LOB Speech
UConn
Ronny Heredia

Good afternoon. My name is Ronny Heredia and I am a senior studying history and urban and community studies at the University of Connecticut. I am here to speak on behalf of UConn's regional campus students, and to share my story.

I grew up in Manchester, Connecticut in a low-income household with parents who had never experienced life as a college student. From a young age, my parents encouraged me to attend a university, but they also knew that it would not be easy, not due to my academic ability, but due to the fact that they were not members of the college network. They did not know how to navigate the college environment.

Although I did well in high school, the school I attended is in one of the bottom 30 districts in the state and did not adequately prepare me for the rigors of a tier 1 research institution. I was a hard working student in high school, but in college, I quickly discovered that academics are not the only challenge: I needed guidance on the financial aid process, on navigating the college environment, and on how to communicate effectively with university faculty and staff.

Thankfully, I was selected to participant in UConn's Student Support Services program and ConnCAS, which serves first generation, low income, and underrepresented students at the university. SSS provided me with acceptance to UConn contingent upon my successful completion of an intensive 6-week summer program prior to freshmen year. The summer program helped prepare me for the rigors of higher education. The SSS counselors have continued to support me throughout my time in college, not only academically, but also encouraging me to take on opportunities such as internships and community involvement.

While I am fortunate to have been admitted to UConn through the SSS program, I know that many of my friends, who come from cities like Hartford and Bridgeport and from more difficult backgrounds than mine, would not be able to attend UConn in the face of these budget cuts. Budget cuts will hurt the support programs and the students they serve. While these cuts may appear to be small drops of water in a larger ocean, they will without a doubt have a ripple effect.

Every year since I've been at UConn we have grown more diverse. If the proposed budget cut were to pass, it would have a direct impact on minority enrollment and retention at UConn. Without adequate support services and financial aid, low income students might not have the opportunity to attend their flagship institution, further perpetuating the cycle of poverty in their families and in their communities.

Through programs like SSS, UConn continues to uphold its mission to serve *all* of Connecticut's citizens, regardless of where they've graduated high school or their socioeconomic status. In order to continue fulfilling its mission, UConn must be able to fund programs that support students like me in achieving our dream of earning a college degree.

I chose UConn because it was the best option academically and financially. UConn opened so many doors for me, giving me a brighter future. Currently, I am enrolled in UConn's Fast Track program for a Masters in Public Administration. I am excited to say that I will be seeking a career in Educational Policy in the state of Connecticut upon graduation.

When I look around at my peers I see a brighter future. I see a Connecticut that is starting to reap the rewards of its investment in higher education. I hope that my words today and the progress that UConn has made will prompt you to reconsider the proposed budget cuts.

Thank you, committee members, for holding this hearing and for allowing me to speak today. Thank you, General Assembly, for your past support, and thank you, everyone, for listening to my story.