CHAIRPERSON: Representative Toni E. Walker

SENATORS: Flexer, Hartley

REPRESENTATIVES: Baker, Haddad, Hall, Johnson, Rotella, Simms

REP. WALKER (93RD): -- the list, the list. Coralys Santana. Coralys. Coralys. Yeah! After Coralys, Kevin Claffey. Is Kevin Claffey still here? Yes? Okay, good. Go right ahead, ma'am. Push that little button and don't forget to let me know who you are.

CORALYS SANTANA: Thank you, Madam Chair. My name is Coralys Santana and I apologize for the way that I sound. I am just getting over an illness, but I thought --

REP. WALKER (93RD): You sound fantastic.

CORALYS SANTANA: [laughing] I thought it'd be very important for me to be here today, so I am a UConn Waterbury graduate. I am a UConn Waterbury, you know, I played Blue and that's where my heart is. So that's why I'm here, even after I've graduated. I graduated in the class of 2018. Many of you may have seen me in the building, but I am a Waterbury resident. And thanks to the opportunities that this campus has provided for me, I am actually in the process of, you know, buying my first condo with my husband, and we're expecting a baby girl, so that is just part of the landscape of opportunity that attending this campus and graduating as a first-generation student has allowed me. So it all
started -- I used to live in Puerto Rico. Spanish is my first language, and so when I used to come visit my mom in the summers and the winters, I lived across the street from the campus at UConn Waterbury. And I remember being a young girl, probably about ten years old, saying to mom, you know, "When I grow up, I wanna go to that school across the street." And, lo and behold, that is where I went. I did have the opportunity to go to Storrs and I refused. And not many people say that, but I did fall in love with this city. And there is a lot of good to be said of Waterbury and the development that has happened over the years. And I think that UConn is a central hub to that development. And so, if that campus was not there, I don't know if these same people that have graduated with the same people that, you know, I still know that are attending would have had the privilege of an education of that standard, because as a first-generation, Latino student, I had to work all four years of college. I did not have the luxury to dorm or, you know, travel. I had to work two or three jobs at a time as a student, and I needed the flexibility of a commuter campus to do so.

So I started off as a political science major. When my time was up, I was supposed to go to Storrs in two years; I refused. So I changed my major to urban and community studies. And now, that major, you can barely finish there because we are losing teachers, we are losing resources, and it's detrimental that if we as a state want to keep people my age here, that we give them that opportunity to be able to still provide for their families and pursue their education. And that is
why I am here, despite being and sounding the way that I sound, is because I know and believe that, true to my heart, that this campus is central to the mission of the state to grow young people, to develop young people, and keep them in the state. [bell ring] So thank you, Madam Chair.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and thank you for staying so that you can testify. Thank you very much. Have a good day. You take care of that cold. Kevin Claffey. After Kevin, Bobby Berridault. Berridault? Bobby Berridault? [discussion over pronunciation] Is Bobby -- Oh, okay. Go right ahead, sir.

KEVIN CLAFFEY: Good evening. Thank you for letting me speak on behalf of UConn Health. My name is Dr. Kevin Claffey. Is that too -- It reverberates quite loud here. Is it okay?

REP. WALKER (93RD): You're okay.

KEVIN CLAFFEY: My name is Dr. Kevin Claffey. I'm a professor of cell and vascular biology at UConn Health. I'm also the president of faculty AAUP and a breast cancer researcher. And tonight, I would like to address the importance of funding UConn Health, and in particular, the unfunded liability part of the fringe rates that's charged to our grants and to the institution.

My colleagues and I have provided testimony that will demonstrate the adverse effects of these costs added on to our grants arising from the inadequate past funding of pension obligations by the state. The major impact of this additional fringe cost is significantly hampering our ability to not only support the mission of UConn Health in research,
education, and clinical care, but it also affects negatively on our ability to have more jobs, taxes paid by those employees, and the downstream benefits of the research, including research dollars, patents, new companies that could be supported of the investments Connecticut has made in the biomedical technology sectors.

One of our requests from the previous hearings on HB 7118 was to assess the actual impact of these fringe rates. So one of the major impacts is our clear ability to compete for federal grants for the simple reason that we cannot hire additional personnel during a multi-year grant period; thus, we have reduced productivity and reduced output to be able to compete for these very difficult follow-up grants when the funding rates are typically below 10 percent. So there's an extremely difficult threshold to pass. Now, our fringe rates at UConn Health are paid with monies used to do research. That's called direct cost money. And are between 18 and 25 percent more than in comparable institutions such as UMass Worcester, Rutgers, University of Vermont, Michigan State, and Penn State. Now that number, which is kinda hard -- You put in a number. It's 18 to 25 percent of their salary more. So that's a significant amount of money. It's not 18 or 15 percent of a small number; it's the whole salary percentage. So it's quite a bit. So, overall, from the 46 research centers and departments at UConn Health, scientists bring in about $83.6 million dollars of fund in last fiscal year. The estimate for reducing this fringe charge on grant down to comparable rates at other institutions and our fellow researchers is about $4
million for UConn Health, and I believe it's a similar level at UConn Storrs.

At UConn Health, deferring the nonfunded portion of the fringe charge on grants amounts to our ability to hire probably at least 50 to 65 additional students, postdoctoral fellows, and importantly, highly-trained professional staff that help us do this research and translate the research into cures and benches and start-up companies that contribute to improving our local economy. [bell ring] Well, my colleagues and I hope you take this opportunity to understand the high level of return for this investment and capitalize on the state's investment in UConn, UConn Health, and bioscience initiatives. These will provide jobs and economic vitality to keep our best-trained doctors, dentists, and researchers right here in Connecticut. And I'll stop there. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and we're gonna have a hearing on fringe, and I'm hoping that UConn will be there, as well as our CSU system to talk about this. So at that time, I hope we can have that conversation.

KEVIN CLAFFEY: That would be great. It would be hard to keep us away. Let's put it that way. [laughing]


BOBBY BERRIAULT: Good evening, everyone. My name is Bobby Berriault and I'm a current student at the University of Connecticut School of Law. And I'm
also a alumni of Central Connecticut State University and Asnuntuck Community College.

The reason why I'm here today is because I wanna advocate for more funding and resources to the CSCU system, because, I mean, tuition has gone up 40 percent like since the Great Recession, and it's really hard for people to afford to go to college. And my great fear is that we're pricing an entire social economic class of people out of the higher education market, and I don't really think that's fair. I mean, coming from my own experiences like -- So, like, I grew up without a family and I grew up in five foster homes and two group homes, and, you know, having Asperger's and living in poverty, I've had a really difficult life. And the reality is like, Asnuntuck Community College and CCSU really saved me. Like, without the opportunities I've had at community college and the state university system, I mean, I certainly wouldn't be here. I mean, who knows what would've happened to me, but it wouldn't have been good. And so, like, I know people are skeptical about the American dream, and they're like, "Well, the American dream is like dead or it doesn't exist; it's not real." But, I mean, it is real, because, like, I'm living it. Like, someone who, like, came from nowhere and came from nothing, you know, I'm able to be in a position where I'm able to be doing well, but I didn't really get to do -- I didn't do it alone.

I mean, the fact is, I've had a lot of support, you know, through school, through community college and CCSU. And, you know, going to CCSU, CCSU was actually the home that I never had, because it's like, even though I was there like 365 days of the
year -- I was there Christmas, Easter, you know, there have been plenty of days I was the only one there on campus. Like, it was so wonderful, because for the first time in my life, people actually cared about me. And people like, they, I mean, people really wanted me to succeed. And I didn't have that before. And so the reason why I'm able to be a good person and do good things for other people is because of the opportunities that the state of Connecticut through the higher educational institutions have provided to me.

So I hope that -- I mean, there's the community colleges in particular, but even the state universities are able to get all the resources and all the funding that they need. I mean, not like hundreds of millions of dollars more, but just enough so that there could be enough teachers and enough peer professionals, and people can have the same opportunities that I had. Thank you very much.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, thank you. That's an incredible story. And where are you going to law school?

BOBBY BERRIAULT: Oh, I'm going to UConn now.

REP. WALKER (93RD): You got it.

BOBBY BERRIAULT: This is my last semester ever as a full-time student. So I'm a little nervous, but I think I'm gonna be okay.

REP. WALKER (93RD): You did a fabulous job and thank you so much for staying to talk to us. Thank you so much. Have a good day.

BOBBY BERRIAULT: Thank you. You too.
REP. WALKER (93RD): Alix. Let's see, Ion, Ion?
Yes, okay. Go right ahead.

ALIX DEYMIER: Hi. I'm Alix Deymier and I am a
basic science assistant professor at UConn Health.
I have my own lab and most of what I do is I study
bones. I try to understand how bones change when
people have different diseases, why they change,
what happens to their overall health, and I'm really
focused on trying to develop treatments that help
people in the long run, you know, people who have
osteoporosis, with broken bones. So from the point
of view of a research perspective, I'm doing work
that will hopefully help millions of people.

Now from a local perspective, my lab also hires
about one to three students every year and about one
to two postdocs every year. Currently, I have two
wonderful graduate students, Anna Pearson and
Stephanie Wong, and I'm about to hire a new graduate
student who is a fabulous student who has lots of
fellowships coming in to UConn, and so locally, I'm
able to hire these people and benefit their
mentoring and increase their education and make them
the type of people who will allow them to be amazing
employees in Connecticut, which is just a fabulous
part of the job. I also teach biomaterials at UConn
in the Department of Biomedical Engineering. So
every year, I'm teaching between 160 and 200
students, undergraduate and graduate. So my job
consists not only of the research I do in the lab,
mentoring the students, but also teaching
undergraduates so that they can then be the type of
employees that we want to keep in our state. We
bring in the best students. We wanna keep them here
and have them be the most talented individuals
working in the all the businesses that we have.
Now, all of these students are almost exclusively funded through grants. I write lots of grants. I spend a lot of time writing them, hoping and wishing that we get the funding. Now, things like fringe rate being so high makes it so difficult. When we get these grants, that has to cover everything, research costs, salary, fringe. And so if we have to put a lot of money into fringe, that's less research or that's less people that I can hire. And if I can't hire more people, then that means I have to spend more time in the lab, which I love. But that means that I can't teach as much. And that means that I can't write as many grants. So now I'm in this vicious cycle of constantly being at a disadvantage. I don't have enough students because I can't afford the students because the fringe is high. Now I can't support my research. Now I'm having issues that I can't teach as much, so I have to cut back my hours, which means I simply can't employ as many people in Connecticut. I can't train as many students, and I can't make sure that we have as many people as possible going through the UConn system that are producing great research, great PhDs, great masters, even just getting their bachelor's and going into work in all the technological fields.

So I'm essentially here to say if we can get the funding to help cover fringe, to help sustain UConn Health as an entity, and make sure that we're not at a disadvantage compared to other universities, we can really benefit the entire state by training people who will keep the economy going, from bringing people in -- Not a single one of my students is local; they all come from other states. -- that are young, that are motivated,
that are happy to be here and get the knowledge that we can provide. So I think it's a really good return on investments to invest in this. [bell ring]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and thank you for your testimony.

ALIX DEYMIER: Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Is it Ion or is it Jon? I can't tell if that's an I or a J.

ION MORARU: It's an I and it's pronounced as it'd be ee’yon. Like a Y.


ION MORARU: I am delighted to be here. My name is Ion Moraru. I am a professor in the Center for Cell Analysis & Modeling at UConn Health. I have been a faculty at UConn Health for 25 years. So I think that speaks to itself that I love UConn and UConn Health. I had quite a few opportunities, some of them quite recent, to leave, but it became a family for me. And I actually watched it grow in 25 years from an underdog to a really top-notch research university in the country, one of the best. And that made me very proud.

But the reason I came here is because I have seen the last few years the danger of this going up ending and that we will, that UConn and UConn Health will fall on a down spiraling curve because of several factors that you are all aware of.

I will speak in concrete terms now to the fringe rates that have been mentioned before where I have a concrete example of yet another way in which we can
lose, not lose in a competition to competitors, but lose to collaborators. I have [clears throat] -- I am part of three national biotechnology research centers that are currently funded at UConn Health. There's only a handful of institutions, Harvard and UCSC among them, in the country that have three active center grants like that. The last one was awarded in June of last year and I'm a codirector of that center in collaboration with University of Washington, Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York, and Auckland Bioengineering Institute in New Zealand.

So we had a position in that grant application that was supposed to be hired through UConn Health, and because of the abnormally high fringe rates, we could not meet the money cap. And we could actually meet the cap on the grant by moving that position to my collaborators in Mount Sinai in New York City. Now if we have outpriced ourself to a medical school in New York City, that is lunacy.

You know, we're still doing -- That position will work collaboratively with us, but in quantitative terms, a five-year, full-time, high-skill position and $1.4 million dollars in federal grants were lost by UConn and the state of Connecticut to Mount Sinai and the state of New York. [bell ring] It would not have been that way if the funding, the fringe benefit would have been at the previous rate was a total investment of $165,000 from the state. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you and thank you. I hope you heard where we said we're gonna talk about this in a hearing.

ION MORARU: I am glad.
REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Thank you for testifying. Annabelle, Elizabeth Appel. Elizabeth, come on down. We wanna get everybody out of here by 8:30 p.m. [laughing]

ANNABELLE RODRIGUEZ-OQUENDO: Thank you for giving me this opportunity. I'm Dr. Annabelle Rodriguez-Oquendo. I'm a physician, a scientist, professor of cell biology, endowed professor at University of Connecticut at the Health Center, and I came to UConn in 2012. I was recruited from Johns Hopkins as part of the Bioscience Connecticut Initiative right with the mission to take discovery science to commercialization for the greater good. And so we have a start-up company over at the Farmington Avenue. It's called Lipid Genomics, and I'm the founder. I'm the inventor of seven patents, two of them that we accomplished here at UConn since I arrived in 2012. My expertise is in cardiovascular disease, the genetics of cholesterol and risks for heart attacks. And so the two patents that have been issued, and one now progressing into the foreign phase, relates to inflammation in heart attacks.

Now I've provided you a table in my testimony that shows you exactly what we're talking about quantifying the lost opportunity because of the high fringe. These are things that I did when I brought by grant from Hopkins, was with a 35-percent fringe rate. And I know, Representative Walker, you were just talking about the hearing on the fringe. I definitely want to be a part of that. But you'll see that that table, when you look at what we have to pay at a 69-percent fringe for our staff, these are professional staff. If we reduce it to 42 percent what I pay for fringe, I would save $28,000
dollars a year on my budget. And if I used a 35-percent fringe, like what they do at Harvard, with my colleagues, I'd save $36,000 dollars a year. And that's money definitely that we would hire students from CCSU, which I've done in the past in special payroll. But also students from underrepresented groups, racial, ethnic minority, rural areas. There's money that could be used to really support the STEM population here in Connecticut. And when you're losing $36,000 dollars a year, it's not competitive.

Now I presented to Representative Haddad's group with the higher education two weeks ago. And I read the testimony from Comptroller Lembo and I also read the testimony, the public testimony from Scott Jordan, and so I'd only say that -- I even actually emailed Lembo. -- that he wasn't supportive of HB 7118 in its current written form and he offered suggestions for perhaps increases in the general fund to pay for this excess unfunded liability from the pension. And all I'm gonna say here is that we should have explicit allocations of money that go to the research dollars. Because there's $13.5 million dollars that returns to the Health Center that the researchers don't benefit from, as you can see from that table. We're not afraid of competing. I'm now in a public university compared to a private, and I can tell you that neither myself nor my colleagues are afraid of competing. We want our ideas to make a difference and we want to take our ideas and go from discovery science to commercialization for the greater good. But it has to be a fair competition. So thank you.
REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. I just have a quick question. You work at UConn. How long have you been working at UConn?

ANNABELLE RODRIGUEZ-OQUENDO: Since 2012.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Since 2012. So you are not a Tier 1 or a Tier 2 or Tier 3?

ANNABELLE RODRIGUEZ-OQUENDO: No. Yeah, I'm on the ARP.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Mm-hmm. That's part of the reason why we need to have a conversation because --

ANNABELLE RODRIGUEZ-OQUENDO: Yeah. [Crosstalk]

REP. WALKER (93RD): -- you're not a Tier 1, and that's what that, what we'll talk about.

ANNABELLE RODRIGUEZ-OQUENDO: Well, we're still -- Well, if you look at the table, and that 69 percent from my, it's come off of our direct budget, so --

REP. WALKER (93RD): We will have that conversation.

ANNABELLE RODRIGUEZ-OQUENDO: Beautiful. Thank you.


ELIZABETH APPEL: Hi. Good evening. My name is Elizabeth Appel. I'm a primary care internist and assistant professor of medicine at UConn Health. And I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you this evening in support of UConn Health, the only public hospital in Connecticut. And I just want to say I appreciate what you do for the citizens of Connecticut. I'm a primary care
physician educated in a public medical school in Georgia, chose training in a fully public program in Boston. At the time, it was Boston City Hospital, known as the real St. Elsewhere, if you remember the T.V. show. In '94, I looked for a practice opportunity in Connecticut in an underserved area with a diverse patient population. I remained with my original medical group, when in 2001 we merged with UConn Health. Personally, I had a baby at UConn and when the babies got older and broke their bones, my colleagues were their ER physicians and orthopedists. Now, my grown-up 19-year-old will enroll at UConn at Storrs in Engineering.

We work as hard in my practice as we would at ProHealth, Trinity Health, solo practice, but I'm able to practice blinded to any consideration of type of insurance, which is the only way to model care for our next generation of physicians. My patients may be professors, for example, and they share the waiting room with my patients who in other systems would be shuttled to Medicaid clinics. If my patient changes insurance, I don't have to let them go because "We don't take Medicaid." My experience as a trainee in a public hospital in Boston shaped core values of compassion, respect for cultures, and doing the most sometimes with the least resources. And these are the core values of all of UConn Health.

I value our public hospital and clinic network. Recently, I saw someone in my office with a serious problem. I called the specialist who had them immediately admitted for diagnostic surgery. The patient came back in in follow-up very quickly, in addition to complimenting about their wonderful coordinated care. Students worked with me in the
office and were there when the patient came back in and it was a remarkable learning opportunity.

I have a huge network of clinical advisors just to call or email away when I have challenging cases, and this doesn’t happen effortlessly in other systems with multiple private practices, independent.

So I will close my testimony stating that I love our public hospital. I feel privileged to belong to UConn Health and hope that the legislature will support our public hospital and clinic system at UConn. And, again, thank you for this opportunity to speak to you in person.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and thank you for your commitment to health care. Thank you. Ibrahim, and then Michael Bailey, right behind him. And is Michael Baldwin here? Is Michael Baldwin -- Okay, good. Go right ahead.

IBRAHIM ELAI: Good evening. My name is Ibrahim Elai. I'm the vice president of AUP at UConn. I'm a nephrologist, a kidney specialist, assistant professor of medicine, I teach medical students, and I'm involved in research at the UConn Technology Incubation Program. I have my own project there.

I'm here today to speak in support of UConn. I've been working in the public health delivery for the last 14 years. Most of my practice is revolves around public health and I -- We are like the only public hospital in the state and that's a well-known fact. And we take a lot of Medicare and Medicaid. In fact, we are, as a nephrologist, kidney specialist, we are the only nephrologist in the
Hartford area that takes Medicaid patient as our patient, so, that has nowhere to go.

Health care delivery and health care disparity has been a big problem for the country, and keeping the public health care backbone with UConn Health available to the public is a key to keep UConn healthy, or Connecticut healthy. In addition, I heard like two testimonies prior from a student and from somebody who was, you know, taking advantage of the public education. And that's when medical education become half million dollars award, you know, providing that backbone to minorities, that can get a medical education, that's key to serve to serve their population. And there's a lot of data on that. So keeping UConn as a public and supporting it, supporting UConn is very important to keep Connecticut going as far as health care and education, to provide physicians for a few years to come. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and thank you for staying and thank you for your testimony. Michael Bailey, and then Michael Baldwin, and after Michael Baldwin -- Oh, good. After Michael Baldwin, Ali -- What's Ali's name, Ali DeGirolamo?

ALI DEGIROLAMO: DeGirolamo.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Okay, I was close, huh? [laughing] Go right ahead, sir.

MICHAEL BAILEY: Good evening, Madam Chair and Committee members. Thank you for sticking around and allowing us to speak to you tonight. My name is Michael Bailey. I am the executive director of the American Association of University Professors, the Chapter. This is the president, Tom Bontly. There
were a lot of questions earlier today about negotiating contracts and the effect that the fringe benefit has on that. I thought it'd be best to bring Tom up at this time. If there's any questions, maybe we can answer those.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Mm-hmm.

MICHAEL BAILEY: But we represent the faculty and the coaches at the University.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Mm-hmm.

MICHAEL BAILEY: So we are in support of Governor Lamont’s proposed biennium budget beginning July 1 of 2019. Total UConn appropriations for the Governor’s biennium budget include a slight increase to the current funding levels, allowing the university to continue to provide Connecticut students with outstanding education of great value for their hard-earned dollars. Susan Herbst, you heard today, indicated that UConn is in the top 25 of public universities in U.S. News & World Report, so we're very happy with that.

Overall, for the fiscal year '18-'19, there was a increase in full-time faculty and part-time faculty at the university, although there was a slight decrease in full-time tenure track and tenure faculty, with a slight increase in non-tenure track faculty. Of the 24,000 undergraduate students enrolled in the fall of 2018, 72 percent of them at the main campus were Connecticut residents.

So a big concern for UConn AAUP obviously is the unfunded liability that's associated with the fringe benefits, especially as it relates to the research grants. You've heard testimony today about the
competitiveness with other peer institutions. You've heard some testimony today about the "bang for the buck" that these funding agencies are looking to get. The university's researchers, we understand that if there is a non-award for a grant, it would likely lead to another non-award. So losing out on grants is of serious concern for our researchers.

But more importantly, I wanna give you maybe a side consequence of the fringe, of the increased fringe rate. I have two faculty researchers, very successful researchers, that have decided to take their nine employees out of state service and move them to the private sector because of the fringe benefit rate. Their claim is that the fringe benefit costs are draining their research budget. So these nine employees one day are going to be state employees, the next day they're gonna be private employees. And I don't think that's a good direction for the state to be moving toward. We're talking about taking at least nine employees at this level off the state payroll rolls, making contributions to the pension. Right? All of those issues are in play, so it's a trend that we're very concerned about. We certainly don't wanna see other researchers move in that same direction. These are part-time, these are contract employees. So they have end dates, which allows them at the end of their contract to be --

REP. WALKER (93RD): Mm-hmm.

MICHAEL BAILEY: -- to be not rehired and put out into private service. [bell ring] So just something that I wanted to bring to your attention that's kind
of a side consequence to what's happening with the higher fringe rate. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony and just -- What we heard from the Board of Regents group --

MICHAEL BAILEY: Board of Regents?

REP. WALKER (93RD): Board of Regents of the CSU system. They said that if the contract or the grant that you're going after has Tier 1 people in the grant, then that's where the assignment of the 64 percent. But if you're -- We have to find out. We're gonna follow up on it and find out, but if they're people that are coming new into the system, they would be a Tier 4. So the fringe would be a different [Crosstalk]

MICHAEL BAILEY: So with the university, there's a blended rate that's --

REP. WALKER (93RD): Yes.

MICHAEL BAILEY: -- that's determined. This isn't from the CSU systems, it's negotiated with the farming agencies.

REP. WALKER (93RD): It's a blended rate with them too, so that's why we are going to sit down and talk with the Comptroller and try and look at options of what we can do to try and do it and see if we can, if nothing else, get the contracts that are hiring people that are on Tier 4 pulled off to the side so that they're not -- So we're gonna hear about it and I know everybody wants to tell us -- We are going to address it. We've heard it all day long.
MICHAEL BAILEY: So we would love to participate in that meeting as well.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Absolutely.

MICHAEL BAILEY: We'll look forward to that.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Just look for it under Appropriations Hearing for fringe. Thank you. Thank you very much.

MICHAEL BAILEY: Thank you. Great. Thank you.

TOM BONTLY: I'm a lower down on your list, so you can probably cross me off.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Okay.

TOM BONTLY: Save you a little time.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you.

TOM BONTLY: Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you very much. Have a good evening. Michael Baldwin.

UNKNOWN: [Off Mic]

REP. WALKER (93RD): I'm sorry?

UNKNOWN: [Off Mic]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Yes, thank you very much. Ali, come on down. And I think there are a couple of people with you who want to give you moral support or something? [laughing] Are you John Board? No. I'm sorry. Is it Jo -- Is it -- What's your name, Hon?

JOSEPH DELORENZO: I'm Joseph DeLorenzo.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Joseph. Did you sign up?
JOSEPH DELORENZO: I did not.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Okay. What's your name?

JULIE KUCSERA: Julie Kucsera.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Julie, did you sign up?

JULIE KUCSERA: I did not.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Oh, yes, I do. I have you down.

JULIE KUCSERA: [inaudible 00:34:38]


ALI DEGIROLAMO: Okay, great. Hello. Thank you all for letting me speak tonight. My name is Ali DeGirolamo. I am the student government president of the UConn Waterbury campus. I wanted to come here tonight to make sure that -- I've seen that the other regional campuses have been getting improvements done on their campus, and I personally feel with our campus, we haven't been able to get the same opportunities the other campuses are getting with funding and resources that I've seen.

On our campus, I have noticed, that many faculty members are retiring, which is great for them, but -- However, because of this, we are losing classes on our campus, and instead of hiring full-time professors, we're hiring adjunct professors. Therefore, when they're coming to teach the courses, they have to come at night time. A good amount of our students are using the bus system, which is basically leading to a problem because the bus system ends closer to dinnertime, and because of that, the adjunct teachers are coming to teach the third- and fourth-year classes for graduation, which
is leading these students to have to transfer to other colleges or other campuses. And they're not getting the full opportunity that they need because of this. Not only that, I've seen many people transfer to other campuses and they actually reverse coming back to UConn Waterbury because of the family feel and the 1 to 17 ratio. And not only that --

REP. WALKER (93RD): Sorry, while you're talking, 'cause I just said I thought Fastrak came out there, but, no, I'm wrong.

ALI DEGIROLAMO: Oh, well, so Fa -- I am actually part of the Fastrak program; however, it's for the Hartford campus, so, yeah, I would -- And that's also another thing where it's like, I would personally love to have the opportunity at the Waterbury campus, but because we don't have the resources, we can't have Fastrak there as well. But, yeah -- But with the revitalization happening in Waterbury, there are many new opportunities happening, which is bringing more students into the area. Like we now have an off-campus housing, which is awesome because then students have the opportunities to go to the campus and work one-on-one with the professors and have more opportunities, and because of this I'm seeing improvements happen. And even with the small amount of [inaudible 00:37:05] money that we had, in the past, we would only be able to have one to two events a week for a campus, which is not really a full-campus lifestyle that you can remember, but now we are able to have two to three, almost four events a week, which is amazing, because now the students are coming on to campus and they're enjoying the student life, instead of just coming there, doing their class, and then going home. I just personally feel and know
that if we were to get the funding and support that all the other campuses are getting at this time, then we would be able to make Waterbury amazing, and it would open up so many opportunities for other students, as it's done for me. So --

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. And, yeah, we've heard it from your senator today, too. [laughing]

ALI DEGIROLAMO: Thank you. [laughing]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and thank you for your testimony.

ALI DEGIROLAMO: Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Patty O'Neill, and after Patty, Juan Carlos, Juan Carlos Re -- Oh! Come on down, come on down. Jeff Shoneck? Jeff? Yep! Come on down. Good evening. Go right ahead, ma'am.

PATRICIA O'NEILL: Thank you, Madam Chair.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Press that red button, press the button there, so that -- Right in front of you, press the button on the microphone at the bottom. There you go!

PATRICIA O'NEILL: Thank you, Representative Walker and members of the Committee. My name is Patty O'Neill, Associate Professor of Psychology at Western Connecticut State. I'm also President of the CSU AAUP organization. I am here to advocate for our students and for the Connecticut state universities.

In the 21st century, higher education is a human right that must remain accessible and affordable. It is a public good that generates social and
economic progress. The Connecticut State Universities have an integral role in creating this social and economic progress for our students. I urge you to support them. The transformative nature of the University experience is illustrated by one of my former students. When he attended Western, he simultaneously worked nights as a stock clerk at a local supermarket. He would show up for class, clearly exhausted, but he was so determined to complete his degree, which he did, and did so with an almost perfect 4.0 GPA.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Hm.

PATRICIA O'NEILL: What is he up to these days? He’s the general manager of that local supermarket, which is great. His daughter, who he would bring by to my office when he was at Western -- She was about this high. -- is now in her third year of a joint PhD/MD program. I can't take credit for that, but I like to think some of it started at Western.

We serve first-generation students, nontraditional students returning to finally finish a first degree, or a second degree, traditional college-age students, and students whose first language is something other than English. They are a diverse and ambitious group of individuals. They all benefit from the ability to take advantage of a first-class education, and one that is considerably less expensive than other choices. Let’s try to keep it that way.

In order to do that, support for the CSUs must, at the minimum, be maintained. For too many years, support has declined, and there are some unfortunate side effects of that decline. In order to address the decrease in state support, the Board has been
forced to raise tuition too many times. This has
created serious barriers for some of our citizens
and delayed or prevented altogether degree
completion. That itself can have a life-time
impact. The evidence is clear: individuals with at
least an associate’s degree earn significantly more
over their lifetimes compared to those with less
than an associate’s degree. Individuals with at
least a bachelor’s degree earn significantly more in
comparison to those with an associate’s.

Our public higher education institutions still
remain out of reach for too many, who then may be
forced to take on debt, which in turn hobbles them
after graduation, if they graduate. [bell ring]
Invest in our futures, and invest in the Connecticut
State Universities. Thank you for your time.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and thank you for
your testimony, and thank you for listening to the
bell. [laughing] Thank you, and have a good evening.
Juan Carlos and Jeff, Jeff Sh -- You come on up with
them, because the two of you are from 1199?

UNKNOWN: [off mic]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Hello.

UNKNOWN: [off mic]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Good evening.

JUAN CARLOS RESTREPO: Before I start, I just wanted
to express gratitude for everything you do for our
youth and the teams involved. They are the future.
My name is Juan Carlos Restrepo and I am a
phlebotomist at UConn Health. I have been a
phlebotomist for 17 years. For 10 years, I worked
in clinical laboratory and have worked at UConn for the past 7 years.

I'm here today to ask you to fully fund the UConn Health Center because it is so important to invest in our public hospital. Everyday, my fellow union members and I register and greet everyone that comes into the lab for services. We draw blood from patients of all ages. We help train our staff in phlebotomy and other orientations. Some of us are assigned to work on the floors. When we are, we go to different rooms and draw blood in our bedside units. I also work in Central Processing where I have a variety of duties working with the specimens. I prepare the specimens that I receive from the tube stations from [inaudible 00:43:22] to test. I answer phones and collaborate with doctors regarding specimen results, help answer questions from the nursing units, and perform a daily checklist, and follow closing procedures at the end of the day.

Many of our phlebotomists and laboratory assistants have different specialties. At UConn, I'm trained and specialize in pediatric blood draws. I have been asked by the doctors to assist with extremely difficult pediatric draws. Some of the families we serve come from a different hospital or even out of state because they have had bad experiences with other laboratories. They arrive frustrated and worried. But when they come to us, they are relieved. Our duty is diffuse any difficult situations, put the patients at ease, and deliver our service that the public and our communities deserve. There is no worse feeling to know that your child may not be treated for what they need just because they have difficulty with getting blood drawn.
This is just one important reason why we take pride in the work we do and why we must protect our public hospital. Where else will they go? Where are there alternatives? Bad experiences often discourage families and patients, and they may stop looking for health care altogether. My coworkers and I take pride in providing these services for our community. My family takes pride in the work I do because they know I help to make a difference in standing for what I believe in. I work hard for my patients and work hard to build the trust that is established at our public hospital. This is a trust that is worth defending. This is why we should fully fund our public hospital for public good. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Go right ahead.

JEFFREY SHONECK: Good evening.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Press the button right in front that -- on the microphone. There you go.

JEFFREY SHONECK: Thanks. Good evening, everyone. Thanks for having us tonight. My name is Jeffrey Shoneck and I'm a respiratory therapist at John Dempsey UConn Health Center. I've worked at John Dempsey, tomorrow will be my 17th anniversary. I've never worked anywhere else in the health care field. At UConn, as a respiratory therapist, we also, myself and some other therapists, we have precept students from different colleges, University of Hartford and Manchester Community College. So we also teach too. They work with us side by side. I've spent my entire career here, as I said.

I'm here to testify today to ask the Appropriations Committee to fully fund the UConn Health Center, Connecticut's only public hospital. As a
respiratory therapist, we give respiratory care to patients of all ages, ranging from breathing treatments, CPR, life support, drawing blood, oxygen therapy, and many other medical procedures that we do. We are also part of teams that resuscitate patients if necessary, neonates and adults. We serve our patients that usually are most vulnerable. Or they come to us, you know, when they're in need. Maybe a little side note. They depend on us for our survival. We have -- I see a lot of patients that come back to UConn because they like the care there. They refer their families and they come back and they ask for us personally. And that's a nice feeling to have when somebody comes and asks your name, are you still working there. And most of the time, we all are. We all still work in there. We love UConn. It's a great place to work. And we give good care. We know that the patients depend on us and we'll do everything to keep them safe. I do this work because I care about the mission of UConn Health, and as a union member and as a state worker.

I've benefited from the stability of working at UConn Health Center. As a single dad, the stability of this job has allowed me, this has allowed me to rest easy. Sometimes, it's kinda hard to rest after some stressful days of what we see. Knowing that my son has good medical benefits and who now is a college student at the University of Maine. Having stability means that I have good health insurance and good income to provide for my children. I also have two other children. I call them my "rentals." They're not mine, but I pay for them. So that's why I call them -- Their mom is here tonight. [laughing]

Recently, UConn entered a public/private partnership with the NICU, with Connecticut Children's Hospital.
That was probably not recently, but almost ten years ago. There was a lot of unrest with that, and I think that my coworkers and I believe that this partnership did not benefit us, nor the patients. It caused a lot of upheaval. [bell ring] We see a private hospital coming in, carving out different services and taking a big chunk of our profits for themselves, rather than reinvesting in the services the patients need. I'm here today because I wanna protect UConn Health Center for my family and all the families in Connecticut. This is why we need to fully fund the UConn Health Center. Thank you for your time.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Senator Flexer, did you want to say something?

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): [inaudible 00:48:48]

REP. WALKER (93RD): No. Brevity. [laughing]

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to applaud you for your 17th anniversary tomorrow. That's all. [clapping]

JEFF SHONECK: Oh, thank you very much. It's a great place to work.


JENNIFER WIDNESS: Good evening. I'm Jen Widness, and I'm the president of the Connecticut Conference
of Independent Colleges and I'm here to advocate for funding for the Roberta Willis Scholarship Program which was flat funded in the Governor's budget for the biennium.

I can't top the students that were here earlier. Sorry to waste your time. They are, obviously, our most effective advocates [laughing] on this issue. I just wanna reiterate though that we are really appreciative of this Committee's support for funding for this program and the fact that it continues to be available for students who attend both public and private colleges.

As you know, one of our state's greatest assets has and always will be, our educated workforce, but our economy is evolving rapidly, and our workforce is not educated enough to meet the employer demands. According to our Strategic Plan, by 2025, we need a workforce in which 70 percent of citizens have some education beyond high school. This means a production of 300,000 more graduates than the current rates of production will yield. This state must focus on increasing the attainment levels and retaining talent, and the Scholarship Program can help you accomplish these goals. A robust student aid program targets funding to our neediest students, incentivizes Connecticut's to stay in state, and supports access to the institutions that best fit their needs.

Data gathered by the state's P2 WIN system illustrates that, contrary to popular belief, it's not whether an institution is public or private that determines what percent of grads stay in state, but what percent of Connecticut's students are enrolled in that institution. Albertus Magnus, University of
Saint Joseph, Goodwin College enroll almost 100 percent Connecticut kids and have higher employment rates post-graduation instate than some of our public counterparts. The P20 WIN data set also found that 84 percent of Scholarship recipients at the independent colleges were found working in state after graduation. This is an effective tool to retain students in state.

We know you're facing significant challenges. We heard it all night. And I'm empathetic to that. We just hope that we can -- The economy needs to keep -- Our economy needs an educated workforce to grow. This will help our fiscal challenges, and therefore, we hope funding for this new financial aid program will continue. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and, no, you can't top the students.

JENNIFER WIDNESS: Sorry. [laughing]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Yeah, it's okay. [laughing] Thanks for your testimony.

JENNIFER WIDNESS: Thank you.


DARNELL FORD: All right. Good evening, Madam Chair and members of the Committee. My name is Darnell Ford and I'm an organizer with the Services Employees International Union District 1199. Our union represents 26,000 health care workers across
the public and private sector in Connecticut, including 7,000 health care workers at state agencies. We have about 300 members employed at the University of Connecticut Health Center. Our members working at UConn Health are nurses aids, transportation aids, phlebotomists -- That's you. -- respiratory therapists, dental assistants, operating room technicians, pharmacy technicians, and other health care professionals. 1199 members perform critical functions at UConn, like drawing blood, preparing medication, transporting patients, and assisting in aiding nurses, doctors, dentists, and medical students. Our members, along with over 4,000 other union members at UConn Health, take care of one million patients at UConn served each year and make the hospital run. 1199 members are very proud of the work they do. They are part of the flagship, which is the University's hospital.

The UConn Health Center is Connecticut's only public hospital, as you've heard earlier today, and serving over 500,000 Medicaid and Medicare patients each year. We know our system of health care delivery is in crisis nationwide. Health care costs are skyrocketing as hospital chains merge and insurance companies become more powerful. In Connecticut, Yale-New Haven Hospital and Hartford Health Care control about 80 percent of the health care market, and all of us pay the price. Hospital insurance companies amass their wealth from patients' pockets in paying higher copays, higher deductibles, and higher cost per service. This system is based on profit.

The UConn Health Center, however, is a public institution, and its mission is to serve the public. We need to protect the mission by protecting our
public hospital. As a public institution, it has a democratic accountability to the public that our hospitals evade, often to their financial benefit. UConn Health should not be a site of any hasty cost-saving measures in a budget that should reflect our values as a state. We need the Appropriations Committee to fully fund UConn Health Center and make a real investment in public health and Connecticut state employees.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and thank you very much. Go right ahead.

PAULA ALLARD: Good evening. I want to thank you for having us here tonight. My name is Paula Allard, and I'm a respiratory therapist at the UConn Health Center. I've been there for 12 years. I began my career in the private sector as a physical therapy aid and a receptionist at a doctor's office. I have always been dedicated to serving patients. I became a respiratory therapist in 2007, and this was an incredible, important career change for me, because I was able to continue to help people, but also have the income and the benefits that my two small children at the time needed to keep a roof over their head. I was a single mom trying to get by.

I am here tonight to ask the Appropriation Committee to fully fund our public hospital. Respiratory therapy, as Jeff has mentioned, is a crucial function of our hospital. My coworkers and I are responsible for all aspects of respiratory care at the UConn Health Center. We establish and maintain life support machines and protocols. We give all sorts of necessary breathing treatments and oxygen therapy. We give CPR and we do resuscitations. We
know that patients depend on us, sometimes for each breath, and we will do anything we can keep them safe. We are one of the first responders in the hospital to go to a call. And if we're not there, they're looking for us. Families look to us time and time again as professionals to keep them at ease when their family members are at their most vulnerable.

This is an extremely different environment than the private sector. When I was at the doctor's office, the services often resembled a conveyor belt. As one went in, one went out. Here at UConn, we take great pride in not only providing the services that are expected and required, but also going above and beyond for our patients. This comes natural at UConn because we understand we are providing a service to our communities. Patients love the services that we give because we are attentive, we take care of them, we take time to listen. We provide a level of experience and expertise and we provide a quicker service than most other hospitals in the area. Time and again, patients come back and say that they would rather come to our place than other area hospitals. We are so proud to provide these services to our community, and we are proud to do it as state employees and union members.

As union members and state employees, we have good benefits, which means we have some security and stability for our families. As a public hospital, our mission is to serve the public. Employees at UConn Health care deeply about this mission and that is what is being a public hospital for the public good is all about. We need the legislator to fully fund the UConn Health Center and protect it, just
like we at the hospital protect the public good. I want to thank you for your time.


JOHN BOARD: [laughing] Good evening, Representative Walker. Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, I'm John Board, a former Board of Regents representative from Western Connecticut State University. Before I sort of dive into the meat of my testimony, I would like to align my testimony with Mr. Namer from earlier, in the sense that Dr. Cook was the reason why I attended Western. He was the one that recruited me to the University. Every student he has mentored, he takes time to sit down with them and actually learn about the students, not only in their academics, but also in their life. As well, he's really truly the most compassionate person, never mind professor, that I've ever met.

But getting back to the business at hand, I'm here to speak today about tuition and fees relating to the CSCU budget and present a proposal which could provide more stability for students and for the state. According to multiple news outlets and industry experts, businessmen, as well as the owner of the Dallas Mavericks, Mark Cuban, it's predicted that the student loan bubble will burst within the next decade. We may not be able to stop this situation, but I think we should try our best to manage it. For those of you who serve on Higher Education and Employment Advancement, Representative
Haddad, Senator Flexer, you guys very well know the proposal that I am putting forward.

The concept which I am proposing is tuition contracting. It's a proposal that I've been advocating for for the last five years. It would freeze the current tuition rate or the soon-to-be tuition rate for the incoming class, let's just say the class of 2023. Part of this contract would be an agreement to attend a specific university or system for four years. If a student opts to extend the degree program going into that, going into more of a nine semesters, a student's tuition would jump to whatever the incoming freshman rate would be. So in our example, it would be the class of 2028. There are additional concepts which we could tie to this: learn here, live here, as well as examining the CHESLA loan rates. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee and I'm available to take any questions which members of the Committee may have.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Did you submit testimony?

JOHN BOARD: I'm going to afterwards.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Okay.

JOHN BOARD: I've been sitting in the corner, you know, all day doing my research on it.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Okay, so do me a favor and please make sure you submit that to us. And if we have any questions, we'll get back to you.

JOHN BOARD: Definitely. Thanks so much, Representative.
REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you very much. Okay, Mary. And is Ashley, is Ashley Robinson here? Come on down. And Julia Kucsera? She's, she's gone.

UNIDENTIFIED: She left.

REP. WALKER (93RD): I'm sorry?

UNIDENTIFIED: She left.


UNIDENTIFIED: We're covering the same [inaudible 01:01:50]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Yeah, you all get the same -- Any other Blue people to testify? [laughing]

[laughing]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Do you want to stand with them or something? Okay. [laughing] Go ahead.

MARY BUGBEE: Good evening, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Mary Bugbee and I'm a lifelong resident of Manchester, Connecticut, a PhD student, and a graduate assistant at UConn, as well as the president of UConn's Graduate Employee Union, UAW Local 6950. I'm here to speak on a personal note about the importance of continued state support for UConn.

I have been a member of the UConn community in one way or another since 2009, which makes ten years this year. I attended UConn on a presidential scholarship for my undergraduate education, and upon graduation I landed a job working on a Department of Defense-funded research grant at UConn’s Institute
for Collaboration on Health, Intervention, and Prevention. I worked there for three years until starting a PhD program at UConn in Medical Anthropology. I have worked as a teaching assistant, research assistant, and instructor-of-record at different points throughout my six semesters in this program.

I have benefitted greatly from state investment in UConn. I have had amazing and passionate instructors and colleagues, including tenured faculty, adjuncts, and graduate employees, across many disciplines. Starting in my undergraduate years, I was able to participate in impactful health-related research and gain valuable research experiences that helped me advance me to where I am today. I am also lucky to have gained lifelong mentors.

In addition to myself, my two sisters also attended UConn. We were raised in a single-parent household, and UConn’s relative affordability made it possible for my mother to support all of us through our undergraduate years, with help from a combination of scholarships and student and parent loans.

My oldest sister graduated with a degree in chemical engineering, and she now works at United Illuminating in southern Connecticut where she wears many hats, including overseeing the Energize Connecticut Initiative. My younger sister graduated with a degree in Accounting and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality studies, and she currently works as an accountant for Deloitte. Our education at UConn has been crucial to our success in our chosen careers. In my PhD program, I study U.S. and Mexican health policy, and upon completion of my degree I want to
put my knowledge, skill set, and passion to use here in the state of Connecticut.

Continued state support and investment is key to maintain accessibility, affordability, and excellence at UConn, so students from Connecticut, especially coming from single-parent households and working families, can access a quality education. And as an instructor, I also want to ensure that the quality of my students’ education doesn’t suffer while their tuition continues to rise, an unfortunate trend that’s resulted from previous budget cuts.

I hope the state will provide the support we need for UConn’s budget, and I thank the Committee for their time and this opportunity to provide my testimony. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Go ahead.

ASHLEY ROBINSON: Good evening, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Ashley Robinson and I’m a graduate student and research assistant at the University of Connecticut and a member of the Graduate Employee Union, as you can see. As a PhD student in the Neag School of Education, I work on a research project that examines the factors in teacher education programs that lead to successful instruction of Math and English Language Arts for beginning teachers. I am also pursuing my dissertation research on college students' experiences of racial bias incidents on campus. Additionally, I am a teaching assistant this semester for the Multicultural Education course in the Teacher Certification Program for College Graduates at the Hartford campus. UConn’s commitment to an excellent school of education
provides me with the faculty, resources, and skills that will allow me to continue to research cutting-edge concerns in education that impact the practices of colleges and universities in Connecticut and beyond.

State support for UConn allows us to maintain a reputation as a competitive and strong university, ensuring that we can recruit and retain dedicated and skilled faculty and staff. As a graduate student and research assistant in the Neag School of Education, I am earning my degree from a graduate school of education ranked Number 17 by the U.S. News and World Report and working in a specialty department that is ranked Number 15. I applied to my PhD program while already living and working in Connecticut. This is also true of many of my peers who are also educators. I chose UConn instead of leaving the state for another university for my graduate program because of the stellar reputation of the Neag School of Education. I knew that I could stay in Connecticut and receive a competitive education at a high-quality public research university. State support allows UConn to continue to have excellent programs such as those within Neag, providing crucial opportunities to further the educational success and future of the entire state by educating teachers, administrators, and educational researchers who are living in, working in, and committed to the future success of the state.

Support for UConn directly stimulates Connecticut's economy, providing jobs throughout the state, and bringing and keeping faculty, staff, and their families to Connecticut. In 2012, I moved to Connecticut for a job at UConn. I am not a
Connecticut native, and I didn't complete my previous education in Connecticut. However, when I was job searching, I knew that UConn was the best public university in New England, and that made it my top choice. When I chose to continue with my education and earn a PhD, I spent a year looking at programs across the country but decided that the quality and reputation of the Neag School of Education meant that I didn't have to leave the state that I now called home. My husband and I recently purchased a home in Mansfield, and he has now worked at Pratt & Whitney for over a year and is taking graduate courses in Organizational Management at Eastern Connecticut State University. UConn's quality has drawn and kept me and my family in this state, a reality that I'm sure is true for countless faculty, staff, and students of the university.

UConn is a vital asset to the State of Connecticut. In the past, the state budget has provided generous support to UConn's important mission of providing education, service, and research to the state and residents of Connecticut, and I strongly encourage you to continue this generosity in the next budget. Thank you.

SIAVASH SAMEI: Good evening. My name is Siavash Samei. I'm from Willimantic, Connecticut. I'm also a teaching assistant at the University of Connecticut and a member of the Graduate Employee Union at UConn. My testimony is more of an institutional testimony to tie like the hard work of our GAs at UConn and why your funding is so important. But before I proceed, I'd like to say that I think myself and my fellow GAs at UConn are deeply touched by the compelling stories and testimonies that we heard from our friends from the
community colleges from the CSU system. And my testimony, our testimony is focused on UConn, but we believe that the Appropriations priority of this Committee should be to fund all of these institutions, and to put any one of them on a so-called debt diet would be a disservice to their hard work and to their dedication to the state of Connecticut.

REP. WALKER (93RD): You can submit that to the, the capital over there. [laughing]

[laughing]

SIAVASH SAMEI: [laughing] Oh, yeah, we'll be busy. That's fine. The Graduate Employee Union at UConn represents over 2,100 graduate assistants and 150 postdocs who work tirelessly every day in classrooms and labs across five campuses to help UConn fulfill its core mission of quality education and research and to drive the innovative research that attracts critical investment to the state economy. GAs are students and employees that work alongside faculty and administration to provide critical teaching and research services while spending, while pursuing a postgraduate degree in various fields.

Because of your support, the GAs make quality education possible for 20,000 students of Connecticut families. Nearly 1,400 GAs are teaching assistants that serve as lead instructors for hundreds of courses and thousands of small classes and labs that provide critical face-to-face interactions, interactions that teach students the writing skills, the analytical and critical thinking skills, and the cultural competencies that are key to success in the competitive and global job market of the 21st century.
Because of your support, we enhance Connecticut as a hub of innovation and scientific breakthrough. Nearly 800 of our GAs are research assistants who conduct a significant portion of day-to-day experimental work in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and, yes, social sciences. These research projects drive the university's continued growing reputation in scientific innovation. We are active in the field of cancer research, clean water environmental health, climate change, social justice, and nanotechnology, to name a few.

And finally, we generate millions of dollars in research revenue for UConn and the state. Both TAs and RAs often serve as investigators or coinvestigators on research proposals that generate of $150 million dollars a year in funding through private and federal grants and contracts.

My own story is a case in point. A few weeks ago, I successfully defended my doctoral dissertation in anthropology thanks to an NSF research grant in which I was a co-investigator working on a collaborative and interdisciplinary project in one of the least studied parts of the world, in the Middle East. We believe that Connecticut's prosperity is inextricably linked to the vitality and reputation of UConn and all of Connecticut's institutes of higher education.

I, along with my fellow GAs [bell ring] from UConn are here before you to reaffirm our commitment to provide the world-class education that Connecticut families deserve and to UConn's growth as a leading hub of innovation and research. But our ability to deliver on these promises depends on our elected
officials continued financial support of Connecticut's colleges and universities. Thank you for your time, and I'd just like to close by saying that attached to the testimony are a number of testimonials from our individual members that highlight their hard work and contribution to the state. I urge you to take a few moments and read their testimonies. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Did you say you successfully --

SIAVASH SAMEI: I did. I have revisions to [inaudible 01:12:02], but I did, yes.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Excellent. Congratulations.

SIAVASH SAMEI: Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): We all have revisions [inaudible 01:12:06]. [laughing]


BILL GERRITY: Thank you, Representative Walker. When you're testifying so late, so many of your points have already been made multiple times. My name is Bill Gerrity. I am the president of University Health Professionals. I work at UConn Health. I have been a nurse for 29 years.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Wow!

BILL GERRITY: Twenty-three years with the state. I did 16 years bone marrow transplant and oncology, 5 years in the ED before I was elected and became the president of UHP, 2,750 members and I could not be
prouder of UConn Health today, because it wasn't just UConn and UHP that was here. AAUP 1199, I was very happy to see people who I worked with on the floors here testifying today. Thank you so much, guys.

REP. WALKER (93RD): It's the whole family. Mm-hmm.

BILL GERRITY: Yeah. So like I said, a lot of the things I wanted to actually say and have testified on in the past were covered today, fringe, absolutely, please, when that -- I've already told Terry back there, please, you gotta let me know when that's gonna happen. It was brought up, some of the public-private partnership conversations, I've in the past testified about our NICU, so I was very happy that my brother from 1199 brought that up. I didn't want to go too in-depth on that because it's been -- It's not, really not a good public-private partnership. It has not worked well for us. We've also had the Farmington Surgery Center, which at one point in time was private institution on our campus --

REP. WALKER (93RD): Mm-hmm.

BILL GERRITY: -- which had to then be absorbed. It is now UConn Health Surgery Center, and those are all state employees now also. And again, the DOC agreement is always a difficult thing to talk about that we've had in the past. I have been very proud for the people who I've been working with. We have a UConn Health labor coalition where we are talking with Dr. Agwunobi on multiple issues and we're not having a lot of transparency when it comes to this public-private partnership. So in the past when I was here, I said I was talking on 7120, Senate Bill
749, and House Bill 7118, because I felt all three
of them were kind of wrapped together.

So I think I actually have to kind of stick a little
bit more, because not many people have talked about
it, but Senate Bill 749, LEGISLATIVE APPROVAL FOR
THE MERGERS OR CLOSING OF INSTITUTIONS WITHIN
CONNECTICUT STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES. UConn
Health, it kind of scares me when you're talking
about carving up UConn Health. We have a mission
statement of research education and clinical, and
we're talking about, you know, carving away one
aspect of that.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Mm-hmm.

BILL GERRITY: So I'm very afraid that even if we
work hard and fix the fringe issues, that this is
still something that may be on the plate, which
makes me very nervous. I would finish with this by
saying in the past eight years, we, the state, [bell
ring] have invested in UConn Health Center. We've
built new state buildings, hired top-of-the-field
staff, and we've seen more patients, both inpatient
and outpatient. As we're growing, please don't let
UConn get carved up and sold off. You know, in the
past six years, I believe, our OP was about a three,
no, $260 million dollar building and I wanna say the
new hospital was again about a $280, I wanna say,
somewhere in those numbers. So we're talking almost
half a billion dollars in the past ten years. So
carving that up and handing it off to a place like
Hartford Hospital would really be not a good way to
go, in my opinion.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Okay, thank you. Thank you for
your testimony, sir. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Justin and Andrew. Is Jacqueline here? I thought that was you. Okay, stay right there. Don't go, don't go. Got two people before you. And is Claudia Cupe here? Good. And Tracy Olivet. Okay. And Roshanay Tahir? Roshanay, okay. All right. Go right ahead. Press the button at the bottom. Right at the bottom. There you go.

JUSTIN BOUTIN: Good evening, members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for letting me have this opportunity to represent my school. My name is Justin Boutin. I am from the town of Cromwell. I am a commuter student at Central Connecticut State University and a member of the CCSU Student Government Association. I am here today to address my concern about Connecticut's proposed budget for the CSU school system, as well as potential tuition increase and a proposed textbook tax.

The recently proposed two-year budget for the state of Connecticut will result in a $57 million dollar shortfall for the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities system, which may lead to tuition increases that will negatively impact all CCSU students, including myself. I personally know many CCSU students who live on their own and work one or multiple part-time jobs while taking up to five classes and barely get by on the income they earn to finance their tuition bills and textbook costs every new semester.

Over the last two years, tuition has gradually increased by a total of 8 percent. I paid $5,308 dollars in tuition for the Spring 2019 semester, and
that's not including the additional cost of the textbooks I had to purchase for my five classes. My annual income is about $12,000 dollars at my part-time job at the Cromwell Stop & Shop, where I make $10.70 per hour. If tuition in the state of Connecticut continues to increase at the aforementioned rate and the proposed tax on textbooks for colleges and professional schools passes, then I will surely struggle to come up with enough money to fully finance my tuition, my textbooks, my car insurance, my grocery bills, and my leisure spending. It does not require a mathematician, given the data previously mentioned, to realize that any tuition increases will have a severely negative impact on me personally, as well as the hundreds of other CCSU students who struggle to make ends meet.

On average, college students in the United States are spending well over $200 dollars per semester on textbooks. Placing a tax on textbooks will severely hurt the finances of CCSU students, especially poor students from low-income families. This proposed tax on textbooks is certainly not going to solve the $57 million dollar budget shortfall in the CSCU system and it will needlessly harm low-income, part-time working, full-time students. Therefore, I hope the Appropriations Committee will not consider any proposed tax on our textbooks or any proposal to increase our tuition. The students should not be targeted to help alleviate budget shortfalls. Other solutions should be considered to mitigate the budget shortfall for the CSCU system that do not extract more money directly out of the pocketbooks of students. Let's keep our state schools affordable. Thank you for your time. [bell ring]
REP. WALKER (93RD):  Perfect.  Go right ahead.

ANDREW PILKONS:  My name is Andrew Pilkons.  I am from Vernon, and I am a student at Central Connecticut State University studying chemistry.  I am also an At Large Senator on CCSU’s Student Government Association.  I am here to address the Committee about Connecticut’s budget to CCSU and the CSCU system, as well as the proposed textbook tax.

A bit of background about myself, I am a transfer student at CCSU.  Before transferring, I had gone to both a private university and Asnuntuck Community College.  Without a doubt though in my mind, CCSU has given me the most valuable education I have ever received.  I have learned substantial lessons in civic engagement, leadership, diversity, and activism while being taught by some of the most dedicated professors this state has to offer.

I and thousands of other students are only able to take in what this university and other public state colleges and universities have to offer because it is so affordable.  Students of diverse backgrounds attend CCSU and public universities and make substantial sacrifices to do so, but by raising already high tuition prices and taxing already expensive textbooks, this state risks not giving a chance to students who do not come from advantaged backgrounds to succeed.

This is unacceptable.  This state needs to give the chance to succeed to everyone.  This should not just be for the sake of the students, but for the sake of this state.  When students of all backgrounds succeed in our state colleges and universities, they will succeed in this state and be the valuable citizens we need.  I hope you all will oppose taxing
textbooks and will not raise tuition for universities in the CSCU system.

Thank you, and I hope you all will consider all students when considering legislation and the budget. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and thank you for your testimony. Thank you for staying so late too. Thank you.

ANDREW PILKONS: Thank you too.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Have a good evening. Get home safely. Jacqueline?

JACQUELINE SOSNOSKI: So, what I just signed to you is "good evening" and "I am a nursing student." I'm also an ASL student.

REP. WALKER (93RD): I saw you practicing back there earlier.

JACQUELINE SOSNOSKI: I would like to start with a powerful quote from Michael Moore's essay, Idiot Nation. "We live in a country where 44 million can’t read and perhaps close to another 200 million can read but usually don’t. Well friends, you and I are living in a very scary place. A nation that not only churns out illiterate students, but goes out of their way to remain ignorant and stupid, is a nation that should not be running the world."

My name is Jacqueline Sosnoski. I am a U.S. veteran attending Three Rivers Community College by the gift of grants and scholarships. But these do not cover all my expenses. Even while working two part-time jobs and owning my own small business, I still struggle to pay bills and buy the books and
materials I need to be successful. My purpose is to become a registered nurse. At 26 years old, I am a nontraditional, first-generation student who battles many learning disabilities and mental disabilities, including PTSD. The thought of returning to college was intimidating if not impossible to imagine. The professors and staff at Three Rivers Community College embraced me and helped me transition into a successful student.

During the fall semester, I took psychology, math, English, and American Sign Language, where I exceeded even my own expectations and earned a GPA of 3.92. I hold the position of president of Three Rivers Veterans Organization, and last fall we were able to donate 80 complete Thanksgiving Day meals, including turkeys, to the Norwich Veterans Center. I also hold the position for president of Phi Theta Kappa, an international honors society for two-year colleges. I participate in additional clubs of Mind Your Mental Health and Voices of the River. We're an acapella group where I use my knowledge of American Sign Language to sign songs. While attending Three Rivers, I found a love for American Sign Language and plan on pursuing an additional degree as an ASL medical interpreter, a profession that is seriously understaffed.

Along with my full-time studies I am a teacher's assistant.

My goals and the goals of my peers can only be achieved by your continued funding of higher education in Connecticut. To decrease or even maintain the current level of funding would be deleterious not only to Connecticut but America as well. The only answer then can be to increase the
funding of Connecticut's colleges so more Americans will be able to follow their dreams as I am. As Walt Disney once said, “There is a great big beautiful tomorrow shining at the end of every day.”

REP. WALKER (93RD): That was wonderful. Thank you and I'm so glad you stayed to share that.

JACQUELINE SOSNOSKI: Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): That was amazing. Thank you, and thank you and have a safe drive home. Claudia and Tracy.

CLAUDIA CUPE: Good evening. My name is Claudia Cupe and I have two children and three grandchildren. I'm a graduate from the Women's Leadership Institute and a president of a business club at ACC. I retired early from the U.S. Postal Service six years ago to take care of my first grandson. I didn't want my first grandson to go to daycare, so I started my own daycare. It was fun at first until I started watching other people's kids. Then, it was a different ballgame. Time goes by fast when you're having fun.

REP. WALKER (93RD): [laughing]

CLAUDIA CUPE: My grandkids, they kind of kicked me to the curb once they started school. So, my journey started. I came to Asnuntuck Community College in the fall of 2015 to find my second career. I started off with early childhood education and then I decided that I would like to have a conversation with somebody over the age of three years old. Because I've always been an entrepreneur, I started to, with business administration, but then my love for helping others
became clear. So one of my awesome advisors at ACC told me to take a career assessment test to see where my interest lies. That's how I got into human services management. I truly enjoy helping people.

To be a nontraditional student at Asnuntuck Community College has changed my life forever. The professors, faculty, and staff in the Academic Tutoring Center are the best thing that ever happened to me in my life. I feel so -- I feel some of the benefits of having free tutoring at ACC, you get that one-on-one attention, which improves academic performance, help improve work-study habits, and to help most students with individual and unique learning experiences. Tutors also encouraged me to form a study group with other students in my class, because when you study together and help encourage each other to learn, it really helps. It's a great feeling when you're accomplishing something great. Also, the tutors are more than willing to help in any shape or form possible. They are always willing to assist, they go over the call of duty. Without the tutoring center, I would not have maintained a GPA of 3.78. I cherish the staff in the tutoring center.

Overall, ACC has provided a great learning environment for me as a nontraditional student. This has been the best decision I have made in a long, long, long time. No regrets. Everybody from the professors, to tutors, to staff and faculty, this small community college is like my extended family. [bell ring] The close-knit family at ACC makes it a joy to attend community college. Thank you very much for your time.
REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Thank you very much and congratulations.

CLAUDIA CUPE: Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Go right ahead.

TRACY OUELLETTE: Thank you for allowing me to speak. My name is Tracy Ouellette and I'm a nontraditional student at Asnuntuck Community College also. I've been attending Asnuntuck since the fall of 2014 as a part-time student. I'm a member of the Student Government Association, the cofounder of our pantry at Asnuntuck, a graduate of the Women's Leadership Program, and I am a member of a number of other clubs on campus. I work a full-time job, a part-time job as a student worker in the college, and I participate in numerous activities and attend classes. Making the decision to go back to school was a difficult one. I had to weigh the costs and the benefits carefully to see if it would fit my life and be affordable as a single parent.

Looking at Asnuntuck being a community college locally near me, it was the most affordable option. When I started attending ACC, I noted that the college was very warm, caring, and had a family atmosphere that immediately put me at ease. The college also provided several free services to help students, like free childcare, the Magic Bus, which was free transportation, free tutoring, and ultimately, as a graduate of the Women's Leadership Program, which was also free to us, I created and cofounded the food pantry for students at the college.

I believe that these things and the lower cost of tuition and the free services have helped numerous
of our students, myself included, be able to stay in college and achieve our dreams and get our degrees. The pantry alone since our opening in 2017 has had 140 percent increase in student usage, compared to only a 3.2 percent increase in main campus student enrollment. Not only do we provide food for the student to help feed them at home, we also provide a section of grab-and-go snacks and drinks to help them during the day in case they don't have breakfast or lunch available or because they can't afford it. Many students have come in and told us there were days when the only food they had was what they received in the pantry and that without it, they would have probably had to drop out to work and afford living. The higher cost of education can be overwhelming and it's barely affordable to a large number of Asnuntuck students, including myself. It's my hope that we can keep the costs affordable for all. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Thank you both for your testimony. Thank you very much. Roshanay Tahir. And after Roshanay Tahir, Matthew Long. Matthew Long. Okay. Is there anybody else that wants, that had, that -- [laughing] I can't even talk anymore. Is there anybody else who wants to testify that did not testify? Thank you. Go right ahead. [laughing]

ROSHANAY TAHIR: Good evening, honorable members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Roshanay Tahir and I go to Central Connecticut State University where I study biomolecular science and psychology. At Central, I am a commuter senator for our Student Government Association, as well as chairwoman of our External Affairs Committee where
we push policy at the town, state, and federal level.

I am here to address my concerns about Connecticut's budget in regards to a potential tuition increase and the proposed textbook tax. The latest state of the budget address gave a two-year budget proposal which included, which could impact CCSU students. The budget proposed a $57 million dollars shortfall within the Connecticut state college and university system, possibly resulting in a tuition increase. With Central's tuition being increased by a total of 8 percent within the last two years, this would negatively impact a lot of university students, including myself. I am a first-generation student; my parents never went to college. To pay for my first year, my parents had to cash their life insurance so I could get an education. I will be going to my third year at CCSU paying for tuition solely out of my own pocket. Last semester, I almost couldn't afford to come back to continue my education. I was working three jobs while taking six classes while being a full-time student, and even that wasn't enough to pay for tuition. The only reason I was able to continue my education this semester was by needing to be unnecessarily persistent with different departments on campus to get a last-minute scholarship.

According to a recent study by the Charter Financial Publishing Network, college students' biggest reasons for going broke were: 51 percent, unanticipated expenses; 49.4 percent, not enough financial aid; 49 percent, high textbook costs; 48.6 percent, college costs too much; and 42.4 percent was a change in financial circumstances for either themselves or for their parents. I am not the only
student with these kind of struggles. There are other students in my shoes with similar situations, struggling to get by, but pushing and working extremely hard to achieve their dreams.

So I look to you, members of the Appropriations Committee, and ask why add an extra burden to those who will be our future and why add another struggle and make it harder for someone to make something out of themselves. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and thank you for your testimony. Thank you for staying. Thank you.


MATTHEW LONG: Hello. I get the pleasure of being the last one, right? So, hi. So my name's Matthew Long. I'm a student at Middlesex Community College where I study political science and I'm also a member of the Student Advisor Committee to the Board of Regents and I serve on student government and do all that kind of stuff. I'll try to keep this short, 'cause we all wanna get home.

So, first off, community colleges are a promise we made to the students, the community, and to our future. By investing in community colleges, we are investing in that future. People who attend community colleges are not -- Generally, they are on the poor side working class individuals and that -- I sadly have to say, it includes myself. I currently haven't been able to afford my own textbooks. I am waiting for a reimbursement track, we have been still on financial aid, and my award just came in last Friday. So it's, can be difficult, and with -- While the current budget proposal does slightly increase the amount that the community colleges and the CSU system will receive, it's not, it's
obviously not enough to maintain long-term stability. Pretty much nothing will be, but, you know, that's, that's another story.

So I'm currently concerned about the community colleges being hollowed out from the inside. We are -- There's a shortage of staff at my college. We do great with the resources we have, but it never seems to be enough and we always seem to be missing that one extra person that could really make things run smoother. What we really obviously need, solutions, and community colleges are an easy cut to make to the budget. They're block, because they're block grants and pretty much we can kick that can down the curb and make other people make the hard decisions. But I will kindly ask that all of you keep fighting. I appreciate that you guys came here to listen to testimony tonight, because everybody has lives that -- It's a lot of work, but it does make a difference and students really get to improve. I know my friends have, are generally better people for attending community colleges. So I appreciate it, and that's pretty much it.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony, and thank you for being the last one.

MATTHEW LONG: [laughing]

REP. WALKER (93RD): I hope you get the reimbursements.

MATTHEW LONG: It should be com -- It's in the mail. I didn’t sign up for direct deposit. Yeah. I'll do it.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Okay. That's a key. Okay.

MATTHEW LONG: Oh, yeah.
REP. WALKER (93RD): Okay, thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you everybody for staying and I close this public hearing.