It is a pleasure to be here today to discuss SB 750 *Act Concerning the Prevention and Treatment of Mental Illness at Institutions of Higher Education*. Given the existing wording, I am profoundly supportive of the intent of the legislation while also encouraging more discussion among colleges, universities, public health officials, students and leaders in middle and secondary education.

UConn is committed to promoting the health and wellness of our students. Our experience is that any successful program is dependent upon a multi-faceted approach that insists upon a campus-wide commitment to health and wellness. Over the course of the last three years, UConn has developed a case management system, hired additional psychiatrists and therapists, added therapists to each of the regional campuses, and experienced significant increases in students receiving mental health care from our staff. Beyond clinical care and follow-up, what is equally notable is, in the last academic year, our outreach programs made over 10,000 student contacts, trained over 1,000 members of our community as gatekeepers for suicide prevention, and conducted 92 campus workshops on mental health and prevention.

The prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depression cannot be adequately resolved through a one-time intervention (one visit to a counselor, or by implementing an online tool, or require training for staff) – it requires a multi-pronged approach.

Our institutions of higher education must be designed and resourced to support the wellness of all, rather than the sickness of the few. When loneliness presents as a prevalent obstacle to student mental health, a comprehensive approach involving community engagement, training of staff beyond mental health practitioners, and interactive online methods are tools for success across our college and universities campuses. I am proud of our students for coming forward and working with us to develop systematic intervention that enables us to holistically respond to the emerging mental health crisis.

Our work must be done in conjunction with the expertise of our colleagues in public health, middle, and secondary education. This is essential given the onset of mental illness among our youth.

In closing, I welcome the commitment for the legislature to support student mental health and illness. But again, there is not one single tool for prevention and prevention cannot not just be introduced when students arrive in post-secondary education – it needs to start much earlier. The K-12 system must take prevention seriously and it should simply continue in post-secondary education.
The correct approach must be to work collaboratively on programs that enhance culture-wide, broad-based, connections to reduce loneliness, anxiety, and depression and achieve the goals that UConn and the General Assembly share for the health and wellbeing of our youth.

Sadly, the only thing that stops UConn from doing even more in this area is resources. As we have mentioned, despite the understandable, but significant, budget cuts of the last few years, UConn has made funding to increase mental health services for our students a priority. Of course, we would love to do more and with additional funding we would be happy to do so. In the meantime, we will continue to look for ways to improve services with the resources we have.

We thank the Committee for its interest in this topic and look forward to working with you as this legislation evolves. We would be happy to answer any questions.