area would recognize and respect.

Of course, as a college student, affordability of my education is extremely important to me. The estimated cost for me to attend my home state's flagship university, the University of Illinois, ended up being more expensive than for me to come to UConn after receiving my scholarships. The cost of attendance at the University of Illinois has priced out a lot of my friends and pushed them to look at other states' universities as I had to do. This "pricing out" has driven away quite a few people I know who have extremely competitive applications much like my own. Suffice to say, Illinois has lost out on a lot of talent because of the price tag. It would be a shame to see that occur here too.

I urge you to consider the weight of your decision. The University of Connecticut has not only changed my life but will continue to do so. It has pushed me to go farther than I ever could have imagined. I testify before you today, here at a state capitol that isn't even my own, because I sincerely appreciate everything this education has offered me. I come to this university, 800 miles away from where I grew up, far from my parents, high school friends, and my comfort zone, because I love it. This university is simply extraordinary and it needs your help to continue to be that way.