Testimony of
Dr. David Banach

Appropriations Committee
March 7, 2019

Re: UConn Health

Members of the Appropriations Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience at UConn Health and thank you for your ongoing support of our institution and our mission. I am an Infectious Diseases doctor, epidemiologist and Head of Infection Prevention at UConn Health. I was born in New Haven, raised in Trumbull and graduated from UConn with both my medical degree and a Master’s Degree in Public Health.

I returned to CT to practice medicine after completing my residency and fellowship out of state. I came back to UConn for two reasons – my commitment to teaching medical, dental and public health students and physicians-in-training, and my commitment to our state. Connecticut is my home and UConn is the school that is dedicated to transitioning Connecticut’s best students, residents and fellows into outstanding, dedicated and compassionate attending physicians and dentists.

I wanted to take my time with you tonight to share a few words on the impact that UConn Health has on the public health of our state. Our medical and dental faculty, trainees and students are all dedicated to improving the health of our state. Additionally, UConn Health has been the training ground for countless public health professionals, many of whom serve in leadership roles throughout our state, in both the public and private sector. As an academic partner with the Connecticut Department of Public Health we foster collaborations between clinicians, epidemiologists and public health practitioners throughout the state.

I will highlight two examples in which our trainees and faculty are actively involved in research and public health activities that extend beyond the walls of our health center.

I am currently mentoring Romina Bromberg, a UConn Infectious Diseases fellow, working on a collaborative project with the Connecticut DPH healthcare-associated infections program. We are collecting data on Candida bloodstream infections among CT residents and the use of antifungal medications among all hospitals throughout the state. These blood infections have some of highest rates of morbidity and mortality of all infections among patients in Connecticut, particularly among our most vulnerable patients. We anticipate that through these academic-public health collaborations we will be able to better understand the epidemiology of these infections and work with hospitals throughout the state to provide guidance on how to prevent and best prepare to treat these infections.

I am working with Simran Gupta, 3rd year medical student at UConn, and colleagues at DPH studying the epidemiology of carbapenem-resistant bacteria, those highly antibiotic-resistant “superbugs”, throughout Connecticut. We are studying differences in the risk factors and clinical outcomes of these infections in different healthcare settings. With data from this project, we will begin to design interventions to reduce these devastating infections and thwart the spread of these dangerous organisms in our state.
These are not health threats that are limited to UConn Health patients or individuals living in the Farmington Valley, but public health challenges that impact all residents of Connecticut. These are only a few examples in which UConn students and faculty work with our state leadership to solve critical public health threats and improve the health of our state. This is the value of having a public academic health center: a place whose mission it is to educate and train the next generation of clinicians, researchers, public health providers and leaders. And because it is UConn – educating mostly Connecticut residents – these scientists, providers and leaders stay in the State of Connecticut, to work, raise families, and live.

UConn Health has taken large budget cuts in recent years. Failing to provide UConn Health with the funding it needs jeopardizes these important activities. Without a strong UConn Health - Who will train our public health workforce? Our public health physicians? Our epidemiologists? Our community health advocates? And who will carry out the public health work being done to protect Connecticut’s citizens?

It is critical that we ensure that UConn Health and our Schools of Medicine, Dental Medicine and Graduate Program in Public Health continue to thrive. We cannot jeopardize the training of our own clinical and public health workforce. The consequences of failing to do so will be devastating and downright dangerous to Connecticut residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you regarding the value of UConn Health and for your ongoing support for its financial health.