Co-Chairs Osten and Walker, Vice Chairs Hartley, DiMassa and Horn, Ranking Members Formica and Lavielle and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Michael Bailey and I am the Executive Director of the University of Connecticut American Association of University Professors (UConn-AAUP). UConn-AAUP is the union that represents the faculty and coaches at the University of Connecticut Storrs and Regional Campuses. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide testimony before the Appropriations Committee today.

I write in support of Governor Lamont’s proposed biennium budget beginning July 1, 2019. Total UConn appropriations from the Governor’s biennium budget include a slight increase to the current funding levels, allowing the University to continue to provide Connecticut students with an outstanding education of great value for their hard earned dollars. (UConn ranks in the Top 25 public universities in the nation according to U.S. News & World Report America’s Best Colleges (2018))

Overall, there was increase in Full-time (FT) and Part-time (PT) faculty and staff, although there was a slight decrease in FT Tenure, Tenure track faculty (-20) with an increase in (FT) non-tenure track faculty (+15) from FY 17 – FY 18. Of the 24,000 undergraduate students enrolled in the Fall or 2018, 72% of them at the Main campus were Connecticut residents.

Of concern for UConn-AAUP is the increasing cost of fringe benefits, and what has been perceived as being extremely generous benefits for University employees. In fact, of the largest driver for benefits cost – State Employees Retirement System, 33% of that cost is associated with the unfunded liability
from historically poor administrative decisions. When the high fringe rate is incorporated into research grants, it puts the researchers at a disadvantage with their peers and with the funding agencies.

The high fringe rates for UConn and UConn Health are approximately 20% points higher than their peer institutions. Higher fringe rates result in fewer dollars to support research activities and the hiring of more state employees. Funding agencies make awards dependent upon getting the best “bang for their buck.” If another institution with less fringe costs can use more funds for research activity, they will award that institution. A non-award of one grant can lead to non-awards of future grants.

UConn Storrs is looking for assistance in the fringe rate that is applied to the University’s non-state funds, similar to what was given to UConn-Health and the Connecticut State University System in the past. The projected cost of the FY 19 fringe rate for non-state funds is $42.9 million. A similar projected number would have to be incorporated in the FY 20 and FY 21 biennium budget from the general fund to cover this fringe rate.

UConn-AAUP supports any measures to reduce the unsustainable burden placed on research grants for their faculty and is willing to assist in a dialogue to address it.