Dear Mr. Chairs, Chairman Haddad, Vice Chairwoman Flexer, and all other distinguished members of the Committee of Higher Education and Employment Advancement:

My name is Derek Pan. I am an undergraduate student at the University of Connecticut. I am also a Senator and the Student Services Committee Chairman for the UConn Undergraduate Student Government.

I’m here in support of the Proposed Bill 750, an act concerning the prevention and treatment of mental illness at institutions of higher education, but also hope to offer a suggestion to improve this Bill.

Recently, I authored a Joint Resolution that was passed through the UConn Undergraduate Student Government Senate that is very pertinent to the current Bill 750 in consideration here today. This Joint Resolution recognizes that a large percentage of students with mental health issues do not seek treatment despite ready resources available at many college institutions around the nation due to a lack of mental health literacy; and as such, we have moved to encourage the University of Connecticut to establish a mandatory module or educational resource for all incoming freshmen that educates them on the common mental health issues faced by college students, dispels common misconceptions and stigmas that surround mental health issues and treatment, and points to professional resources both on and off campus that can be utilized. The resolution also encourages the implementation an Act by the Connecticut General Assembly that mandates such a module or resource be required at all Connecticut post-secondary institutions. I have attached the Joint Resolution, as well as my Truman Scholarship Policy Proposal which it was based on, to my written testimony for further consideration by members of this committee.

Research has shown that a mandatory mental health educational curriculum decreases the rates of stigma and increases the rates of help-seeking behavior in an academic environment. Having existing programs for treatment does not necessitate a high rate of use by students, and as such we should move to expand evidence-based mental health educational outreach and awareness programs alongside the treatment and resources provided in order to fulfill a comprehensive approach. Additionally,
ensuring that the mandated educational programs are evidence-based would be vital in maximizing the efficacy of such programs.

As for the Senate Bill 750, might I suggest the inclusion of a clause or provision that highlights a mandatory evidence-based mental health literacy module for all Connecticut post-secondary institutions covering educational topics such as stigma and resources offered at the institution.

Under Connecticut State Statute 10a-55m, UConn and other higher education institutions in the state of Connecticut are mandated to educate their students on sexual assault prevention through awareness programing. Likewise, I envision a similar provision being added to Senate Bill 750 to educate students about mental health issues through a mental health module.

As a student-leader who has advocated greatly for mental health issues at the University of Connecticut, I am greatly in support of Senate Bill 750: An Act Concerning the Prevention and Treatment of Mental Illness at Institutions of Higher Education, but I hope that you will all consider amending this bill to include a mandatory evidence-based educational module at all institutions of higher education in the state of Connecticut.

Thank you all for your commitment to this very important issue, and I look forward to your efforts in advocating for me and my fellow students.