

## PUBLIC HEARING

CHAIRPERSON: Representative Toni Walker

SENATORS: Osten, Flexer, Hartley,  
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REPRESENTATIVES: Lavielle, Baker, Betts,  
Dathan, Gibson, Haddad,  
Hall, Johnson, Kokoruda,  
Nolan, Perone, Rotella,  
Ryan, Simms

REP. WALKER (93RD): Good afternoon everybody.  
Hello. [Laughing] Good afternoon everybody. I  
want to welcome you to the afternoon, or the evening  
portion of the public hearing portion of the Higher  
Ed Committee. Tonight is one of our favorite nights  
because we get to hear from the students and when we  
started this quite some time ago I think it made  
such a world of difference in having people talking  
to each other about the circumstances of education,  
higher education in Connecticut. I thank you all  
for coming. I want to remind you we have panels and  
with the panels that means you have -- each panel  
has 15 minutes. So I know all of you have taken  
math. You all know that if you have four people on  
a panel you've got to make sure that you all get to  
say something. So if you start looking -- look at -  
- just have somebody in the group sort of you know,  
tap the table to say okay, time, so that I don't  
have to help you 'cause you don't want me to help  
you. We want to hear from everybody and we want to  
make sure that everybody has a chance to present.

So when you get to the microphones make sure you  
turn the -- press that button, make sure it's on.

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Make sure that you state your name because your testimony is going in record number one, and number two, there's a man, if he has enough time in the room back there, he will type your name on there so other people know who you are. So it's very important that you say your name. What we also do is, we ask everybody to make their statements and because of the fact that it's really all about you and not us, we will let you talk and that's -- that will be enough. We do not need to get into the conversations. We want you to make your statements and we want to do it a timely fashion so that you can make sure that you are heard with your issues, so I thank you for that. So let's start by the first panel, panel one, the Independent Colleges. Could you please come forward? Awesome. Is that chair there for a reason; do you know? Does anybody know why that chair is over there? You want to move it so the camera will be able -- by the way, the camera is on the floor people; they hear you and see you so just make sure that you are speaking to the microphone so the cameras can make sure they pick up on who you are. So with that, I will let the first person from the panel begin. You press the button right in front of you. There you go. Okay.

LEILIM CHANG-SALAZAR: Can you hear me?

REP. WALKER (93RD): Yep, you're good. Go right ahead, please. Make sure you state your name.

LEILIM CHANG-SALAZAR: Hello everyone. My name is Leilim Chang-Salazar. I am currently at senior at Albertus Magnus College and I will be graduating this May with a double major, a BA in Communications and a BA in Healthcare Management. Originally born and raised in New Haven.

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As a first generation college student, challenge -- it was a challenge for me to understand the financial aspect of how to pay for it and how much -- and how expensive it actually was. My sophomore year I was actually considering transferring because of the financial burden. I'm eternally grateful that the Roberta Willis Scholarship was able to help me continue my education at Albertus Magnus College. It is important for me to stay at Albertus because as soon as I step foot on that campus, I knew that's where I wanted to be at, I knew that's where I wanted to be involved at despite being a commuter and despite being really shy at the time.

Taking baby steps, I slowly joined organizations that interest me and it lead me to have executive forward positions and leadership roles. Throughout the years I have not only become a better communicator but also a much more confident leader. This scholarship also allowed me to study abroad and volunteer in Costa Rico and also allowed me to be an intern for both the Marketing Communications Department at Albertus Magnus and Stonington Behavioral Health.

When I graduate I intend to stay in Connecticut and pursue a career in communications and marketing in the healthcare sector. The healthcare world is growing and people deserve to know all the amazing technological advances that we are making -- that are available to others. Countless families are new in this country and either do not speak English or it's their second language. This is something I can personally attest to because Spanish is my first language and I learned English in school, so I now how frustrating it can be for these families to not understand something or for them to not have anyone

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to translate legal documents or just regular doctor's visit. So being bilingual, I will use that as a forum to help outreach.

As I pursue my personal and professional goals I will always remember how this scholarship provided me with the financial support I needed to move forward with my education. I was able to begin and finish my studies at Albertus, a place that is my second home. I'm always there, very much involved, and I love it. Please continue to support this program to ensure students like me have the opportunities that I have had and are able to do the same. Thank you. [Applause]

REP. WALKER (93RD): I'm going to skip protocol. We're really not supposed, maybe I should -- would you rather have jazz hands? Is it okay -- okay, clap all you want. Even say yay. [Laughing] Go right ahead.

ESSENCE WOMACK: Hello, my name is Essence Womack. I'm from West Hartford Connecticut and the major that I'm studying is Public Safety and Security. I attend Goodwin University after my college previously shut down, and they also helped with my transition, which was a very big one for me, moving from one college to the next. This college is right for me because it helped me with that transition and it also helped me to adapt to the new environment that I would be facing and help to make sure that everything went smoothly.

My experience at Goodwin University has been wonderful. All my professors have taught me information that has helped me in my major and the staff there as well is very kind, which I believe

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that is very important because it does provide outcomes when you have a positive attitude.

Financially, such as the Roberta Willis Scholarship Grant has been incredibly important to me because it has helped me to achieve my academic goals without the stress of having to worry about money because that was a very big thing for my family being that I am the first to go to college. So that has lifted a burden off of me and it has helped me to achieve everything that I wanted to during my college career.

When I graduate I hope to be juvenile correctional counselor to help the youth who are troubled and in need of guidance. I also plan to stay and work in Connecticut 'cause I feel as though it would help me continue on with my journey helping others who are facing a path of struggle. Please continue to fund the Roberta Willis Scholarship Program to ensure students like myself have the best opportunity to enroll in an institution that is best fit for them in state. [Applause]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you.

CHRISTINA GARCIA: Hello, my name is Chrstina Garcia and I am from Gilford, Connecticut. I graduated from Gilford High School in 2017. I'm a junior occupational therapy student at Quinnipiac University. I first want to thank you for giving me the chance to speak to you all today. Quinnipiac was the right fit for me because it has one of the best occupational therapy programs in the state and in the country. I've had an amazing experience learning from the faculty and I believe that I am being prepared well for my future career.

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What I love about Quinnipiac is that I'm more than just a number at the school. I'm able to make connections directly with my professors and I am immersed in the OT program from day one. It was a huge draw for me that I'm not taught by a TA in a giant lecture hall and it makes for a much more aggressive learning environment. Financial aid such as the Roberta Willis Scholarship has been incredibly important to me because it is the reason I'm able to continue my education. I work two part-time jobs while being a full-time student in order to receive the best education available to me in Connecticut. I finance a major portion of my tuition on my own. It can be a struggle trying to balance my course load along with the added stress of funding my education. Scholarships are so essential to ensuring that I, along with many students like me do not graduate with insurmountable debt that would stifle our future goals.

When I graduate I intend to work as an occupational therapist with children who have disabilities. I believe that every child deserves an equal chance to develop and grow with the supports that they need and I plan to be a part of that process for kids in Connecticut. Please continue to fund the Roberta Willis Scholarship Program so that students have access to the Connecticut school that is the best fit for them. A student's financial status should not be the factor that holds the back from receiving a quality education. Scholarships such as the Roberta Willis Scholarship are vital -- are a vital part in creating an equal playing field for all Connecticut students. Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to speak to you all today.

[Applause]

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SYDNEY MERCIER: My name is Sydney Mercier and I am from Weathersfield, Connecticut. I will be graduating from the University of Hartford in May with a bachelor's degree in integrated Elementary and Special Education. The University of Hartford was the right fit for me because they offered me both the most financial assistance and was a school that was close to home. I knew they were a school that was going to give me the quality education I was looking for. I was -- they were able to give me that education in a timely manner so that I would be able to graduate on time and get a start on my career as soon as possible.

My experience at the University of Hartford has been nothing but amazing and I hope to continue my education there when it's time to get my master's degree. Financial aid such as the Roberta Willis Scholarship Grant has been incredibly important to me because I will be the first person in my family to obtain a bachelor's degree. Without financial aid I would not be able to attend such an amazing school. When I was probably about 10 or 11, my mom had lost her job and we had just had another sibling. We were in a huge amount of debt and it lead to her filing for bankruptcy so when it came time to figure out how we were going to pay for school, my mom was unable to take out any loans because of her credit after the bankruptcy.

For the first two years of school I had to take out loans in my name. Thankfully my junior year she was able to get a Parent Plus Loan, so both my mom and I have loans taken out to pay for my schooling. Any financial aid I have received the past four years throughout my time at the University of Hartford has been helpful and we are thankful for it every day.

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When I graduate in May I intend to enroll at the University of Hartford's Master's degree program, particularly in the advanced special education program. I also intend on getting a job as a teacher either in General Ed or Special education in the state of Connecticut. Please continue to fund the Roberta Willis Scholarship Program so that students like myself have the opportunity to enroll in the institution that is the best fit for them in the state. [Applause]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Thank you all for your testimony, and you did a fabulous job. Thank you and have a great day, thank you. [Applause] Next we have panel two from UCONN. Let's see, good afternoon still. Go right ahead.

PRIYANKA THAKKAR: Hello all. My name is Priyanka Thakkar and I am the current Student Body President for the undergraduate population at UCONN. Although speaking as one person, I represent almost 24,000 undergraduates who come from 35 countries, 42 states, and come from all 169 Connecticut cities and towns. Our wonderful students on campus are part of our 700+ clubs and organizations; they are leaders in and outside the classroom, and engaging in cutting-edge academics and research. These students are becoming active citizens by participating in activities that push themselves out of their comfort zone, representing every community from around the state and beyond. Our students vote, our students speak out, we care about our state and those that represent us. UConn has supported us in various ways to develop ourselves and truly find our identity and voice on campus. Personally, UConn has helped me develop my own voice as a woman of color in business. Being continuously inspired by my

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classes, professors, and peers, I have found multiple spaces where my identity is not only appreciated but celebrated. I have discovered that I am passionate about a variety of things, specifically human rights and technology; two very different areas of interest, but yet I have had opportunities to combine them both together.

I have been inspired to represent our student body and not sit idly but to be vocal and present in the campus community. And what is truly so special about our UConn community, that many can attest to is that we are able to lift each other up no matter our differences in size, gender, race, religion, sexuality or income status. No matter who you are, there is a home and place for you at UConn where your voice and presence is welcomed and valued.

When we look around campus, we see each other as fellow Huskies united as OneUConn. However, there are still students who are suffering and those that need additional support on this campus. As a student and leader in this community, we need more diverse staff and faculty to relate to our students, who look like them and understand their experience. We need more resources given to students who are struggling with their mental health and are afraid to ask for help. We need more space for our campus organizations including our cultural centers. We need your help with the assistance of UConn's state funding to ensure the fulfillment, potential, and professional and personal success of our Huskies.

These are the students that are fueling this state and they deserve access to these resources. UConn students need to be acknowledged, remembered, and

taken care of so that we can maximize the future of this state, together. Thank you. [Applause]

KATHERINE MORRIS: Hello. Hello, my name is Katherine Morris and I'm an honor student studying cognitive science, anthropology and public policy. I grew up being told that education is the key to success. Coming from Jamaican immigrant parents I had no choice but to internalize that. It motivated me to always be at the top of my class, constantly engaging with knowledge, constantly absorbing the world around me. I moved eight times before moving on to campus. From this I learned how drastic a difference a ten minute or a three hour drive can make.

In high school I moved to Bridgeport, Connecticut. Take a second to acknowledge what you might have immediately thought or pictured. I attended Bassick High School and the Bridgeport Regional Aquaculture Science and Technology Education Center, AKA BRASSTEC. I graduated salutatorian and made my way to UConn, financially independent but determined to succeed. I see many BRASSTEC friends from Fairfield and Stratford on campus but too few of my friends of BRASSTEC made it with me. Some did but could not afford to stay. Across the nation black students have the lowest college retention rates with black men particularly low at around 52 percent. UConn is not exception.

When we say education is key we leave quality out of the sentence. Quality comes from resources and support. Quality is access to nutritional food and mental health services. Quality is increased funding to cultural centers. Quality is consistent academic advising and career services. Quality is

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well funded. When you cut the budget, you cut quality, you cut support, you cut access to opportunity. When you cut the budget you cut people who look like me out of the picture. In my time at UConn funded by scholarships like the Presidential Award for Valedictorians and Salutatorians, Roberta B. Willis, the Pell grant, I've had the privilege of growing as a student and citizen. In my last year being one of the first scholars of the Bold Women's Leadership Network I was able to quit working two jobs and fully lean into my passion as a scholar activist. I'm the founder and president of UConn Collaborative Organizing or UCO, an advocacy group committed to promoting intersectionality and solidarity and social environment to address this movement.

We hosted -- oh, sorry. In just our first semester we've mobilized hundreds of UConn undergraduate and graduate students, faculty and staff alike in our movements including Representative Haddad. We have hosted seminars, marches and strikes. We created a new column in a daily campus. We're shifting the culture of community and activism on campus. We've only just begun. I could not have done so without adequate resources and support. Imagine the change UConn students could foster if they were all supported well. Imagine the change UConn could -- oh sorry, Connecticut could create. Imagine how we could lead the nation into a more diverse and equitable future. Please invest well in UConn because when you invest in education you invest in our collective future. Education always paths the best interest. It is after all the key to success. Thank you. [Applause]

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GLEB REZNIK: Good Afternoon members of the Appropriations Committee.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Move the microphone close to you, please.

GLEB REZNIK: Sorry, there you go. My name is Gleb Reznik and I am the Deputy Chief Information Security Officer at Synchrony and also a Welton resident. Headquartered in Stamford, Synchrony is a premier consumer financial services company that delivers customized financing programs across key industries including retail, health, auto, travel and home along with award-winning consumer banking products. We have built partnerships with national and regional retailers, healthcare providers, manufacturers and more. Synchrony is proud sponsor and a partner with UConn University as well as School of Engineering to help advance technology education and digital expertise for future leaders. Our partnership with UConn is very strong and helps Synchrony in several important ways:

First, this relationship helps us recruit engineering, math, computer science and technology talent, which is essential for our ongoing success and most importantly, it keeps jobs in Connecticut.

Second, we collaborate close -- we collaborate closely with UConn Engineering on numerous research projects, which helps us stay at the forefront of technological advances. This is a critical -- this is critical to remaining competitive in the financial services industry. I would like to provide several specific examples that demonstrate the importance of this partnership.

The first one. Founded in 2016, the Synchrony Financial Center of Excellence in Cybersecurity is a unique academic-corporate partnership to mitigate the growing cybersecurity exposures. The Center was established at the UConn Storrs campus, located in the Innovation Partnership Building. This Center allows Synchrony and UConn Engineering to focus on cybersecurity research across various industries. The Center advances education and research in cryptography, security and software engineering, security architecture, advanced persistent threats, and many other topics. The Center is promoting cutting-edge research in a field that is expected to grow by more than double between 2016 and 2021.

Synchrony and UConn aim to counter the growth of threats of foreign and domestic cybercrime by developing information security talent and leading research to help companies and consumers stay ahead of these threats

Second, Synchrony Digital Technology Center is now open at UConn's Stamford campus. We have 30 students that work in the center. Students focus on Digital Media and Design, Computer Science Engineering, and other business-related majors for UConn Stamford students.

Synchrony is also participating in and sponsored the CyberSEED event, which is an event that took place just this past October and with really big focus on how ethical hacking can further demonstrate the benefits of our partnership. We had close to 200 students and 50 schools that attended this across the country.

And last example I'll mention is, we're continuing to sponsor several Senior Design projects from the

School of Engineering. This is a great way to engage and recruit engineering talent and to explore new concepts with UConn faculty and students. In 2019 a four-person team worked on the Synchrony sponsored project to enhance the user experience for Synchrony's customers.

And lastly I'll mention that Synchrony's commitment to UConn is reflective in our recent philanthropic gift of \$1 million in December 2019 to UConn's Connecticut Commitment, an initiative to provide free tuition to low-income undergraduate students. These examples demonstrate the essential role that major research universities play in working with industry to develop a highly-skilled workforce and expertise in emerging technologies. Moreover, Synchrony currently has 65 employees working at our Stamford site that either graduated from UConn or are current students and have participated in internships.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Can you sum it up, 'cause you're way past the three minutes.

GLEB REZNIK: I'll just say that Synchrony is proud sponsor at UConn and looks forward to continuing our important work together.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you very much.  
[Applause]

EMILY YALE: Hello everyone. My name is Emily Yale. I'm a Master of Engineering in Global Entrepreneurs student at UConn Storrs. I have been at UConn since January 2019 when I was awarded the opportunity to work on my startup company fulltime. My startup company is named Land Maverick which I run and founded. It's centered on collecting mass data on

golf courses to improve playing conditions as well as reduce costs and minimize chemical usage. My hard work component is proudly manufactured in the state of Connecticut and I intend to keep manufacturing it in the state of Connecticut.

At UConn I have participated in three different entrepreneurship programs, Division Quest and the Connecticut Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovations Accelerate UConn and summer fellowship. Each of these programs have contributed to my understanding of entrepreneurship, how to build a viable company, and how to be successful in the state of Connecticut differently. It takes a village of entrepreneurship programs to build successful companies. There's no one single strategy that works for all. Just like a winning football strategy won't win a baseball game and a winning baseball strategy won't win a high school robotics team. There's no one strategy that helps all startups come off the ground. Hardware products in Sureteck, Intek services software and medical devices, all need different help. They need a village of entrepreneurship programs. UConn has availability of entrepreneurship programs that need to keep being funded and allowed to grow into a town of entrepreneurship programs to help improve entrepreneurship in the state of Connecticut.

Startup companies don't fail because of good ideas. Startup companies fail because founders don't know what to execute first. UConn entrepreneurship teachers students and lab grown technology how to come out of the lab, what to execute first to be successful. Thank you. Now, thank you for your time and I hope that you continue to fund Connecticut Entrepreneurship because the one thing

that's more fun than being an entrepreneur in the state of Connecticut is that the state is full of UConn grown entrepreneurship projects. [Applause]

AMBER SMITH: Hello everyone. My name is Amber Smith and I am currently a senior, joint senior and master student studying political sciences at UConn Storrs. I have come here today to share some of my story with all of you.

I was born and raised in Hartford. This city shaped who I am and I'm so proud of where I'm from. There are of course many opportunities I missed out growing up low income in Hartford. I was enrolled in Buckley, in Hartford Public school system K through 12. I went to Buckley High School and I had some highly influential teachers but we were devastatingly underfunded. You could tell someone anything is possible all you want. You can tell them every day, but we have eyes. And if we look around and we see no one that we've ever known has done it, those words of encouragement can fall on deaf ears.

In high school I was so discouraged and concerned I wouldn't get into college, I applied to every school that would give me a fee waiver for the application process. Like many other first generation, low income, under represented students I was accepted to UConn through Student Support Services. The UConn Storrs campus is less than an hour away from Hartford, yet I felt so isolated. It was an entirely different world. I am the first in my family to go to college. None of my family members or friends could prepare me for what I was going to face because I was the one that was paving the way. It was only when I was surrounded by my peers, my

true peers and seeing them also succeeding and growing and learning that I felt much more --

REP. WALKER (93RD): Go ahead, keep going.

AMBER SMITH -- was capable with my life. Thank you.

Student Support Services became my home away from home. It felt familiar and safe. The resources from SSS were all vital to my success. I have done so much in the past four years, more than I ever thought I could. My proudest accomplishment to date happened this past October when I was flown to Chicago to attend the 2019 Obama Summit for my work in my community and Hartford, regarding the lack of support for youth homeless problem. None of this would have happened if I was not invested in.

In turn I would not have had the education, the skill or the will to invest back into my community. In a few short months I will be coming back to Hartford to begin my career in public service, whatever that may look like. We have to ask ourselves, who are we to deny education for the next generation. I ask that you continue funding programs like this and students like me. I hope that you will because if you give the community the resources to succeed they will. Thank you.  
[Applause]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you all. Next panel three. Connecticut State University, Charter Oaks State College and undergrad programs. While we're changing I just want everybody to know up at the General Assembly, just in case you didn't know this; we have internship programs so if you want to come up and work with -- with us during the springtime

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'cause that's when our program really works, make sure you go on line and apply to our internship program. All right? Go right ahead.

YINERA LOPEZ: Good afternoon. My name is Yineira Lopez and I am currently a senior at Eastern Connecticut State University. I am originally from Venezuela but grew up in Atlanta, Georgia. In 2016, I received a full scholarship from the Dream.US foundation to attend Eastern Connecticut State University. In the past four years, Eastern has become my home and has allowed me to continue the journey to fulfill my dreams. Leaving home to pursue higher education is challenging but there could not be a more supportive campus than Eastern. Our school aids students in many areas like writing assistance, tutoring, undergraduate research, health services and career development. These are only a few aspects of support on our campus but highlight the commitment that the institution has to its students in helping them achieve success. Thankfully, I personally have not had to worry so much about tuition as it is covered by my scholarship. However, through my participation in the Student Government Association I have seen the concern that many students have with the continuous rise of tuition. Efforts like free access to community college are great to see in our society but we must not forget about other groups of students who will be affected by the decline in enrollment in their respective institutions. Your committee can assist in alleviating some of the hardships that our students will be exposed to by providing additional funds to ensure that the quality of education and support to students is not affected.

Our President Nunez and her administration have done a tremendous job in ensuring that the quality of education and support is not negatively affected on our campus. However, state funding has not increased in past years but the needs of students have. So I urge you today to consider investing in your students because of that, by investing in your students you're investing in the future of Connecticut. Thank you. [Applause]

ELMAR BARRIOS: Hi, my name is Elmar Barrios and I am currently a senior at Western Connecticut State University. Coming and being raised from undocumented immigrant parents it was hard because a financial burden always arose and it also helped -- it also was detrimental to us because it was not just one college student going, but two. So I was raised in the aspect of work, work, work, because here in America it's all about quantity not quality. So I learned that I was going to work. But because of that dream and hope that I had one day of going to school and continuing to pursue my career, I was awarded the opportunity to go to Western with the Roberta Willis Scholarship to help assist me with going to school.

It was a hardship for my parents because they did not expect that from me because it's different being raised in a culture and society where everything is about just the money and not understanding how hard it is and to really go for your dreams and achieving it.

I'm also currently the President right now of a club that we have on campus, the Student Nurse Association which helped me realize a lot of these hardships that people struggle with because we've

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given back to the community; and with the university helping and assisting us with giving back to the community with donations we've been giving, with giving back clothes, toys and unfortunately we've gone to a homeless shelter which we realized a big chunk of what it is and how under served we are. But I have realized that Western has helped us so much with giving back to the community, the greater good of Danbury and everybody else around it, making sure that the dream and the passion that one person may have at such a young age continues on and never fades away.

I ask -- and we also gave away for Mission Health Day which is an organ -- a day where Danbury Hospital and Western Connecticut State University work alongside each other to give back to the unfortunate which made realize the real reason I wanted to pursue nursing which was help the under-served population and I ask today to please keep funding Western Connecticut and our great opportunities like the Roberta Willis Scholarship for other people to make sure that a dream of a child never fades, and continues and pursues on because just that one hope and effort that one person may give is a reason to continue on and continue striving, continuing -- even though you may want to throw in the towel at times, which I have experienced, but the passion that Western has given me and the help it has given me financially is making me continue on with my career and hopefully one day going on to becoming a registered nurse for the pediatric population.

I thank you for your time and I hope once again, please continue funding our program as well. Thank you. [Applause]

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CALEB WELLS: Hi. I'm Caleb Wells. I first would like to thank you for your time and care about our education. As a sophomore history major at CCSU, I can list countless times and places where people like me did not have the opportunity for such learning and growth. Central has been a place for me to truly spread my wings.

After sleeping my way through high school, I did not know what I wanted to do. I took a gap year and moved around the country. What I learned during that time was that there is satisfaction in education and that workdays are often very long and hard. When I came back to Connecticut, I knew I wanted to go to college. I decided to go to CCSU simply because it was close to my house and inexpensive. While these are the most basic of criteria, I am very happy that Central fit the description.

As I went to class that first day, I decided to try something different and put in a little effort. I started paying attention in class, speaking with professors, and eventually joined the student government. All of a sudden, I was one of the active students who enjoyed school. Central became a sanctuary for my best and most sincere efforts that I never had acted on before. Soon enough I was the Chair of a committee, then President of History Club, and now working directly with our Vice President of Student Affairs. The shell that I broke out of created a new future for me that no one would have predicted three years ago.

My life has been changed ever since. This ability to learn and succeed, has given me a sense of hope that I have never had before. I feel as if I have

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finally planted my feet after years of letting the wind take me where it please. The opportunities CCSU has offered me by way of classes, professors, and activities has been like nothing else in my life. My professors have always welcomed me into their offices and advised me as best they could.

The beauty of CCSU lies within its inexpensive nature. Because I knew I was not \$33,000 dollars a semester, I was willing to try and more importantly, fail. I knew that even if I did fail people -- excuse me. I knew that even if I did fail and people shooed me off, it was okay. This was something I had never taken to heart before. This life lesson that was so foreign to myself in high school has become a cornerstone in my philosophy. And at the same time as I ran around with clubs and perhaps overworked myself, I attended amazing classes with Professors who really cared. Our history department filled with Ivy League scholars has been a phenomenal source of information about both history and schooling. The only way my transformation was possible was because of the affordability of CCSU. Central has been a blessing for me and the thousands of other students in attendance. Thank you. [Applause]

SCOTT D'AMATO: Hi, good evening. My name is Scott D'Amato. I am a senior at Charter Oaks State College and I'm a resident of Enfield. Good evening, Representative Hall and to the rest of the Appropriations Committee, good evening. After high school many years ago I joined the working world. I did not understand or value the need for a college education at the time. After working in a few different industries in my early twenties, I was hired by a large local healthcare company where I

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began what became my career in project and program management. As I started to navigate through my career path, I faced some real barriers that limited my growth potential, always I had a sense of insecurity when someone asked the question, where did you go to college? I dreaded that question during interviews, networking with managers or leadership, and even just shooting the breeze with my co-workers. I often felt inadequate because I did not have a college education. My options to pursue alternative positions were limited to those that did not require a degree and I missed out on opportunities as a result. My application was dismissed early in the assessment process.

Although I had experience and certifications in my field, I was passed over in preference of similarly qualified applicants with college educations. I often lamented my choice not to go to college when I was younger, and considered that to be the biggest personal regret of my adult life. I heard of Charter Oaks State College through a coworker who was close to my own age and had started taking courses to finish her degree. This raised my interest, but as a full time worker I was intimidated by the potential commitment and financial implications of college. I wondered how I might balance school with work and life's other obligations. I certainly could not spend several hours in a classroom each week. I contacted Charter Oaks State College and an advisor helped me get started with a job related certification program in Project Management and to get there I had to take three online classes.

When I started that program, I wasn't expecting to start a nine-year academic and personal journey that would bring me before you all this evening.

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Achieving my certification in Project Management felt good, and I was inspired to continue learning. I enrolled in a bachelor's degree program. Experiencing incremental academic success was more rewarding than I ever imagined it could be, and it gave me me an improved sense of self-value and purpose. The flexibility of the online learning environment, tools like Black Board and electronic Library resources, and the Academic Advisory staff enable students to complete course work generally at their convenience, in context of certain deadlines of course. This approach allowed me to balance my academic journey with work, family, and home life obligations, sometimes were easier than others. The relative costs of attending Charter Oaks State College made it much more affordable than other online programs. And as I speak to you today, I am enrolled in the final course of my degree program, and will graduate with a bachelor's degree in just a few weeks. Thanks to Charter Oaks State College I learned critical thinking skills, and expanded my understanding of a broad range of topics in my major, which is Healthcare Administration. This included classes in Psychology, Communications, and Science, just to name a few. I apply my learning each and every day at work and in my personal life.

Please provide the necessary funding critical for Charter Oaks State College to continue offering these academic opportunities to adult learners like me. Let us expand our horizons, experience the sense of accomplishment, and gain the confidence and self-worth that comes through the educational process supported by this and other institutions. When I graduate I will feel that I resolved the one regret of my adult life. Please allow others to do

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the same and much more through your support of Charter Oaks State College. [Applause]

ASMA RAHIMYAR: Good evening. My name is Asma Rahimyar. I'm a junior at Southern Connecticut State University. Stowed underneath my sprawl of maps, chronologies, international legal provisions, and Afghan history books is Robert Bly's poem, *The Night the Cities Burned*. The following stanza is circled, twice over, in red. *I'm never tired of despair and desperation, and I won't be quiet. I keep crying out that the house is being robbed. I want even the thieves to know.*

Researching Afghanistan's political situation is an undertaking that has colored my dreams in an array of Orwellian shades each night; however, my recurring nightmares of purges, indoctrination, imprisonment, and refugee camps are little penance for the insight I have gleaned into what happened to my uncle's friend, my mom's neighbor, my dad's professor, and the human beings who are continuously commemorated with Amnesty International reports instead of tombstones. There is a profundity in this gleaning, too; there is a profundity in the fact that I frequently fall asleep with my head rested against a book instead of a pillow, that I document human rights infractions with perpetually ink-stained fingers, and that I write about justice with an ardency that seeps my dreams in it. Yes—I am here to tell you about how improbable, how brazen, and how utterly miraculous it is that I, whose father studied anatomical structures in a deserted library and whose mother held nothing but Kabul's moonlight in her palms when she fled, am fervently studying to become an international human rights lawyer.

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When you invest in my education, therefore, you are fulfilling my parents' wildest dreams. You are insisting that the unlikely is, in fact, an imperative worth championing. My fellow students and I are the bearers of legacies, the manifestation of prayers, the carriers of folded-up postcards, and the embodiments of relentless hope. Ours are hero's journeys too. Above all, we must retain the dedication necessary to recognize them as such.

I am here to tell you that the sum total of my knowledge regarding the structure of the Senate, my understanding of Jane Austen's satirical wit, and my love for Rumi's hypnotic quatrains is far greater than its parts. My experience discussing Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed at the United Nations, debating natural law theory with my classmates, and helping a student figure out the proper placement of a semicolon within an essay about the death of her sister are similarly, worth far more than what a transcript or a resume could ever capture.

To be curious, to sit on the edge of one's seat as a professor describes Socrates' exaltation of the examined life, and the necessity of seeking knowledge for knowledge's sake is a human right, and I will safeguard this right through the questions I ask, the career I hope to pursue in human rights law, and the conversations I partake in, whether they be about the Categorical Imperative, the impact of rising tuition prices, or the best friend my uncle lost. His eyes were the color of mung-beans, and he was killed because he didn't know how to stop asking questions.

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I am impelled, then, to attend meetings regarding the implementation of social justice within curricula; I am obligated to stand alongside students rallying for immigrant rights on campus, and when I am handed the megaphone all it takes is a reminder that my mother once played the same card game five times in a row, as if the monotony of it could distract from the airstrikes overhead for me to speak. I am compelled to lead the Muslim Student Association, to participate in voter engagement efforts, and to write about the need to measure life with our words because I have to—because a boy with eyes the color of mung-beans was once killed for having a voice, because there is a girl my age who learns about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from within a classroom pockmarked with bullet-holes, and because my dad, who saw politics at its darkest, places a blanket around my shoulders as I study international relations and smiles, "keep at it, future world shaker." My idealist with a pure heart, my mom adds, as well as a liking for sticking herself in situations that don't immediately call for her presence. Live out the life so many before you could not.

I am here to tell you that the sum total of my knowledge is an awareness of my own smallness, as well as an understanding of what I owe the world in response. Indeed I cannot let the fact that I am on this side of the Atlantic make me forget the miracle of my circumstance, nor the action this miracle warrants. Before cities burn to ashes, there are children named after things cherished, with penchants for laughing at inopportune moments and carving their initials into trees, as children do. After cities burn to ashes, there are men and women

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who grow up without tiring of despair and desperation; one even hears her grandmother's voice as she studies for exams, walks to classes, and stands behind podiums, as dreamers do. This is what she says. My child—my lonely, dark haired child, who falls asleep with a river of smudged ink streaming across her palms, like calligraphy without the words. The next time they ask you what you are, you must cast away the hyphens, the apologies, the mispronunciations, and the acrid taste of words unsaid, their fluttering heartbeats caught, dying, between your clenched teeth. Cast them away in oceans of ink, and open your mouth. My child with the gossamer voice; you must tell them this story. What we could not say will nourish the cracked earth, and laleh, your grandfather's favorite flowers, will grow from our tears. You must know that the horizon is yours for the taking, and you can fold it in half to fit in your pocket so long as you remember what belongs to you.

Yes, I am here to tell you that our students pursue the rhythm of their coveted ambitions, and that the world is better for their striving. All can never be lost so long as the extent of our aspirations remains unfettered by circumstance. My peers and I are here before you after the ashes. I promise that the cadence of our voices warrants your attention. Thank you. [Applause]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, thank you all, thank you, thank you. While we're changing I'm going to do something unusual. I'm going to ask my colleagues just to say their name, their district and what towns they represent because I think it's important for you to know that. So, I'm going to start all

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the way over there with Representative Johnson.  
Name, number and town you represent, please.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Thank you so much. I'm Representative Susan Johnson. I represent Windham, which is the 49th district and includes Eastern Connecticut State University and Quinebaug Valley Community College.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Next.

REP. GIBSON (15TH): Hi, good evening. I'm Bobby Gibson. I represent the mighty 15th district, which represents Bloomfield and Windsor. I am also proud to say I attended Southern Connecticut State University and I graduated from Charter Oaks State College.

REP. WALKER (93RD): [Laughing]

REP. SIMMS (140TH): Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Travis Simms. I represent the 140th district in the great city of Norwalk.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you.

REP. DATHAN (142ND): Hi, my name is Lacy Dathan and I represent Norwalk and New Cannon and NCC is in the heart of my district, so thank you for coming.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Next. Right down there. Representative Baker. Representative Baker.

REP. BAKER (124TH): My name is Andre Baker. I represent the 124th district which is Bridgeport and I represent Housatonic Community College.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Everybody's going to add more.  
[Laughing] Go ahead.

REP. ROTELLA (43RD): I'm going to add more.

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REP. WALKER (93RD): Oh, no. [Laughing]

REP. ROTELLA (43RD): I'm Representative Kate Rotella and I represent the 43rd district, which is Mystic, Stonington and North Stonington, and I went to Eastern Connecticut State University and Mohegan Community College when it was Mohegan.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Next.

REP. NOLAN (39TH): How you doing? My name is Representative Anthony Nolan from the 39th district and the best New London. [Laughing]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Where'd you go to school? You want to say that? Is that what you're -- [Laughing]. [Crosstalk]. Go ahead.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Good evening. My name is Mae Flexer. I'm the State Senator from the 29th district which includes Mansfield, Windom, Scotland, Canterbury, Brooklyn, Killingly, Putnam and Thompson. And I represent Quinebaug Valley Community College, Eastern Connecticut State University and the University of Connecticut and I'm an alum of QVCC and UConn. [Laughing] [Applause]

REP. HADDAD (54TH): Good evening. I'm Greg Haddad. I'm the State Representative from Mansfield, Connecticut, the 54th district. I am not just a graduate of UConn but I represent the main campus of the University in Storrs as well. [Applause]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Good evening. My name is Toni Walker. I'm from New Haven. I'm from the 93rd and I represent -- southern Connecticut is right next door and Gateway is right around the corner. And I'm a graduate from Southern also.

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SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): I'm Kathy Osten. I'm a State Senator for the 19th district. I represent the towns of Marlborough, Hebron, Lebanon, Columbia, Sprague, Franklin, Norwich, Lisbon, Ledyard and Montville. [Laughing] I went to Mohegan Community College and most of my educational credits come from being in the military.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Wow. Don't mess with her.  
[Laughing]

REP. J. HALL (7TH): Good evening everybody. It's so great to see all the students here tonight. It's one of our favorite evenings. So, my name is Carol Hall. I represent Enfield and East Windsor, which is part of the 59th. We are the home for Asnuntuck Community College. Thank you all for being here tonight.

REP. BETTS (78TH): Good evening. My name is Witt Betts. I'm from the 78th district which represents Bristol and Clement.

REP. KOKORUDA (101ST): I think I'm the last one. Good evening. I'm State Rep Kokoruda, 101st. I represent Madison and Durham. So glad to be here tonight. You're doing a great job.

REP. WALKER (93RD): So the reason why I did that is because now you have names and faces and districts. Write them. Next we'll have panel four. They're from UConn Health. [Applause] By the representation of all the white coats, there might be a lot of people from UConn Health here. All right. As soon as you're ready, go right ahead. Press the red button. Yeah, got it? Okay.

RYAN ENGLANDER: Hello ladies and gentlemen of the Appropriations Committee. It is my distinct honor

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to address you today regarding the crucial importance of UConn Health as an asset to the state of Connecticut. My name is Ryan Englander. I grew up in Suffield, Connecticut, a small town in the north of the state, and I am currently a second year MD/PhD student at the University. I have been in the UConn system for the entirety of my educational career thus far. I received my bachelor's and master's at the University of Connecticut-Storrs and have spent the last two years at UConn Health. During that time, I have been intimately involved in clinical education programs and basic science research, both at UConn Health itself and at the Jackson Laboratory on campus. I have worked in labs at UConn Health studying the immune response against cancer, developed novel gene editing technologies utilizing CRISPR/Cas9, and I will be working at the Jackson Laboratory this summer studying a novel strategy for developing targeted immunotherapies in a variety of cancer types.

In my personal experience, the University, and UConn Health in particular, is a unique and potent attractant for the young talent that this state will need to compete and succeed in the increasingly technology and healthcare-dominated economy of the coming years and decades. Through my experiences in clinical education, I have seen how the groundbreaking educational strategies being perfected at UConn Health are attracting the best aspiring young medical professionals this country has to offer, individuals who tend to stay in the state and enrich it with their expertise and knowledge. Through my experiences in research, I have seen firsthand that the strength of the University is attracting the top scientific minds

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from across the country who are carrying their brilliant ideas here to this state. These big ideas are where innovation comes from, and it is innovation more than anything else that drives new economic opportunities and growth.

Connecticut sits between the massive biomedical centers that are rapidly expanding in Boston and New York. That provides us with an unprecedented opportunity to form a crucial part of a biotechnology corridor that will be at the forefront of launching the American economy to new heights. Not only can we participate in this period of growth, but through strong and sustained investment in UConn Health, the state of Connecticut has an opportunity to send a message that we are going to be leaders in that process.

The question of whether to continue investing in UConn Health is often portrayed as a choice between spending money now to receive returns later or not spending the money at all. This dichotomy is false. The University's leading position as a top-tier national innovator is producing returns right now. Top physicians are coming to the state of Connecticut because of the strength of our flagship institution right now. Groundbreaking research is taking place at the University, at the Jackson Labs, and at UConn Health right now. That research is currently producing new biotech companies that are starting in the state of Connecticut right now. Investment in UConn Health is not something that is just going to pay off five years, ten years or twenty years though it will also do that. Investment in UConn Health is paying off right now, today.

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I recognize that the Appropriations Committee is juggling a lot of different priorities, as occurs with any budgetary process. I hope I have conveyed today how central UConn Health and the University of Connecticut in general are for Connecticut's growth as we head deeper into the 21st century. Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to address you all today. It has been an absolute privilege [Applause]

PAUL NWOKEJI: Hello, my name is Paul Nwokeji and I am a second year dental student here at UConn. I really appreciate this opportunity from the committee to have my voice heard and to represent this great institution. I am originally from the Boston area, but my years in Connecticut have by far created the most memories and have been the most impactful on my life. It started when UConn offered me to be a part of the football team in the spring season of my junior year of high school. Having gotten blessed with that opportunity so early, I knew I had to take it. My parents made so many sacrifices to even get me to a place where I could be seen by UConn. My father came from Nigeria, he came in his mid-twenties and my mother comes from inner-city Boston, so they have had an uphill battle their whole lives. They taught me and my three siblings a lot about values, about work ethic, and how to overcome. UConn gave me an opportunity to demonstrate what my family has been working for, and it's a feeling like no other. I can't thank UConn enough. UConn gave me the opportunity -- oh, let's see, over the next 5 years as a full-time Biology student and a full-time athlete representing UConn and the State of Connecticut, I grew, I matured, and learned a lot about myself. For this invaluable

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experience, I can't thank UConn enough. Most of my teammates ended up moving back home after their undergraduate education and only come back for certain events. Little did I know, I was not finished with my time at UConn. Again, I found myself being blessed with an opportunity to attend one of the best dental schools in the country. I believe this was no coincidence, and every day I am thankful for it. When I walk through the hallways at school, I always have the feeling of being wanted in the place I already feel at home. It's awesome to represent the State of UConn -- the state of Connecticut again, the institution of UConn as a resident of the state this time and this time as a future healthcare provider.

UConn really does help me feel constant support as a student. After a year and a half here, I can't picture myself anywhere else and feel compelled to provide care to the residents of Connecticut when I am able to practice. The Dental School is helping me progress and, now that I have transitioned to a full-time Health Profession Student, I am learning how to apply myself in different ways than I am used to. I have been able to conduct summer research, serve in many community service opportunities, travel to DC to represent our SNDA Chapter, experience the Biomedical Curriculum, and much more. The resources and opportunities here have not failed me, and I give a lot of credit to the school for providing them.

The medical school curriculum challenged me and taught me what it takes to provide healthcare to the general population. I am more than grateful for being in this curriculum. The resources and facilities have a large positive impact on my

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learning and are big part of the reason of my success here so far. I could not imagine losing any of this due to lack of funding. This is a mutual feeling among all students, not just me. It is important that we maintain funding to UConn Health to help students like me feel supported and have the ability to thrive in Connecticut's workforce after graduating from this institution. This will keep the flow of more in-state providers with amazing education into the Connecticut workforce leading to a standard of high quality care for the residents of Connecticut and more businesses. Also, continued funding will keep UConn Health one of the best health education institutions, which will attract more diverse and talented applicants. I ask that you consider what I have said in favor of continued funding and I hope you feel this investment will lead to results of huge magnitude for the present and the years to come. Thank you for your consideration of my testimony; I truly appreciate it. Thank you. [Applause]

JENNIFER OZIMEK: Hi, my name is Jennifer Ozimek. I am a primary care doctor and assistant professor at UConn. I was born at St. Francis hospital, raised in Avon, Connecticut, attended high school in Farmington, Connecticut. I graduated from the University of Connecticut School of medicine in 2014. I currently live in Simsbury with my husband who is also a primary care doctor at UConn. Thank you very much for taking the time to hear my testimony today.

While in high school I had the chance to visit the UConn health center and was given the opportunity to dissect a liver and heart. It was in that moment that I fell in love with the medicine and its

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ability to combine my love for science with my passion for helping others. I also knew that after touring the school, it was my dream to attend UConn medical school. As a sophomore in college, I applied through their early decision program and was accepted. From day one, UConn medical school had me seeing patients in the community. I knew through the mentors that I met at UConn that UConn was my first choice for a residency program.

As a resident, I had the privilege to practice at the general medicine clinic at UConn Health. The faculty who taught me in clinic ignited my passion for primary care. The dedication these faculty have for their patients is apparent in every single patient encounter. At UConn's general medicine clinic, I have had the opportunity to treat a largely Medicare/ Medicaid population. As their primary care physician, I am able to advocate for their access to healthcare. I am always able to get my patients the testing or specialists that they need by working within the robust UConn health system. I have a strong sense of community and commitment to my patients which drove me to stay on after completing my residency in 2017 and my chief year in 2018 as faculty and a primary care provider at UConn health.

UConn has taught me how to approach patients as people, not just look at the disease that may affect them. Since becoming an attending at UConn I have been able to work towards continuous improvement for the patients we serve. I work with a multidisciplinary team to provide a consultative service for chronic pain patients to help address the opioid epidemic in Connecticut. Not only has this provided a service for chronic pain patients

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but also provides education regarding pain management to providers within our community. My newest initiative is working with the dental program to help improve access to dental care for all of our patients. As a physician, I learn from my patients and colleagues every day. The academic environment at UConn is one that pushes everyone to always strive to learn the latest, continually improve through numerous quality improvement initiatives and do the best for our patients. Without UConn health, there are countless patients who be unable to have access to the best medical care. Thank you.

[Applause]

CHRISTINE BECK: Good evening and thank you for your time and attention. My name is Christine Beck, and I joined the department of genetics and genome sciences at UConn Health in the Jackson Laboratory as an Assistant Professor in August of 2017. As a native of New Jersey, it was nice to re-locate from my postdoctoral laboratory in Houston, Texas back to -- back to the northeast and Connecticut, where my family has settled in a house in West Hartford.

I came to Connecticut after securing a \$1 million dollar research grant from the NHI to pursue the ways in which the repetitive sequences that comprise 50% of human DNA predispose our genomes to instability. I believe in the value of basic research, and think that the study of genomic rearrangements can guide us to novel findings in cancer and germline disease, and may enable the discovery of therapeutic pathways that were previously unknown. As a joint faculty member of UConn Health and the Jackson Laboratory, I participate in the vibrant communities of both

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campuses, and believe that my position has afforded me unique opportunities to accelerate my research.

I went to a public school in New Jersey, and attended state schools- Iowa State University and the University of Michigan, for my undergraduate and graduate degrees respectively. I have a deep respect for publicly-funded educational institutions, and I owe a sincere debt to the state funded universities and the professors that have helped to foster my curiosity. Here in Connecticut, I believe that UConn Health and UConn Storrs are important institutions providing scientific training as well as a top-notch research environment.

As a joint faculty member, I devote my time to my research program investigating genome stability in human disease. To facilitate this, my tenure-track position was supported by a generous start up package from the state, and I am additionally supported by administrative, grant writing, and computational personnel at JAX. In my position I have begun teaching and mentoring the next generation of scientists here in Connecticut.

I greatly enjoy teaching graduate students the fundamentals of genetics, and it is also an honor to mentor UConn Health students, and to train the people who are in my laboratory. Many of them have been born and raised in Connecticut; one is a naturalized citizen that genuinely loves living here, and one member of my laboratory is interested in permanently immigrating to the US and to Connecticut. All of us enjoy working in a diverse community at JAX and UConn Health, and are thankful for the state support that enables our research.

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In 2019, my laboratory used preliminary data generated in my first two years as a faculty member to obtain a \$2 million dollar research grant from the NIH. This award will enable research from my group for the next five years, and my support from both institutions was crucial in securing this award.

From my faculty member colleagues to the supportive staff and graduate students, and to all of the friends I have made in the communities surrounding the campus, my choice of starting my nascent laboratory at UConn Health and JAX has been an excellent and unparalleled decision in my career. I aim to continue to support the research community of UConn, and to foster a productive and interesting research program that pushes basic genome science forward. Your continued support of this community makes or breaks all of our research programs, and your ability to meet the needs of our laboratories is paramount to our success. Thank you very much for your time and attention. [Applause]

JEFF FRYER: Good evening. My name is Jeff Fryer and I am speaking on behalf of a company called Rallybio, an organization that I co-founded with Dr. Martin Mackay and Dr. Stephen Uden on the UConn Health campus in Farmington in January of 2018. I grew up in Waterbury and spent the last 27 years as a resident of Southington. My partner, Martin was born in Scotland, lived all around the world and he's called Connecticut home for over 20 years now. Steve was born in England, lived and worked in Europe and Japan, and has been a resident in Connecticut for 11 years.

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I began my career as a practicing CPA in Hartford and spent another 15 years industry leading financial functions of some large globally publicly traded companies based here in Connecticut, the last one being Alexion Pharmaceuticals. Martin has worked in pharmaceutical and biotech research and development for more than 30 years for great companies like Pfizer, AstraZeneca, and most recently Alexion. Steve trained as a medical doctor in England, spent more than 25 years also in pharmaceutical and biotechnology research and development with companies that include Wyeth, Novartis, Pfizer and most recently, Alexion connection there.

In all reality we have the ability to live anywhere we want in the world. We could have founded our company anywhere we want, but we did it here in Connecticut, our home.

Rallybio is focused on bringing life-transforming medicines to patients with devastating and rare disorders. We officially launched the company in January of 2018 at the Technology Incubation Program on the Farmington campus. We've raised \$37 million in venture financing and while statistically we'll fail as a startup company, we were named as Fierce Biotech's most promising private biotechnology companies in the industry in October 2018.

In less than 20 years working out of UConn, TIP facility in Farmington we've acquired the rights to multiple promising drug candidates and we're aggressively working to advance those toward clinical trials. These clinical trials will run us more than \$200 million in spending over the next four years and we're currently operating with a team

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of 13 employees. I'm hoping that we close on our next round of financing of \$70 million by the end of this quarter. And our success has been not only attributable to the hard work of the Rallybio team members but also the support we've received from our investors, business partners, advisers and vendors.

UConn TIP has been the foundation of Rallybio from the beginning and we could not have launched the company had it not been for the support of the TIP leadership team TIP and Farmington on the UConn campus. UConn, through TIP, has created an environment that gives startup companies like Rallybio a leg-up and a better chance to succeed.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Can you sum up please?

JEFF FRYER: Sure. I'm confident that we could not have launched Rallybio as efficiently and as cost effective as we did without the support that UConn and TIP. While our future is not yet written, we are optimistic that we have a promising future. We know that the Appropriations Committee is faced with budget constraints and priorities, and we hope that you continue to support UConn Health. Thank you very much.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. [Applause] Next we have the fifth panel, Connecticut State University Graduate Programs. You all came for moral support? [Laughing] Go right ahead. Please exit quietly. Go right ahead.

JUSTINE BELDA: Hello.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Press that microphone. Is the red button on?

JUSTINE BELDA: Yep, it's on.

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REP. WALKER (93RD): Okay. Bring the microphone closer to you 'cause you need to -- there you go.

JUSTINE BELDA: Better? Okay. My name is Justine Belda and I am a graduate of Southern Connecticut State University, class of 2015. I am currently pursuing my master's at Eastern Connecticut State University. I am also interning in the Academic Services Center as an Academic Advisor. As an advisor, I predominately advise first-year and second-year students as they navigate their academic journey at Eastern. This has been the most rewarding position because I am able to connect with a variety of students on campus. I feel as though my academic and social guidance is creating a difference in how my students regard their college experience. Learning within the Connecticut State University System has not only been inside the classroom, but also through a work perspective. I enjoy my experience -- I enjoyed my experience during my undergraduate time and I believe that through that experience I am able to better relate to my advisees. Every day I get the opportunity to speak with students and support them to realize their full potential.

This internship has helped me reflect from when I was an undergraduate when advisors provided me with good advice to realize my full potential, even when I was undecided. Liberal arts colleges such as Eastern State University are essential for exploring areas of study that students have never considered before, it helps open new doors every day and it has opened new doors for me as well. The lessons I have learned and opportunities I have been given will continue with me for the rest of my life. And for this I am so truly grateful.

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MEGAN BAKER: Hi, my name is Megan Baker. I'm from Newington, Connecticut. I am a first-year political science graduate student at Southern Connecticut State University. I am also a first-generation immigrant. My mother came to the United States with her father and three brothers from the Philippines when she was just seven years old. I remember my grandfather telling me stories about having to shovel neighbors' driveways in shorts and a tank top because even though he did not own the proper attire, he had to feed his four children on a single income. My mother worked very hard all throughout her high school academic career because there is nothing that my grandfather emphasized the importance of more than education. She placed at the top of her class in high school and was accepted to Dartmouth as an undergrad. Despite her high accolades, college almost was not an option for my mom. So when it came to selecting my undergraduate institution and even my graduate institution, I always predicated my decision on one component: opportunity. I wanted to attend a university that provided me with opportunities to expand upon the foundation built by my mom and her father.

After visiting Southern's campus, I immediately knew that it was the school for me. I was accepted into the University's Honors College with a Presidential Merit Scholarship which waived my tuition and fees, and alleviated the financial struggle my mom had faced 30 years prior. Southern presented more opportunities to me than I thought possible. I conducted research in the Political Science Department that was eventually published. That work generated further research collaborations and led to my entrance into graduate school. The

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funding from my scholarship, the genuine care and support I received from the university's administration and faculty, and the vital preparation I received for life after graduation is a privilege that I am lucky to have received, and everything my mom could have wanted for me after facing the hardships of her experiences.

The allotted time for this testimony is not sufficient for describing the importance of the public funding for higher education that I received through Southern. In addition to my receiving of the Presidential Merit Scholarship, Southern awarded me with a state-funded travel abroad to further my studies in Europe. As a member of the University Choir, I was able to travel to Greece, Portugal, and Rome over the course of the past four years through the generosity of a family foundation that was created by one of the members to pay forward the opportunities the institution provided him.

By attending Southern, I was able to not only receive a top-tier quality education within the school itself, but I was able to branch out and explore educational facets outside of campus and outside of the country. I built cultural bridges with choirs abroad through a shared love of music, and studied ancient Roman and Biblical texts while at St. Peter's Basilica, the Sistine Chapel, and Ostia Antica.

Southern gave me an extremely valuable experience and is credited with cultivating and molding me into the confident, capable person I am today. Allowing students and Connecticut residents to have these aforementioned experiences only serves to better our home community. Public funding for higher education

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should not be regarded so finitely in budget numbers and dollar amounts. We are talking about students' future; we are talking about Connecticut's future. Properly fostering the educational growth of the next generation should be considered as an investment.

Many of my peers in the political science department seek internships right here at the state capital; last year, I interned at a government relations firm and enjoyed every minute of the experience. It made me reconsider looking for a graduate school out of state. A lot of my colleagues find internships here as legislative aids for their hometown representative or senator. The students here want to give back to the state in which they grew up or attended undergrad. They want to find jobs here and work towards bettering the state. Cultivate an environment where students want to stay, where they feel nurtured and supported. So, please, invest in students, in students like me because they will play a vital role in the state's future success and understand the value of reinvesting in the community that provided them the opportunity to succeed. Thank you. [Applause]

KRISTINE DONAHUE: Hi, my name is Kristine Donahue. I am pursuing an MFA in Creative and Professional Writing from Western. I don't know what I can add to the powerful testimonies that my fellow students have already given, but I will give it a try. If you had asked me even a year ago if I would consider returning to school for a post graduate degree, my answer would have been a resounding no. And that's exactly the answer I gave to Anthony D'Aries, the program coordinator for Western's MFA in Creative and Professional Writing when I stopped by the

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vendor table he was manning at a writer's conference in New York City, of all places, back in August of last year. All I wanted was his signature so I could get my free course for visiting all the vendors at that event. [Laughing] I had no idea where those five minutes would lead.

As I'm sure he asked the hundreds of other attendees at that conference, he asked me "why not"? Why not, indeed. Aside from the sheer cost of college at any level, I faced the barrier of a less than stellar undergraduate performance. In the years after I graduated from UConn, hello fellow Huskies, I had in fact looked at pursuing a master's degree in a variety of fields. All of them hitched my future to a GPA that defined who I was as a student and as a person over a decade ago. Doors were closed to me before I'd even had a chance to apply.

But Anthony didn't give up. Even though returning to college certainly wasn't an easy sell. I spent weeks emailing back and forth with him and speaking with current students and recent graduates. And I spent a fair amount of soul searching, finally coming to the realization that this wasn't about improving my writing or getting a degree. This was about creating an opportunity for myself. If it hadn't been for that personal touch, and Herculean effort on the part of my program coordinator, I wouldn't be here. Now that I am, it's the MFA program itself that really excites me. For the first time in my life I'm an active participant in my education. I am in charge of the curriculum, which empowers me to steer my education in a direction that suits me and my goals. This is not one size fits all learning.

Additionally, I'm less bound by the shackles of tuition. Don't get me wrong, college is still expensive. But I have opportunities to work as a graduate assistant for the university to help defray the cost of which I am taking full advantage. For my very first day in my MFA program at Western I have felt like I'm home. I'm finally in the right place, at the right time, doing exactly what I'm supposed to be doing. At long last I'm on the right path to my dream career and WCSU not only opened that door for me, but it all but refused to let the opportunity slip through my grasp. Please continue to provide the funds that allow students like me every opportunity to pursue our dreams. Thank you.  
[Applause]

MICHAEL THERIAULT: Good evening. My name is Michael Theriault, and I'm a first year graduate student at Central Connecticut State University. My experience is central and can best be described as inspiring. From the faculty and staff, to the students, this is an institution that displays great pride and unity. At Central, we are all referred to as a family. It is no surprise seeing as how we all come together to support the university's growth and overall mission. I came to Central as both a graduate student and a graduate intern. This has given me the unique opportunity of experiencing the internal and external components of this university. I am studying student development in higher education. This major teaches us the value of student affairs as well as the impact it has on a student's growth and development. I spend the majority of my internship in the student center. Although it is only one building, almost every student knows it as the living room of our campus.

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Over 60 students consider the student center their job, with responsibilities ranging from managers to technicians. Without them our building could not be sustained the way it is on a daily basis. Because of the funds we receive, we are able to support over 100 clubs and organizations, ranging from cultural, mental health, identity, leisure, recreation, and so much more.

My involvement as an undergraduate meant so much to me and got me to where I am today. I would love to see these organizations and programs continue to see the funding they need. All the students I work with spend tireless hours planning, meeting, and executing these events. To many, their clubs and organizations give them a space they can feel accepted, wanted, and appreciated in. Central Connecticut State University has done an amazing job expanding its outreach to all of its students and taking our wants and needs to heart. We would not be in the place we are today without the state of Connecticut's continued support. Higher education is a fast changing system and it is imperative it sees the continued support from all of you to meet the demands of an ever growing new generation of students. Thank you. [Applause]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you all. You did a fantastic job, thank you. Up next panel six, UConn. Good evening. Go right ahead.

ERIN CURRY: Good evening. I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to the Connecticut House Appropriations Committee for the opportunity to speak tonight on behalf of the University of Connecticut tonight. My name is Erin Curry and I am currently a sixth year graduate student pursuing my

PhD in Applied and Condensed Matter Physics at the UConn Storrs campus and I am also the Vice President of Graduate Student Senate.

I grew up in Glastonbury, and although I achieved my bachelor's degree out of state, returning to Connecticut for graduate school was very important to me. When deciding on a physics graduate program I chose UConn for two reasons. First, I wanted to come back to the great state that I call home with the hopes it would open doors to industrial career opportunities in Connecticut post-graduation. Second, the research, innovative laboratory equipment, and awarded faculty at UConn stood out noticeably against other highly regarded programs to which I was offered admission.

The institutional esteem that attracted me to the UConn was only -- has only grown during my time as a student researcher. Most notably, with the financial support of the State of Connecticut, UConn has the incredible opportunity to expand STEM research and innovation through the Next Generation Connecticut Initiative also known as NEXTGENCT. A large component of the NEXTGENCT accomplishment thus far is infrastructure catering to a wide range of STEM departments, notably the creation of the University Tech Park, which includes the Innovation Partnership Building. This revolutionary building brings industrial leaders together with motivated students and faculty to create cutting edge research and development.

To use a personal example, I am a graduate student who has already benefited from the unique resources of the Innovation Partnership Building. I am funded through a joint UConn-United Technologies grant to

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solve fundamental questions surrounding the relatively new field of metal additive manufacturing. Thanks to the NEXTGENCT initiative, UConn has given me a unique opportunity to utilize multiple additive industrial systems and recently in partnership with industry have even begun the process of possible patent and commercializing of our radiation imaging technique. I have seen firsthand that the NEXTGEN's investment in UConn and its students is working to create revolutionary collaboration, which will only strengthen our workforce for the future.

The benefits of NEXGENCT are already exemplified in completed projects such as the Innovation Partnership Building and one third of the Gant Science Complex, but in order for this mission to reach its full potential we must not stop here. In plan are renovations to extremely outdated buildings such as and Torrey Life Sciences and the creation of the Science One complex. We must see that the plans follow through to encourage the best and brightest to choose UConn.

In addition to infrastructure, an arguably more important element of the upcoming years at UConn is the necessary hiring of faculty and staff to support the NEXTGEN mission. Throughout my time at UConn I have witnessed many years of hiring freezes at the University, causing a profound ripple effect through teaching, research, and advancement.

Accomplished new professors, increase the caliber of undergraduate teaching, bring in grant funding to the university, and help to recruit the top graduate students to UConn. Speaking as a graduate student, talented faculty is a major contributor when

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choosing a higher education program. Continuing the NEXTGEN initiative will allow the university to hire new faculty, bring in the most talented graduate students, and educate undergraduates to create the best future workforce in Connecticut.

UConn has established the foundation to become a leader in teaching, research and development; however, if we do not continue to support the initiative, we will be left with nothing but the foundation. To build a strong academic future for both the university and Connecticut as a whole we must follow through on the next years of NEXTGEN and beyond. Thank you for your time. [Applause]

BERK ALPAY: Thank you to the members of the Appropriations Committee for this opportunity to testify. My name is Berk Alpay. I was raised in South Windsor and I'd like to briefly describe to you my experience as a Computer Science and Mathematics student at UConn over the last three years. And I hope my experiences will reflect the close ties between high-quality education, academic research, and industry that are possible because of UConn.

Since early my freshman year, I've done research with the Eversource Energy Center at the Innovation Partnership Building at UConn. The research group I'm a part of, a team of students and faculty works full-time to develop methods by which to improve the reliability of power grids in cooperation with New England's largest energy provider. Since last year I've worked on a research project in bioinformatics using genetic markers to predict gene expression. This work has major applications in detecting genetic risks of disease. My research wouldn't be

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feasible without the supervision of my advisor who was recently hired by the Department of Computer Science and Engineering and the advanced computational resources provided by UConn Health.

Outside of the lab, my computer science and statistics coursework are designed explicitly to give students a deep understanding of software engineering, data science, and machine learning, skills for which today's industry has high demand. Almost all of my instructors are actively engaged in research, and impart insights into course material and hands-on projects that come with working at the bleeding edge of science and math.

UConn's budget supports the quality of education, academic research capacity, and industry partnerships that make all this possible. I chose UConn for its status as an affordable, world class university, and I've never doubted that it was one of the best decisions I've ever made.

Thank you again for this opportunity to submit testimony. I hope you will continue to recognize and support UConn's critical role in Connecticut's economy. Thank you. [Applause]

KYLA IRWIN: Hello everyone. My name is Kyla Irwin. I'm a senior from State College, Pennsylvania and I have had the opportunity to create my own major by participating in the Individualized major program. The title of my major is Youth Development and Sport. I want to thank the assembly for allowing me the opportunity to speak tonight and for all of the past support, it means more than you know.

My junior year of high school I came on my first visit to campus. I was extremely excited to say the

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least. I knew that this was the perfect school for me the moment I stepped on campus. With the history of hard work, excellence, and perfection, I knew this was the school that was meant for me.

Academically and athletically, UConn is known around the world. Due to the opportunities that UConn has provided for me, our research programs in the Psychology Department have been a tremendous help, great experience and chance to gain knowledge that is deeper than the classroom. I have been able to be a part of studies and run studies that have provided the insight that has allowed me to dive deeper into what I plan on doing in the future. I am thankful for the opportunity to grow more in my academic fields.

Another academic opportunity that has been extremely beneficial to me would be the access to tutors. With my vigorous athletic schedule, the ability to schedule tutors and have the chance to enhance my knowledge has been something I am forever grateful for. It has allowed me to be driven in the classroom as well as on the court, and if it weren't for the academic staff and tutors we have available, my success here would not be the same. The staff that is involved with our athletics program grants us the convenience of flexibility and success all in one. Without my academic advisors, SAAC advisors, and leadership teams on campus, there would be a direct correlation to a decrease in my academic success.

Upon graduation, I plan on continuing my basketball career overseas. As an athlete, I know my time to play is limited, but because of the education I have received here at UConn, I know that I have an amazing chance of getting back into grad school to get a master's degree in occupational therapy. A

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program that has been offered here at UConn that has impacted what I want to do in my future and has touched my heart, is the program called Team Impact. Now that UConn is involved with Team Impact, I have been privileged to be the fellow here on campus. This program has truly inspired me to work harder and be a greater influence on the lives around me. For those of you who do not know about Team Impact, it is an organization that pairs children with chronic illnesses up with college athletic teams with the hopes of building confidence and friendship along the way. This organization has surely done so.

Lastly, after a bittersweet four years here, I am graduating under the individualized major program. With all of our traveling and missed school days, this program has given me the opportunity to be successful in the classroom. I was able to pick courses that suited my future desires and had the flexibility of choosing the method that I perform best in. With my last course being my capstone project, I get to leap into what drives and motivates me on the court and in the classroom and learn more about how sports impact youth development and boost confidence, resiliency, and grit throughout a lifetime.

UConn has been able to produce champions on the court and in the classroom, and with your help we can continue to live up to our legacy and win championships every year. Thank you, have a wonderful evening. [Applause]

VIRGEN GUADARRAMA: Good evening ladies and gentleman. My name is Virgen Guadarrama and I'm here on behalf of the University of Connecticut,

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more specifically the Hartford campus. It has been with great honor that I have accomplished two years of my college career at this campus. Two years filled with assignment, devotion, ambition and new opportunities. It was on Hartford campus where I realized who I wanted to be in the future. Not in a career aspect -- not only in a career aspect, but also in a personal one.

But before I continue this part of my story, I would like to take you back in time. I was born in Hartford, Connecticut but I cannot say that I was raised here. My family traveled to Puerto de Alcala to take care of my grandparent's health and personal issues. It wasn't until 2009 or 2010 after they both passed that my mother finally decided to stay in the United States so that we could ensure that my brother got high quality medical services and that I got a high quality education service. From there on we have one through it all from homelessness to having our own house. My family and I have had to overcome many obstacles. It came to a point that I even questioned if I would be able to go to college; not only because of the things we were going through but also because part of my family did not believe I would go to college.

As I filled out my applications for colleges I could feel my body filled with fear, and when I finally accepted -- I was accepted in the University of Connecticut, I was excited. Not only was I able to prove to many that I, the daughter of a single mother, had made it to college but I was about to begin one of the most important chapters of my life.

As every new chapter begins new obstacles appear and this chapter was no exception. As a first

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generation student I did not have the complete knowledge of what being in college was like. All I had was the knowledge that my high school had provided which was basically that college was going to be difficult, expensive and challenging, but once in a lifetime experience.

As elected officials in these prestigious and public positions, can you think back to a time in your life where some kind of support made a difference in your life? For me the support came in the form of UConn Student Support Services Program. It truly has made all the difference. I am happy to say that I am very fortunate to UConn Student Support Services Program, better known as SSS, which has helped me make my transition from high school to college. As a first generation college student I did not have much support. I did not know about financial aid documentations. I did not know about certain services available. And I didn't even know how to appropriately reach out to people.

The SSS Program at the Hartford campus has continuously provided me support so I could truly understand the responsibilities and commitment that comes with being in college. This program allowed me to make -- to take two classes the summer before my first semester and has taught me about many resources that the University of Connecticut provides. The SSS Program continues to guide me every step of the way so I can reach my goal of graduating from UConn. Through the support and SSS at Hartford, I have learned my academic strengths and interests and was able to change my major from biology to human development and family sciences.

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My career goal is to be a social worker so I can work in a Hartford area hospital with people who are experiencing issues, but not only medical but also personal. By committing funds to UConn you are supporting students like me, students who plan to make a positive change in our community. Students utilize these essential student services such as the Academic Achievement Mental Health Services and the SSS Program itself as a way to expand their opportunities. If it wasn't because of these and other services, I along with many other students would have fallen through the cracks.

We often speak about ways to close achievement and opportunity gaps. Well that process starts right here, right now and with all of us. How do you, honorable public officials hope to reduce inequalities in our state and increase the opportunities for many students like me. I would like to close with a quote to reflections. Nelson Mandela once said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." But how can I change the world if my education is being affected by the limitation of services and funds. Thank you. [Applause]

JOSHUA CROW: Good evening. I am Josh Crow and I can feel my heart beating in my chest right now, so please bear with me for this. [Laughing] My mom every so often will tell a story of my first birthday. It was quite the occasion, as all first birthdays are and everyone was curious as to what my first gift would be. It was nothing other than a UConn onesie, one that I wore for many years past its prime. Since that day not a birthday of mine has passed where I did not receive what my grandfather would call a subtle hint as to where I

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was encouraged to go to college. This was actually for a good reason. The University of Connecticut has been as much a part of my family as it is a part of this state.

While living up in Sousa house in Towers Dormitory, my parents met and fell in love, so UConn for them was never just a school, but the beginning of a life that they spend together to this day. Because of this strong connection my family has to UConn Nation, I was raised to be a Husky as well. I have watched the basketball games since I was a small child and once we were old enough, my parents kept my siblings and me entertained with many of the stories they made while in Storrs, Connecticut.

Shockingly, here I am, attending UConn as a junior with my younger sister who's a freshman, and if the trend continues, as I hope it does, my brother will join us when he graduates from high school next year. Like my parents I have started to build the foundation of the rest of my life here. I have worked on my education, led the Undergrad Senate as its speaker for two years. Like my parents, I have found someone who loves and cherishes me though we did not meet up in Towers. Some things at UConn have not changed a bit, nor will they ever. But some things have changed a great deal. Every time my parents have dropped me and my sister off they always talk about a new building that had risen up on campus, a new program had been created by the school, or about how UConn is competing at a higher level they ever dreamed it would in their day. These advancements are in large part due to the investment and trust this state has been willing to place in the University over the last 30 years. Now it is no secret our state has fallen on hard times.

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However, as it always has, the University of Connecticut stands as a beacon for all our families, not just mine, that we look to with optimism and hope as we work together to build our state back up to the prominence it deserves.

I am here with my fellow Huskies to ask that you continue the commitment to this institution that has given our state so much, so that when I drop my children off for their time as Huskies, I can marvel at the advancements our home has made together.

Thank you. [Applause]

REP. WALKER (93RD): It wasn't that bad, was it? [Laughing] Thank you guys. You did a great job. Next panel Community College Manufacturing Program. Whew. Go right ahead. Excuse me, go ahead. Sh.

MYAH VIGEANT: Good evening members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Myah Vigeant from Plymouth, CT. I am currently enrolled in the Manufacturing -- in Advanced Manufacturing Machine Technology Certificate Program at Naugatuck Valley Community College. I have always been a hands-on learner and find satisfaction in creating useful items. When my parents suggested I look into manufacturing I was skeptical, but willingly attended an open house and summer intro at NVCC. After doing so I thought this may actually be for me. I enrolled in September 2019 and am in my second semester.

Being eighteen years old and a female has put me in the unique position of proving to myself, my teachers and classmates that I could not only learn this trade, but excel at it. Achieving this goal would not have been possible without the support and guidance of my amazing teachers who work day in and

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day out to ensure our success. Manufacturing has traditionally been a male-dominated field and I am proud to be a part of changing that. Connecticut is in desperate need of skilled employees in order to keep up with supply and demand. I am also proud to help our state to be productive and profitable. Having access to this program has opened up a world of career opportunities for me. I will be starting my internship next month and look forward to getting out into the field. I have felt welcomed into this program from the start, and have made many meaningful connections with the people I have met. We have become like our own small family and that is a big part of my enjoyment and excitement in getting up and going to college every morning.

Choosing to attend this program at NVCC has been one of the best and most life-changing decisions I have ever made and needs to proceed on so others can have the same experience. I am asking that you please continue the funding of manufacturing programs at Connecticut Community Colleges. It is an investment in Connecticut's future. Thank you. [Applause]

LASHAWN DISMUKE: Hello, my name is LaShawn Dismuke. I'm from Hartford, Connecticut. When I came home from prison I didn't know what I wanted to do. I know I didn't want the same as my past. Once I was released to a halfway house in Hartford I found the Best Chance program. I ended up taking a math test, which I scored pretty high on. From there I ended up at MCC, Manchester Community College in the manufacturing program. It was 8 to 12 -- it was 8 to 12 weeks long but it only took me 3 or four weeks to realize I wanted to do this for a career. I did a little research and found out there was a three part certificate program for the Advance

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Manufacturing Program ad only two spots was available. I wanted one of those spots.

[Laughing] So I worked hard and was chosen to fill 1 of those spots. While attending MCC I started to see a future for myself in this field.

Fast forwarding, I graduated from MCC and I started working for Belcan Engineering Group. I've been there almost a year and my future looks so bright. I think the program gave me an opportunity to see life differently. Without the program I don't think I'd be where I'm at today. Today I'm happy with my choice to see this through. Soon I'll be going through the review process at work. I'm excited about it. I've never been through anything like this. My work performance will be rated as well as my attendance, work ethics and how well I work with others. One thing I do know is I want more out of life and I know that school is the key. So I will be going back to school soon. [Applause]

ANDREW GONZALES: Good evening members of the Committee. My name is Andrew Gonzales. I am currently a student at Naugatuck Valley Community College enrolled in the Advanced Manufacturing Technology Program. I am a Navy veteran, former Hospital Corpsman and Waterbury resident. More recently I was a technician at a local cable provider for about five years. I had made very little progress in those five years, very little upward mobility and I felt like it was time I needed to change gears.

I then inquired about what programs were available at NVCC and this program seemed like a great fit. I also was fortunate enough to have a friend who was a recent graduate of the program and was already

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employed at a local manufacturer. This program, the instructors, the caring faculty have allowed me to gain the knowledge and skills needed to set a new course for a career in manufacturing. I'm optimistic and anticipating an apprenticeship soon

where I will gain the experience needed for any vocation. I feel these programs are crucial for someone like me, who is looking to start a new career. These programs allow you to do it as I did, without taking on any debt. I feel the partnerships these companies have with these programs are essential for the success of internships and job placement. An investment in these programs is an investment in the community and the industry this state needs. We have a growing manufacturing industry in this state. We have the people and the resources in place to prepare and educate them. Let's maximize the potential for manufacturing success in Connecticut by providing the industry with the best-educated workforce possible. Thank you. [Applause]

WENDY GENTILE: Good Evening Legislators. My name is Wendy Gentile and I am a graduate of the 10-week Welding Program at Three Rivers Community College. This program has given me the unique opportunity to redirect my career path, as well as provide me with the experience, knowledge and skills required to quickly enter the workforce at Electric Boat. In short, it has changed my life.

After high school, I was expected to attend and graduate college. So off I went. I attended college, I worked hard and I obtained a degree in Elementary education. But something was not right; my heart was not aligned with my choice of career.

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Shortly after college, I got married and started a family. During the next decade, I put my family first and worked at a few menial jobs that allowed me to raise a daughter and support my husband's career.

At my last employer my job was downsized and I found myself at a fork in the road. Do I continue working at jobs that I was only a little excited about or do?

I try something new. I was up for trying something new. This is how I became involved with the Manufacturing Pipeline program. The welding course is located at Grasso Tech in Groton. The program prepared me for a new and often exciting career. Welding was offered in the evening that allowed me to have a part-time job during the day. And over the course of 10 weeks we were exposed to hands on learning, blueprint reading and networking opportunities from companies that needed welders. Part of the hands on learning included using tools of the trade.

Before this class I had only seen pictures of some of the tools that I now use on a daily basis. The class had only 18 participants of which 2 of us were women. Having a small class allowed us to receive individual support to become better at welding. Electric Boat is only one company that has a need of skilled workers to fill the gap of a retiring workforce. From the group of 18, 8 of us were hired at Electric Boat. When at work I meet people every day that have been through the Manufacturing Pipeline or know someone who has participated. The learning does not stop here. Three Rivers has giving me the opportunity to pursue additional

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courses on my new path that will enable me to move up the ladder at Electric Boat.

I strongly encourage you to continue to provide funding for these programs. It is an important part of the future for Connecticut and training people for the jobs of the future. Thank you. [Applause]

SHIANNE CANNIZZARO: Good evening Co-chair and members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share my story with you tonight. My name is Shianne and I am a second semester enrollee in the Advanced Manufacturing and Machining Program at Asnuntuck Community College. I am originally from St. Louis, Missouri and moved here almost two years ago. I served as a weather forecaster in the United States Air Force for six years. When I first got out of the military I wasn't entirely sure what I wanted to do with my life, and my family was very supportive during this time trying to help me find something I would enjoy doing for a career. Weather forecasting was a very grey area and I wanted a job that was more black and white and clear on what to do and what not to do. [Laughing]

My husband and most of his family happen to already be employed in the machining field so they suggested I give it a try, 'cause why not. I hadn't been to a real school in at least eight years and I was nervous how much I would really enjoy it going back. Alongside my younger sister I decided to finally sign up for the program and I can tell you right now, it has been one of my best decisions since getting out. Within the first two weeks I fell in love with the entire program. All of the instructors were incredibly welcoming. The thought

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of running a machine such as a manual lathe or mill was terrifying at first, but the instructors helped me take my first step and I know I won't turn back now. At first the weekdays at school seemed to take forever and now it almost feels like I'm not in class long enough.

The program at Asnuntuck has provided me with so much more knowledge than I imagined it would and there's always more for me to learn. I really love that there is so much hands on experience throughout your classes whether it's working on the shop floor or measuring with the CMM. Asnuntuck has changed my confidence in myself and my skills drastically and for the better. I am set to graduate in May and I have my fingers crossed to get a job with my husband. Machining has definitely given me a new purpose and I can't wait to make a career out of this thanks to the program at Asnuntuck. Please continue to fund programs like this that can be life changing. Thank you. [Applause]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Excellent. Panel eight, UConn. Here goes UConn. You ready? Go ahead.

BENJI BUCHANAN: Hi, I'm Benji Buchanan. When I started my computer science degree at UConn in 2017 I wasn't in a good place. I had been discharged from the Navy because of my mental health issues and I lost my father to suicide in 2013. My first semester was challenging. I had to get use to being in classes with students almost a decade younger than me. It felt like I didn't have a place at UConn to be myself.

I started to going to the Veteran's Oasis in the Student Union. One day, Rob Passmore from the

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Veteran's Affairs and Military Program, which we can VAM, was giving a presentation on a program called Voc Rehab. This program helps disabled Veterans get back into the workforce. Rob helped me get accepted to the program, which has saved me thousands of dollars and made me accountable to a Voc Rehab counselor for my school performance. However, there was one problem with the program.

My counselor strongly encouraged to go to therapy but I didn't like the idea of the VA having records of my innermost struggles. One day at the Oasis I was talking to other Veterans about the situation. They mentioned that UConn has a trainee therapy session program run by master students and supervised by a psychologist. I tried and the sessions immensely improved my quality of life by decreasing my feelings of anxiety. I started doing them regularly and I continue to do so for the past three years. My only complaint is because of the high volume of students my sessions are only bi-weekly, not weekly.

I felt more comfortable and I came more involved within the Veteran community eventually becoming a student mentor in the first year experience offered for military affiliated students at UConn. Between my positive experiences in therapy and how beneficial Voc Rehab was I wanted to help other Veterans who might be in my situation.

However, in 2019 -- in January 2019 I was in another pit of depression. I stopped going to therapy. There was a large part of me that wanted to do what my dad did and end my suffering. The other Veterans would go out of their way to invite me out but often I would feel too tired or too anxious to leave my

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own bedroom. In late January I wasn't doing well. I couldn't get the idea of hurting myself outside of mind. It was draining me. When I was in the military I knew I could always count on my team to help me out of a bad situation, and that day I was going to put that to the test for the Veteran community at UConn.

In a tearful phone call I called one of the Veterans that I got close to in the FYE course. Unfortunately he was in New York at the time but he ended up calling another UConn Veteran and I spent the next two days between their houses. I returned to therapy and slowly things started to improve. Every year since 2013 there's a 5-K race in honor of my dad to support First Responders in crisis, Believe 208. This past year I wasn't surprised that nine other Veterans from UConn showed up but I was surprised that many of the professional staff members of VAM did as well. In the military you're part of a team. There is no 9 to 5 schedule. You are there for each other when you need to be. It's one thing to treat -- to preach the maximums of being there for each other, but the professional staff and student Veterans at UConn have demonstrated that they live their values.

My senior year has been bittersweet. As I know my time at UConn is starting to conclude the University has helped me develop a start-up idea and I plan on working on it fulltime in state when I graduate in May. When I reflect I realize the overwhelming feeling I have is not sadness, but gratitude. I am grateful that I had an opportunity to help other Veterans both as a civilian and as a student.

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So I stand before you today to share my experiences and hope that I can put a face and a story as to why it is imperative that UConn continue to offer the services that have changed lives. Had these services been cut, or worse, removed; I don't know if I would have finished my degree let alone be before you today. Thank you. [Applause]

ERIC BUENO: Hello, my name is Eric Bueno and like my colleague, Josh earlier, my heart is also pounding out of my chest. [Laughing] I am a junior from Hartford studying Computer Science and Engineering at UConn. I want to begin by thanking all of you for allowing me to share my story today, and for all of the support you have provided our university in the past.

We are here today to implore you to continue this support so that UConn may continue producing some of the finest students and research in the country. Today, I want to focus your attention to the need for continued support for first generation and low-income students. Growing up as a low-income student in Hartford, I knew that I would have to work twice as hard as my more financially secure peers in order to afford college. My mother told me from a young age that I would need to get every scholarship possible to go to college because we just did not have the means to send me to school. My high school, Hartford Public High School did not have the same resources as the more affluent schools in Connecticut, and so they could not prepare me for the rigors of college. That is why when my guidance counselor told me about UConn's College Access and Preparation program, or UCAP, I knew I had to be a part of it.

For those unaware, UCAP is a program that affords underrepresented, low-income, and prospective first-generation high school students the opportunity to experience college life and enrich the education they receive from their underfunded high schools. In addition to academic support, UCAP helped me with my college applications, FAFSA, and SAT prep; all the things my high school never could. UCAP helped me fall in love with UConn and it made that feeling of receiving my acceptance letter so much sweeter.

Since arriving at UConn as a freshman in 2017, I have thrived beyond any expectations I had in high school. I owe so much of my success to the different programs offered at the university, like Student Support Services and the McNair Scholars Program. Programs like these are what allow students like myself to keep up with our peers from more affluent backgrounds. SSS has given me and hundreds of others like me individualized counseling, academic support, and even study abroad opportunities. If you told me that I would be going to study abroad in Europe four years ago, I would have thought I was getting punked. [Laughing] Meanwhile, McNair has provided me and dozens of underrepresented students with undergraduate research opportunities, graduate school preparation, and connections with faculty both through UConn and academic conferences. Through McNair, I am being prepared for a PhD program to one day be a professor and help other students who have similar backgrounds. None of the work that these programs do would be possible without your support.

UCAP, Student Support Services, and McNair Scholars are three of the most well run and successful programs I have ever had the privilege of being

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involved with here at UConn. They consistently produce students who are able to thrive in an academically competitive space like UConn, despite them overwhelmingly coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, there is only so much that they can do with minimal funding, and I have watched UCAP and SSS shrink in both size and duration over the last few years. Up until seven years ago, UCAP was a six week program and offered creativity stimulating courses such as art and music. The past three summers, the program was only five weeks and lacked many features of the past. SSS has had similar struggles over the years, all due to diminishing funding.

The value that these -- the value that these programs provide to underrepresented students cannot be overstated. I am living proof that these programs are critical to the success of UConn's first-generation students. Continued budget cuts will disproportionately affect vulnerable students the most. Without your support, hundreds of first-generation and low-income students may be neglected and the circumstances that they were born into will be propagated to the next generation. I hope you understand how important it is that UConn continues to receive your support. Thank you for taking the time to hear my story. [Applause]

NATHALIA HERNANDEZ: Hello, my name is Nathalia Hernandez, and I'm a senior pursuing a bachelor's degree in molecular and solar biology. I was raised in Bridgeport, Connecticut and UConn has afforded an environment where not even the sky is the limit. Growing up I learned that money made the world go around, yet there were many obstacles that I had to surmount more often than the average individual. I

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started working at 14 to help my parents, immigrants of Columbia. I thought that this bubble I was growing in was all I could achieve. Instead, UConn, specifically the honors program, has given me many people, not just myself unique opportunities where every person could become the person that they would want to be or even the person they never even imagined they could be.

I've been able to gain close mentorships, learn new skills and be a part of international experiences. UConn has allowed me to conduct undergraduate research which was significantly expedited by my induction into the UConn Honor's Program. Through the Idea Grant I began my research studying memory formation within the brain, specifically the HIPPO Campus at UConn Storrs and UConn Health. Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation, or LSAM, has made my time here more meaningful and has helped me develop into the leader I am today.

Through LSAM I have been awarded the opportunity to share my knowledge outside of UConn by going to symposiums and presenting my research. Additionally LSAM has allowed me to fully immerse myself within community outreach allowing me to further diversify my experiences and provide me with the confidence and the tools to become a successful dentist. As a UConn senior I am proud to say that I am leader, not only within the several learning communities I am in, but within the campus itself. With the help of honors, mentors and supervisors my PI and every single person I have met in the UConn community I've been able to develop my own research idea in neuroscience, meet the female dentist I look up to, Dr. Noma Gomez, and achieve interviews with several dental schools across the country. Through these

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state-funded programs, UConn has created a community that allows me to be surrounded by students with as much ambition and drive as me, which fosters an environment that breeds success.

With the help of the Robert B. Willis Scholarship and others like it I've been able to go outside the bubble I was raised in. Please keep funding these programs and scholarships so students like me can continue to make a difference and achieve what was expected as a first generation Latina. Thank you and have a good evening. [Applause]

LEILA DANESHMANDI: Dear members of the Appropriations Committee. There are three words that no one wants to hear; you have cancer. But recent statistics are showing the fact that more than 40 percent of the US --

REP. WALKER (93RD): You've got to stake your name, babe.

LEILA DANESHMANDI: My name is Leila Daneshmandi.

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

LEILA DANESHANDI: Recent statistics are showing the fact that more than 40 percent of the US population will hear this sentence at some point in their life. That means one person for every US household. There are more than 20 approved drugs for each type of cancer, but if that's the case, what makes it so difficult to cure cancer and save people's lives. But what happens nowadays in the clinic is that when a patient is diagnosed, the oncologist will choose a chemo drug depending on what has worked best in previous patients, but what works well for one person may not necessarily work well for the others. And so that's why in some cases, in ovarian cancer

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for instance, the first line of treatment fails in 80 percent of the time.

My name is Leila Daneshmandi, and I'm a PhD candidate at UConn. I'm also the co-founder and COO of Encapsulate, a biotech startup that's working to tackle this problem. My story started from Temple University in Philadelphia. After a year of graduate studies there I transferred schools and relocated to Connecticut to pursue a PhD in biomedical engineering care. I chose UConn because of the quality of its higher education, its strong school of engineering and a talented faculty.

I co-founded Encapsulate during my PhD. We're developing an automated tumor-on-a-chip system that can take cancer patient cells that have been taken from the initial biopsy, grow them outside the body and test all the different chemotherapy drugs against the cells of that specific patient. So with this, oncologists can choose the most effective chemotherapy drug from the very beginning. This will cut costs in healthcare systems and reduce the burden and costs that patients encounter during chemotherapy treatments.

We founded Encapsulate at UConn in 2018. The first grant that we received was from UConn School of Engineering in partnership with CTNEXT and Connecticut Innovations, were generously backed by the state. The most recent grant that we received was from NASA for \$700,000 to support our technology to the international space station. What's happened in between has been nothing but unbelievable support from both the school and state. The community here, and entrepreneurial ecosystem that the state has created through its many initiatives such as the

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UConn TIP Program in Farmington have been so unbelievably supportive and allowed us to grow in ways I never thought would be possible.

I can certainly say that choosing UConn and relocation to Connecticut has been the best decision that I've ever made. I plan to finish my PhD in a few months and to begin working fulltime at my company. We're on track to receive investment and we'll be starting to hire first employees very soon. My co-founders and I all met in a classroom at UConn. We came together because we had a vision that we could change the way that cancer patients are being treated right now. Certainly if not from the support that we have received from you, from Connecticut I would not be here.

I'd like to sincerely thank you for the opportunity to speak here tonight and to thank you for your continued support in us and in UConn. [Applause]

KANU CAPLASH: I'm just going to say, I'm going to also say I'm very nervous so this should be interesting. But hi everyone. My name is Kanu and I'm a junior at the University of Connecticut and I am currently a SIM scholar in the honors program and I'm currently studying biological sciences and I'm one of the organizers for the UConn Mental Health Coalition as well as co-chair for the Mental Health and Wellness Subcommittee up at UConn Storrs. And I stand before you all as nothing more than a student with a dream, a dream to help as many as I can and be the best that I can be. A dream that truly is not possible without UConn. Not just education but without UConn specifically.

As I recall my first days of orientation I remember being massively nervous. Nervous that I would be

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stifled by those who didn't see -- who didn't believe in my dreams. Nervous that I wouldn't fit in, and nervous that I wouldn't live up to all I could be. But from the moment I stepped on to UConn Storrs campus, these worries fluttered away as I was taken in by a community that always puts others before themselves. Riddled with untreated and undiagnosed PTSD, ADHD, Anxiety and depression, this community took me in and provided me with the highest quality of care I so desperately needed, allowing me to do something I'd only dreamed of doing, being happy.

And in the process this community literally saved my life. Soon after I quickly learned of a massive effect that this university has had on the rest of the state as I join the undergraduate student government, multiple research labs and various university -- university committees where I saw this firsthand. With a myriad of programs centered around bringing resources to schools at the K through 12 level -- K through 12 level across the state, the homeless and simply any in need because that's we do as a UConn community. We help those in need. All of this while the university's top researchers are literally creating new fields of science as our professors re-evaluate the fundamentals of our educational system so that it may be the great equalizer that it was promised to be.

The effect this university has had on the rest of the state is incomparable. I grew up in Connecticut and simply can't imagine this state without this university. My brother goes to UConn, I go to UConn and I expect long after I graduate I'll still be involved with UConn. Connecticut is my home and

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UConn is my family and clearly this story is not unique to me and there's many more who you're your help and much more we can do. We've achieved a lot but there's still a long road ahead of us. So please continue to support us with investments from the state and collaborations. Thank you very much. [Applause]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you all. You did a fantastic job, even with the nervousness; you were great. Next we have panel nine, community colleges. Go right ahead.

MYCAH JOHNSON: Good evening everybody. My name is Mycah Johnson. I'm here today representing Capital Community College. I just want to take a second everyone who has gone before me and shared their beautiful, amazing, inspiring stories. It was an honor to listen to everybody. If you had asked me two and a half years ago if I was ready for college, I honestly would have told you no. I graduated from Connor High School and Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts with a 3.7 GPA, two diplomas, two AP classes and several national awards in Latin. It's not that I wasn't intellectually ready, I just wasn't emotionally.

The pressure of knowing what I wanted and how to get it was too much. I ended up going to UConn only to leave after one year. I was searching for something and I really didn't know what it was. I eventually ended up at Capital Community College where I'm a Management major and that has been one of my best decisions that I have made in my college career. I feel heard and supported. Being surrounded by professors, one of which who is actually in the audience right now. [Laughing] They just all

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wanted me to succeed and have put resources and opportunities in my path to help me.

The funding that you allocate will help to further develop those resources, assist in financial aid, and provide other assistances to those who need them. I've experienced a genuine sense of community at Capital. With smaller class sizes and personalized curriculum they really cater to the individual needs of every student. Faculty at Capital are always available to meet for one-on-one advising and tutoring, whether personal or academic. The opportunities that have been afforded to me during my two semesters at Capital will impact me forever. Since starting the management program at Capital I've joined the business honors society, spoken at several events, won an award at an entrepreneurship competition and even have a business internship with the Lieutenant Governor. My experiences here will continue to shape me into the woman I am becoming. My future goals are to graduate from Capital within a year to attend the International Business Bachelors program at UConn, and to go on to receive an MBA in Business Psychology and Data Analytics.

Capital Community College really knows how to prepare its students for transfer to a four year. I urge you to keep the successes of the community colleges and the universities in mind when appropriating these funds, and I implore you to see the faces behind the numbers. Again, the community colleges will use those resources for financial aid, student advising, program development and more faculty from which my fellow students and I will greatly benefit.

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Thank you so much for this opportunity to speak on behalf of faculty, staff, and most importantly the students at community college. [Applause]

DREW CUSTIS: Testing, perfect. Real quick, Senator Flexer, I believe you have a sticker on your forehead. Okay. Just -- I'm sorry, I wanted to point that out. [Laughing] Good afternoon Appropriation Committee members.

REP. WALKER (93RD): She wants to respond. You've got 30 seconds.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH): Thank you. That was unexpected. The only memory I have of my grandfather of him handing me a piece of fruit, putting the sticker on my forehead and so to honor his memory, I always do this. I promised myself as a child I'd never be a stuffy grownup who was too cool to do this. [Laughing] [Applause]

DREW CUSTIS: I appreciate it. I really hope it breaks the nerves of everybody else in this room. Good afternoon again. My name is Andrew Custis, I am 30 years old, and I am a student at Gateway Community College majoring in a psychology degree program. I started in the Summer of 2018. My goal is to graduate this May 2020. I am a member of the US armed forces and have been for 10 years. I am also a Victim's Advocate within the Department of defense and have been for 5 years. As a victim's advocate I support and empowers members who have been through traumatic events, specifically related to sexual assault and domestic violence. Through the military I have received around 7 years of training in leadership and mentorship to assist the members I supervise within the military.

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I knew I needed to continue my education outside of these experiences and I ended up choosing Gateway Community College. I chose Gateway for its location, multitude of programs, and its military reimbursement. I stepped into the education system knowing I wanted to pursue psychology and Gateway made the pathway accessible. Not only was their advising incredibly helpful, with 213 Veterans currently enrolled, the Veteran services representative Rick Palinko was thorough and adamant about making sure I was taken care of in the school. The Wellness Center has also been my support system for professional growth and personal preventative maintenance.

After my first class in the summer of 2018 I was hooked. My first professor, Joseph Maynard, was incredible. Just a simple American history course put me on a strong track for my degree program. I continued filling my requirements as well as taking one class a semester for personal interest. I had to keep myself rewarded. Rewarded with more education. It did not stop in the classrooms. I eventually ventured into some clubs and the Student Government Association. I was offered the position as Campus Activities Board chairperson by the SGA president at the end of Summer 2019 and accepted it knowing the challenges ahead.

This opened more doors than I had expected. I worked closely with student clubs, faculty departments, and the inner workings of the student government. With my background I made the best of these situations and helped me become connected with students

every week. Every experience opened more doors and opportunities for growth. Not only could I learn

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from other students and organizations, but I could lend my experiences and skills. I was able to give back. This ramped up the motivation for what I was doing within the school. I became more involved with the school government and began to give more than just my skills and experiences back to the students. I was able to show them what rights and privileges they have at their fingertips. This access was underutilized with the limitations the students experienced. What I found on campus was Gateway at the time, had no Director of Student Activities. This impacted how much students understood what was available to them.

With proper leadership training or seminars to promote courage and empowerment, there would be easier pathways for students to take advantage of what Gateway can offer. In this experience I was not only looking through the scope of the small, but also the big picture. How does my experience benefit the students, the organizations, and the school itself? As a liaison to the students from my position as Chair to the Campus Activities Board, I was meticulous in structuring the campus clubs to follow college guidelines. There are few things that could alleviate these concerns. I know the Director of Student Activities was recently hired, but even with his current support his one slot is not enough to support a commuter student body of over 6,000 students. More funding would also allow for quality leadership training and workshops for the students and student leaders. I also have two support systems within the school.

Rick Palinko, the Veteran Representative at the school, does not have a permanent position. As an advocate myself and on the path to being a clinical

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psychologist, Gateway's new Wellness Center only has two counselors for the entire student population. With how much I promote their services alone, the demand for more staffing is definitely needed. An emphasis on students' needs as a priority, programs for student leadership skills, and appropriate staffing to serve students is what I am asking all of you to consider today. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. [Applause]

ANTONIA OGLESBY: That's a little hard to follow. Good evening, my name is Antonia Oglesby and I am a political science major from Housatonic Community College. Housatonic, to me personally, means a second chance. I am a recent high school honor roll student, drop out. At the age of 17 in 2014, in my senior year, I stopped going to school due to intense bullying and I never thought I'd be able to go back into any educational setting. However, in July of 2018, with my then three and a half year old Jesse I celebrated the completion of my GED and enrolled in Housatonic for the fall semester.

I was initially overwhelmed to have come back from a 4 year break. I wandered the halls lost and confused, and in my first week I was ready to quit school again, for good. However, I met a student at the time who advised me to switch my courses, and I did. I began taking American Government with Professor Dunne and Intro to Political Science with Professor Mannion. I didn't know at the time how intracule these two professors would be to my college career.

Professor Dunne was able to teach me about Student Senate, where I am now the Vice President, the Political Science and History club where I am the

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President, and the Student Advisory Committee where I go to the CSCU system office to discuss public safety task forces, the consolidation process; I network with fellow students and I am a voice for Housatonic.

Professor Mannion pushed me and pushed me. In my first class with her I learned of a legislative internship opportunity and as someone who yearns to work in politics this was an idea for my foot in the door. I did everything I could in my first year to create the perfect resume for this interview. When the time came to submit my documents, I nearly backed out. I became so scared of failure and I felt comfortable enough to speak with her about this. She told me, no, you're doing this. I attempted to argue, explain that perhaps a simple internship with an attorney's office would suffice- she told me I was stupid and to never think like that again. She assured me I could do this, and they would be ridiculous to not accept me. When my interview came, I mentioned this encounter and was told, "I would have to have had some words with Professor Mannion if she had not sent you to us," and I walked out of my interview on cloud nine, it was such an amazing accomplishment to see the confidence my professor had in me mirrored back.

I am now a legislative intern for two representatives, Representative Stallworth of Bridgeport and Representative Arnone of Enfield. Although it may be touching, my story of second chances is not unique at Housatonic; it's the norm. I've met many students who have similar stories to mine who in their first semester, struggled in their personal life to the point they nearly gave up. Similar to mine, they had faculty

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and staff who believed so fiercely in them that they had to believe in themselves. From a 54-year-old woman who is starting over in her career, and is now a part of the largest international honor society for two year colleges, to a dear friend of mine who is now the student senate president, and frequently called upon by our school as an important voice.

We are full of ambitious characters all yearning to make a better life for themselves. We are full of faculty and staff members who know us by name, family, religion, situation and we are more than our banner ID numbers. Frequently I see students return just to sit in with our Director of Student Activities and catch up. When I think of my own personal story I'm reminded of a tattoo from one of my favorite professors. It reads, "from GED to PhD", and thanks to Housatonic, that will be me too. [Applause]

LAUREN FEINMAN: Unfortunately my voice sounds like this, so I'm sorry. I work at a big -- a large animal hospital with a lot of people, and it's going around. My name is Lauren Feinman, and I am a second-year student in the veterinary technician program at Middlesex Community College. And I'm the proud recipient of both the Liberty Bank and Dave Champion Scholarships through Middlesex Community College Foundation

My journey to this point starts in Midtown Manhattan, where I was standing outside of a high rise, where I worked as a transcriptionist in a multinational translation firm. I was outside with my boss when she turned to me and said, "You can't possibly want to do this for the rest of your life." She was a smart woman and she really told it like it

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was. There was no upward mobility in my job, and I was struggling to make ends meet. I could barely pay my bills, but you'd think, working in Midtown Manhattan at a huge company that offices in London and France, that I would be making a lot money, but I was just a drone so I was making no money. I had a bachelor's degree in theater with a minor in philosophy and at the time in the late 90s all of the college prep books said would, if nothing else, be guaranteed an office job and a six-figure salary, because everyone wants to hire someone with good people skills. However, all it got me was \$35,000 in student loans and 15 years later, I now owe \$37,000 in student loans because I've had to defer due to my low income and since then I've been on income-based repayment and you can imagine that my monthly payments don't even cover the interest.

So when my boss asked me that question, I didn't have an answer for her. I was really lost, and I flippantly answered, "well, I like cats."

[Laughing] And it was a ridiculous answer and it was just something to say so she would kind of get off my back, but that answer banged around in my head for a long time and a year later I quit that job and I started on the journey I'm on now to become a veterinarian technician, or as I like to call veterinarian nurse.

So I moved to Connecticut, did some research, had some false starts, and then I found Middlesex Community College and I was so impressed with their small classes size, their cohort style learning, so that means from day one to graduation I have the same people in my class who I can learn to lean on and we can help each other. We all know each other. We're a little family. We walk around in a flock

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because we're all going the same place. And also they have a partnership with Pieper-Olson Veterinary Hospital. We have our own wet lab downstairs in the basement where we can do spays and neuters on animals, we can do physical exams, we can do everything that we're going to do in our real-life job down there. Not only that, but upstairs is a working ER with specialties such as cardiology, neurology, oncology, surgery, and we get to be -- we get to have exposure to all of those specialties and all of those professionals.

Right now I work as an emergency room nurse at Central Hospital for Veterinary Medicine in North Haven, and I feel prepared -- I feel prepared to work in this job because the people who teach me are the people who work in the field. They expect the same in the classroom as they would in the hospital, and so now I'm not worried at all about talking to doctors who oversee me and talking to my co-workers and my fellow nurses.

The veterinary field is moving in the direction of human medicine so that means they need more educated workforce. We need to make sure that we are constantly funding these programs in technical high schools to feed into these community college programs, and we all know that a four-year degree is not the answer for everyone, so I hope that everyone here understands the importance of supporting community colleges and technical schools so that those of us who have a passion have the opportunity to pursue it.

Also there's a woman back here who talked about investing in students like her at the college -- at the community -- at the college level, and that

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needs to extend to early education as well as middle and high schools. We need to have education equity at the top of our minds so that all of these other issues that we have from taxes to infrastructure to climate change; those can all be solved (inaudible - 02:20:12).

REP. WALKER (93RD): Your microphone is off. Thank you. Yep. Thank you.

LAUREN FEINMAN: But thank you. That was the end. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): [Applause] Okay, Ms. Monica.

MONICA MALDONADO: Good evening Appropriations Committee members. I can see how this is your favorite night. The stories here are pretty amazing and you have a very tough job. I hope to make it tougher. [Laughing] Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of community colleges. My name is Monica Maldonado. I am the Chair of the Student Advisory Committee to the Board of Regents and student leader at Gateway Community College. I represent the student voice of our twelve Community Colleges and I am here to talk to you about the importance of making the decision to become a student as a means to transform one's life.

Those of us faced with obstacles, financial or otherwise, yet remain determined and eager to succeed, find themselves welcomed by the open doors of community college. Over one hundred years ago, the American Association of Community Colleges understood that in order to develop a more skilled workforce, the key to our country's economic growth was to form community college. Community colleges have a rich history and its continued federal and

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state funding will provide opportunities for higher education and economic equality. Without community college some students would lack the preparation and otherwise find difficulty in accessing higher education. The importance and impact of community college cannot be overstated.

As a long-term investment that pays for itself, community college graduates, transfers, and certificate holders will now have the option to go on to universities or enter the workforce to better employment opportunities. The more you learn, the more you earn. Investing in community college students will increase the quality of individuals lives, giving them the chance of becoming homeowners, affording healthcare, and raising

children that will attend college; they can start successful businesses or climb the corporate ladder, and ultimately become beneficial contributors to society.

Additionally, I would also like to bring to your attention the computation metric concerning the graduation rate for first time, full time students. The current 50-year old federal method downplays the effectiveness of our institutions. The fact that students are taking longer to complete their post-secondary education emphasizes the inappropriateness of this metric. If students transfer prior to earning a degree or certificate their success goes unaccounted.

According to an article published in the Connecticut Mirror by William Gammell of the Board of Regents, those students negatively affect the graduation

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rate. Gammell also states "To get a true indication of student success and institutional effectiveness, graduation rates need to be supplemented with other important indicators of college progress, such as college persistence, transfer and mobility, and certificate and degree completion."

In closing, I ask that our state legislators dedicate resources to advance efforts in finding a modern solution to more accurately reflect student success. I'd like to see Connecticut pioneering the change that will transform the lens in which the Department of Education and the New England Commission of Higher Education views graduation rates. Thank you for letting me share my views with you today and I offer my gratitude for your continued support of the community college.

[Applause]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. And the final panel from the community colleges. Are there people left besides you? Oh, there they come. Awesome, awesome, sh -- please. Go right ahead.

DAVID CASTILLO: Good evening.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Turn it -- got it.

DAVID CASTILLO: Good evening Co-Chairs and members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share my story for you tonight. I am business major at Northwestern Community College. My name is David Castillo and I come from a Hispanic background where there are a lot of hardships growing up. This community college means a lot to me because my parents couldn't afford for me to attend a prestigious University straight out of high school, so Northwestern Community College provides

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me the opportunity to acquire an education, to become successful and bring out my natural talents to the world. My dream one day is to show my Hispanic and other community members that all their sacrifices and support wasn't a waste of their time. I want people to know my name before I leave this earth, and Northwestern Community College has created the opportunity to be able to -- for me to be able to thrive with my community and have a start in life. If this community college wasn't here I would probably be another one on the list.

It is very common for the Hispanic community to feel okay with the average as they sometimes don't like to strive higher than what they have achieved in their lives. My parents have been an amazing support to me and my community because they have sacrificed themselves so I can have a chance at life.

Another reason why I have very high standards for Northwestern Community College is that it is the number one community college in Connecticut which gives me hope to strive for something even greater than my capability. If anyone in this room doesn't know about a town called Winsted I will give you some background on it. Winsted is the place where I grew up and call home. Almost every one of my family members went to every public school that I attended, but they never dreamed bigger than high school; they just aimed for the average that was given to them at the time. But, what my family has given to me is a seed to a new path to greatness that I have been experiencing these recent years. Here is a quote by Otto von Bismarck "Only a fool learns from his own mistakes but the wise man learns from the mistakes of others."

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If I weren't at the community college I would not be here in front of all of you wonderful people, today representing them. Or I wouldn't have the opportunity to take on so many tasks. For example, their new Data science certification which is the only one available at the CSCU community college system. No disrespect to other community colleges but this community college is a blessing to our district and to all of the students who can't afford it or transportation.

I am so glad to be here in front of such a wonderful audience that is giving us a chance to have a voice for our college and our student peers who strive every day to fulfill their dreams. Thank you, everyone and Representative Jay Case, who is currently not here. He represents my hometown. Thank you. [Applause]

KEVIN CHAMPAGNE: Good evening Legislators, College Representatives and fellow students. My name is Kevin Champagne and I am currently a student at Quinebaug Valley Community College. Like many community college students, my path to higher education is a unique one and today I would like to tell you all about my experience as a non-traditional college student.

Prior to my enrollment at QV, I was hesitant on going back to school. I was recently homeless and concerned if I would be accepted by students and staff, if the professors would respect me or just laugh at me for coming to college at such an older age. And if I would be able to comprehend the modern way of teaching. After all it was 36 years since I last sat in a classroom.

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All my worries were put to ease after my first few classes at QV. My professors showed they cared about me and my growth as a student. I was not shy to put in the effort and even when I doubted myself, I would often hear, "Kevin, there is no dumb questions." The support at QV is incredible. I receive guidance from staff that I respect and knowledge from professors who never talk down to me, always encourage me, and talk with me in a mature and mannerly way. This level of respect is new to me.

The confidence QV has in me breeds confidence within myself. My confidence was lacking before attending college. I lived in fear for years. Fear kept me from applying to college when I was young and led me to an unsafe lifestyle that I am now proud to say is in my past. Hearing positive statements I've produced positive results. Not once at QV has any faculty or staff member given me any negative feedback. They are forthright, constructive, and optimistic in my academics and never make me feel less than. Every person I encounter in college, encourages me that I can do anything and when I struggle, they assure me, I can handle anything and succeed.

When I first enrolled at QV my vision was to take a few classes on local history to fill up my day with something to do. Today, my goal is to earn a PhD in Human Services so that I eventually can give others the same opportunities I have been given. To say my goals and self-worth have changed is an understatement. If you would have told me 36 years ago that I would have a 3.86 GPA, that I would be

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the PHI THETA KAPPA Vice President, a member at large for the student government association, a student ambassador, volunteering and organizing the schools Feed the Food Insecure Program, and also volunteering for speaking commitments to students earning a GED and encouraging them to enroll in college, I would never had believed you.

My story is a testament on how valuable of a resource this college is to me and any past, present, or future QV student. Your approval of the requested funding today will insure many stories of personal achievements. It will continue the chance for other to succeed and in my opinion, help stamp out poverty and inequalities. I would like to thank you all for listening today, but most importantly I would like to thank Quinebaug Valley Community College for the future it has provided me. Thank you. [Applause]

REP. WALKER (93RD): I can't wait to call you Dr. Champagne. [Laughing]

KEVIN CHAMPAGNE: Me either. [Laughing]

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

JOSHUA SOLDEVILA: Hello? Okay, cool. So, hello everybody. My name is Joshua Soldevila and I go to Tunxis Community College. I am currently the Student Government President at Tunxis Community College. And growing up I didn't really have faith in myself because of the fact that when I was growing up I went to a special school to deal with anger management issues. I had been kicked out of two daycares and two kindergartens because I was an aggressive or being considered a demon child because I couldn't control my anger. Even to this day many

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of my situations that I have really benefited me to say the least, because of the fact that I went through so many hardships in my life such as I've almost lost my great-grandfather to the age of seven to me actually losing my actual father at the age of eight. And it really helped show that although there's a lot of bad in the world, it's better to look on the upside, which is why when I go through life I look -- I like to make people laugh and I like to have fun because there's too much sadness in the world.

When I was growing up I was always told I wouldn't be anything and I would get beat constantly because of the fact that my step-father didn't believe that I was anything. So it really put an imprint on my life to help. Although I may be suffering at some points in life, I want to make sure that the next person never feels the way that I feel. So everything that I do at Tunxis Community College helps me perform to the best of my ability to help other students that may be going through a similar situation as I am, or are going through even worse.

To be honest, Tunxis was a big part of my life. I've only been there for about -- it's about two years now. And when I was in high school Tunxis wasn't looking like, oh yeah, I definitely want to go there. Not at that point, but now that I've actually walked through it and all the faculty members that have been there to help support me, it really means a lot. Because when you're going through something so hard like that it's crazy. I was homeless and I lived in a car on Park Street right over there for about two months. And it makes you look at things really different such like food and security and stuff. So everything that I do

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that Tunxis helped support me in really, really shows a lot of -- a lot of my maturity but a lot of what Tunxis does.

And Tunxis was such a big help that I believe it was a couple of weeks ago around January 27 'till the 30th, me and Dear Charles Cleary ended up having a fundraiser to help support Australia and Puerto Rico and we raised over \$7,000 in support of that; and I want more students to see that. I want them to be a part of that. Because when we come together we become so much stronger and so much greater that it's better -- it's better off like that than when we're by ourselves. Every single situation I've been put in life has always been someone else's decision and I've never really had my own voice up until recently when I came to Tunxis Community College.

Tunxis Community College really shows me that you have your own voice and you can do what you want to do. Every single student that I walk by in the college knows me for the most part and I try to show them that although you're going through something hard right now, it's dark right now but it's going to be lighter later, and at the end of the day it's your world; everybody else is just living in it. So if I can put that out to other people in the world, that would really mean a lot. So if you guys would be able to support that cause, it would mean the world to me. Thank you. [Applause]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you Joshua, that was beautiful.

JOSHUA SOLDEVILA: Thank you.

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MELISSA MALLEM: Members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you so much for giving the honor to share our testimony with you today. Before I begin I would like to give the Glory and Honor to God, my Savior Jesus Christ because he has been with me throughout this whole journey and without him I would not be here today. My name is Melissa Mallem. My mother, brother, and I are immigrants from Algeria. I grew up in a city called Ouargla, only 52 miles away from Hassi Messaoud, the First Energy town in Algeria. This little but mighty town is the threshold of not only the largest oil and gas companies but is known to be the site of myriad massacres against humanity.

In 2001 Amer Taleb a fundamentalist Imam ignited a mob of 300 self-righteous men, ranging from respectable town doctors and conscientious lawyers to unemployed 30-year-olds, to attack the women who lived in that area without the company of a male guardian. These men were promptly fueled with power exerted from their own tempestuous beliefs and unjustified hatred, to attack, murder, rape and mutilate 40 innocent women in a matter of five hours in front of the whole public.

During the next few days, this barbarousness had spread across to other neighborhoods in the city and hundreds of women had lost their voices, their pride, their dignity, but most of them had lost their lives to the words of a single man. In the years to come, violence and hate spread faster than ever across the country. Women could not find safety even amid their own homes; what was once normal and acceptable became sinful and immoral and what we here consider as trauma they considered natural. This juxtaposition in morality and lack of

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empathy lead Algeria to live in a constant state of numbness and a constant state of denial. We think we had to leave.

Coming from a country where life was a struggle against societal and familial violence has given me and my family load too heavy to carry on our own. Before immigrating to the United States in 2015, I was silently suffering from mental health disorders and unhealed wounds from past traumatic experiences. I found myself reclused, confined and deprived of all help in a society and culture that do not acknowledge the existence of mental health, rather they considered them ordinary and the violence necessary. Coming to the U.S. with such a background was not the easiest of transitions, and despite the hard circumstances I had to face while being in Foster Care and receiving treatments, I was able to graduate high school and transfer to Northwestern Connecticut Community College.

There are myriad misconceptions concerning Community Colleges and it is because of this stigma that I hesitated to join NWCC at first, but to my surprise, this college ended up being my home away from home. Being part of this community means a great deal to me because NWCC took me when I didn't have many options along the way. I had just graduated high school and left an intensive psychotherapeutic residential facility. I didn't know what to expect but I found exactly what I needed. During my two years here, NWCC has provided me with so many opportunities to participate in many events and hold so many positions despite it being a 2-year college not a 4-year university. We do not have the same funds as 4-year universities, yet NWCC has not stopped investing in its students; our faculty and

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professors have always encouraged us to dream big and have empowered and enabled us to achieve those dreams.

It is because of this support that I was able to hold many positions such as the vice president of leadership of my Phi Theta Kappa chapter, president of the AAUW where I attended a national conference in Washington DC for student women leaders. I am an ambassador, a student senator, a secretary, and treasurer of the History Association, and a member of Team Success Scholars. I was additionally a member of the Community College Quadcopter Challenge organized by the NASA CT Space Grant Consortium and this semester God-willing I will be visiting the United Kingdom and participate in the Oxford Consortium for Human Rights Conference. After graduating this spring, I plan to transfer to a 4-year University. My biggest passion is to study Christian Theology and combine my love for Biblical Studies with Psychology. After which, I plan to further my education by attending medical school and obtaining my medical degree.

These achievements are not to be taken lightly. They require a lot of funding and a lot of resources which are not always available at community colleges. This lack of economic capital has not prevented NWCC from being there for me and for its students and for me. My professors and the faculty have taught me a great deal and have inspired me in so many ways, they have invested their lives in us, and have not stopped fighting for us to achieve more than what our circumstances allowed us to see. When you are allocating the funds, please take into consideration the financial limitations we are struggling with and the difficult background each

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one of us is tied to, because every single one of us at NWCC is worth your investment. Thank you very much. [Applause]

SARA ROMAN: Good evening everyone. I'm Sara Roman and I'm from NCC and I just want to say thank you for being here. It's great. It was wonderful listening to everyone. I love hearing your stories.

Being the first of my family to actively seek a formal education, I want to say thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak on behalf of something that I feel so strongly about. Excuse my stammering, just nervous. When I was in high school and being from a very small family a kind of weight was created due to education. I had to do well. The future wellbeing of my family depended on it. I am all they have. I struggled from everything from social anxiety to insomnia while in school and my academics paid for it and knowing that larger universities are only going to see me as a statistic and not as an investment, I was scared. If it was not for the accessibility of NCC, I would have gone into the education. I would go into the workforce much like the rest of my family, and knowing that NCC was there for me and knowing that being able to still push forward to pursue a better education was still an option even though my high school record wasn't flawless, it gave me hope.

So I speak to you now as a soon to be NCC graduate coming this May, and I would not be the same person as I am today without this institution. As a person who is going to pursue the field of secondary education, I love to aviate its importance. Growing up in Connecticut the concept of getting a higher education is introduced to us from a young age

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especially since the standard of living is one of the more expensive places within the US. Along with that is the misconception that a community college is inferior to big private universities when that couldn't be more wrong. The fact that a community college is those stepping stones for an overwhelming variety of people.

While working in the counseling center I have had the pleasure of speaking with a wide variety of students, all with wonderful stories to tell and have taught me so much. I have met new students that were in the same boat as me when I was young who felt that their high school career and thought that NCC was their only option. Or students who wanted to experience the college life before having to commit fully with something like dorming or even larger student loans.

I've met students that were there are students that have the opportunity to come back from years of being away from education to experience new things and overwhelming learn how much our world has changed and how the field of education has changed. And then I met transfer students that want to take advantage of a more affordable way to receive credits and complete a degree just that much faster. In reality community college students are more understanding of the system, more financially versed, and have already been introduced to this higher level of education in a more comforting setting.

Community College is a family of individuals that come to learn, socialize and enjoy being around like minded peers that come with a goal they are set out to achieve. Community College is an opportunity for

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everyone and that kind of accessibility is a gift that anyone can receive it at any time they feel is ready. Thank you. [Applause]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. I just want to thank everybody that came to testify today. The stories were amazing, the students were amazing. Your ability to capture exactly how you feel and how things have happened was great. I want to thank Mr. Ojajian for helping us organize this. I saw him, he's like a proud father every time because it really shows we really need to make sure higher education is funded and funded for all; so thank you, all you students that were here and give you a round. [Applause]

Okay, at this time we will go to the public portion. I guess that was public, but this is another public portion. This is for other people that came up to testify. There are quite a few people here from the same group so we'd happy to let people go together if they wanted to. And I want to remind everybody that together or separate it's three minutes so that we can stick to our schedule coming forward. So thank you all, and at this point I'll call Ibrahim Elali and after Bill Garrity. Is Bill Garrity here? He left? Oh, there's Bill, okay. And then after Bill, Jordan McMillan.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Go ahead.

IBRAHIM ELALI: Good evening. My name is Ibrahim Elali. I'm a nephrologist at UConn and the president of UCHC-AAUP. We represent over 600 faculty members at the UConn School of Medicine --

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Excuse me one minute. Just so everybody knows, we still have testimony going on

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and we want to make sure that we hear what the people are saying; so if you wouldn't mind giving us -- carry your conversations out in the hallway, that would be great. Go ahead.

IBRAHIM ELALI: -- School of Dental Medicine, and Research Scientist Doctors at UConn Health. We all know UConn Health is the only public medical school, and public hospital in the state of Connecticut. It is nationally recognized in different venues, including medical education, innovation, clinical research, and cutting-edge gene therapy just to name a few.

UConn Health continues to grow, 60 percent increase in clinical revenues over last six years, a 30 percent increase in class size -- medical school class, 90 percent are Connecticut citizens, and increase in research awards despite the big difficulties our scientists are facing every day in keeping up with the high fringe rate and UConn health contributes \$2.2 billion in overall economic impact to the State of Connecticut.

We deliver the only Medicaid outpatient specialty clinical care to the area including orthopedic surgery, neurosurgery, nephrology and cardiology to name a few, and with ever ballooning healthcare cost, there is no substitute for state-owned health care providing equal healthcare services to all our citizens alike. We provide an affordable opportunity to obtain medical education so students can stay in Connecticut and provide healthcare services to many state underserved communities. In fact 70 percent of medical students give back to the state, half stayed as resident fellows and the other half stay in the state and practice medicine. 60

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percent master's degree graduates stay in the state of Connecticut.

We as stake holders at UConn health and as a physician representing my colleagues in clinical, dental and research we oppose the privatization of UConn health. We believe if wasn't for the unfunded pension liability, we have the foundation for a bright future, and this not a secret anymore. Privatizing or privatizing UConn health would definitely result in weakening the healthcare ecosystem of the state, fragmenting and weakening clinical education of future physicians training serving the state, and losing control over the cost of healthcare delivery to the most vulnerable population of our state.

And I ran some numbers. The total federal and state Medicaid spending for Connecticut during 2016 amounted to about \$7.9 billion. The federal government paid 58.2 percent of these costs, while the state paid the remaining 41.8 percent which amounted to \$3.3 billion. Medicaid accounted for 23.6 percent of Connecticut's budget in 2015. So I don't know how this is going to be contained if we privatize UConn, which is the only public hospital in the state.

UConn Health is the backbone of the state of Connecticut public medical education and healthcare. We are not a business enterprise; we are the state public medical infrastructure. Let's help UConn health grow to become more successful. Supporting and funding UConn Health is not just supporting a public institute, it is providing the opportunity to the less fortunate citizen to afford expensive medical education, it is a scientific research

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engine, jobs creator, tax contributor, innovation hub, and most importantly it could be the future model of a public affordable healthcare system. Thank you. [Applause]

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you. Are there any comments or questions? Seeing none, thank you so much. Up next is Bill Garrity followed by Jordan -- Jordan McMillan.

BILL GARRITY: Good evening Senator Osten and members of the Appropriations Committee. I would like to take this opportunity to speak today on behalf of funding UCONN Health allowing us to fulfill our mission to care for the population of the State of Connecticut. My name is Bill Garrity and I am a Registered Nurse of 30 years, with 24 years invested in state service. I am the President of University Health Professionals AFT Local 3837, representing 2750 members, and I am the Divisional Vice President of HealthCare at AFT Connecticut representing 30,000 members.

You will hear people testify this evening on many facets of the large complicated issue on funding a public hospital. I've done it in the past, three consecutive years, and most likely will have to do it again. We reached out to our members and asked them to write why what we do is so important. One of the stories hit close to home for me. I hope it hits home for you as well.

Stephanie Rauch is an Administrative Program Coordinator for The Graduate School at UConn Health and more specifically for the Biomedical Science PhD program. She writes, "Our program trains aspiring young scientists to pursue cutting edge research in academic, industrial, and governmental settings with

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the ultimate goal of improving the health and wellbeing of the citizens of Connecticut, the US, and ultimately, the world. It is with great pride that I serve this student population, as laboratory research is no easy task, full of setback after setback in the search for scientific truth at the biomedical level, truth that translates into medical knowledge that can be applied to the treatment of patients at UConn Health, a unique quality of a teaching hospital. The Graduate School at UConn Health also educates student in the areas of Public Health, Clinical and Translational Research, and Dental Science. Students in the Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine, as well as practicing physicians, often pursue further education in these areas as well as the research sphere in order to improve their care of patients in their various specialties."

In addition to being an employee, she is also a patient at UConn, as was her mother. She continues, "My mother moved to Farmington, Connecticut in the spring of 2014, several years after my father's death, to be closer to my son and me. She lost my father's private insurance when he passed but had sufficient coverage under Medicare and enough funds to cover her modest lifestyle. In the winter of 2015, all that changed. Mom took a terrible fall in her apartment, which led to her being in a rehab facility for nearly seven months. Medicare covers only a portion of such a stay, and just like that, she was bankrupt. All her savings was gone. We sold her car to help pay the facility. When she was finally able to leave, she still owed them thousands of dollars, and was forced to apply for Medicaid. This was a devastating blow to a woman that had

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worked all her life in some capacity from being a government employee to raising a family to going back to school to earn her MA certification and working in the private sector. A woman always willing to give those around her a helping hand, asking nothing in return. It felt to her like a failure. Through no fault of her own, she now found herself a ward of the state, and to say she was not pleased about it would be a gross understatement.

Medicaid patients are among our most vulnerable citizens, citizens assured to receive care at Connecticut's only public academic medical center, UConn Health. In fact, nearly one in four patients seen here are Medicaid recipients. There are a multitude of perceptions about the Medicaid program and those who are covered by it. Whatever your thoughts may be on this issue, I can assure you that there are as many recipients, and more, like my mother, who are no happier that they are forced to rely on this insurance as there are those unwilling to support it. Yet when she was alive her very survival literally relied on her utilizing Medicaid and the providers that accepted it.

Connecticut's citizens deserve quality healthcare regardless of their type of insurance, healthcare that they receive with dignity and compassion at UConn Health."

That finished Stephanie's letter. I loved it and I felt it needed to be read. She encouraged me to do so. All I could add is that UCONN Health needs to be here, anyone one of us could be a split second away from being on Medicaid. UCONN Health needs to

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be the lynchpin in the future of Connecticut's public health plan. Thank you. [Applause]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, thank you for your testimony, sir. Jordan McMillan. And can I just remind everybody, when the buzzer goes off that means you have to quickly sum it up, okay, please so that everybody gets a chance to testify. Thank you.

JORDAN MCMILLAN: Hi, my name is Jordan McMillan, and I am the president of the Graduate Employee Union and a PhD candidate in Sociology at UCONN. This is Beverly Brakeman, the UAW's Regional Director, and she's here with me.

In my time at the University, I have taught vital general education and upper level courses and worked as an RA for a timely and important gun violence prevention research project based in the state of Connecticut. I am writing to testify -- and speaking to testify on the Budget Hearing for Higher Education.

Support for UConn is an investment to develop a highly skilled workforce for the state. In my teaching work with undergraduate students, I prepare them to integrate real world experience with their education and foster skills such as critical thinking. As a graduate student studying sociology, my UConn graduate degree will prepare me to evaluate the need for and efficacy of social policy within the state of Connecticut.

Support for UConn also allows us to maintain a reputation as a competitive and strong university, ensuring that we can recruit and maintain -- and retain dedicated and skilled faculty and staff. I chose UConn over other universities for my graduate

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program because of the reputation of the sociology department and its faculty. Attracting faculty, staff and students to UConn also directly stimulates Connecticut's economy, providing jobs and driving innovation and entrepreneurship in the state.

I moved to Connecticut in 2013 to attend UConn. Since that time I have established permanent residence in the state. My wife now provides crucial health services in New Haven, and my child attends public school, also in New Haven. My story is not unique. Supporting UConn and all state universities brings in and trains a talented workforce that will sustain Connecticut for the coming generation. Support for UConn allows us to continue to provide access to affordable and high-quality education for 20,000 undergraduates, supported in large part by graduate assistants like myself.

Nearly 1400 Teaching Assistants are lead instructors for hundreds of courses and discussion and lab sections that provide the critical face-to-face interaction for 20,000 undergraduates who receive a quality, affordable education each year. As someone who teaches 40 to 60 students per semester, it will be difficult to maintain the quality of education at UConn without continued investment. Though most of the funding for research comes from external grants, state funding is crucial to supporting the innovative research that makes UConn great. Maintaining investment in the facilities and top notch faculty enables high-caliber research that bolsters the state economy.

I will just close with this. There are a lot of things in this society that are not working. Many

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generous students have come up here tonight and sat these panels and have shared examples of that. Higher education can't fix society, but those same students also told everyone here exactly how you can help them. You can fund public higher education. It is an essential public good and a very basic stop gap resource for poverty in the state. [Applause]

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

BEVERLY BRAKEMAN: You can take me off the list. I'm here as the Director supporting all of our members at UAW, [crosstalk].

REP. WALKER (93RD): Who are you?

BEVERLY BRAKEMAN: Beverly Brakeman.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, thank you both. Have a good night. [Applause] Next, Randy Lebron. After Randy, Ron Salonia, Salonia? Okay, good. And after Ron, Kirsten Ek, Kirsten? Great. Go right ahead.

COREY GEISMAN: Good evening. My name is Corey Geisman. I'm an organizer with SIU 1199.

REP. WALKER (93RD): I thought this was Ron.

COREY GEISMAN: Yes, Randy Lebron.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Yes, Randy Lebron.

COREY GEISMAN: Yes, he's a delegate with SIU 1199. Unfortunately he --

REP. WALKER (93RD): He's not here?

COREY GEISMAN: -- a family medical emergency and he actually just had to leave to be with his father. He asked that I read his testimony.

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REP. WALKER (93RD): Okay. So you're reading Randy's?

COREY GEISMAN: Yes.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Okay, go right ahead.

COREY GEISMAN: Good Afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee. My name is Randy Lebron and I am a Certified Nursing Assistant at UConn Health in the Intensive Care Unit. I have been working at this hospital for 21 years. I am here today to ask that the committee continue to fund UConn Health. I would also like to express my concerns about the potential privatization of the state's only public hospital. Having a public hospital helps keep healthcare costs down across the state. Keeping UConn public also makes it accountable to the people of Connecticut, and give low-income families a place to receive the care they need.

I came to UConn in 1999 when I was 23 years old. At that time, this hospital gave me the opportunity to pursue a real career. Later in life, I came to realize that my job here provided benefits and a source of income to support my family and provide them with opportunities to succeed. Now, at 44 years old, it gives me hope for a smooth transition into retirement. Any disruption of this timeline for me and my colleagues will lead to a domino effect of hardship that will be felt by future generations.

Being a Nurse Assistant in an ICU is difficult work all around, both emotionally, physically, and psychologically. I am on the frontlines of caring for patients and their loved ones. My day to day

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care consists of moving patients to make them comfortable, diagnostic work such as drawing blood and monitoring vital signs and performing echocardiograms to monitor heart activity. I also stock equipment and provide assistance to nurses and doctors. I like the fact that I can make a difference in my job; that my work impacts the patients and families I care for. However, this job can be extremely demanding sometimes. When the unit is short staffed, nurses and aides are overwhelmed, which results in negative morale. After the renovations two years ago, our patient's numbers increased, while our staffing numbers stayed roughly the same. Our individual workload has almost doubled. This means that patients have to wait longer for care, and the care they receive is not as thorough as I would like to provide.

I hope that my story will make an impact on the future of this hospital. Please continue to fund UConn Health so that we can continue to provide the quality of care that all patients deserve. Thank you. [Applause]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and thank you for your testimony. Ron, after Ron Kirsten, come on down. After Kirsten, Dr. Christopher Trombley; is he here? Doctor? He's here. Okay, come on down too. Go ahead.

RON SALONIA: Good evening. Thank you. My name Ron Salonia, and I have been a Cardiovascular Perfusionist at UConn Health for over 26 years, 15 years as a UConn Health employee. There are seven - there are seven of us on our team. Tonight I want to talk about the great work at UConn Health and our

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unique role in the -- excuse me, in the delivery of healthcare.

A Perfusionist works primarily in the operating room and we operate the heart/lung machine or the cardiopulmonary bypass machine. We are life support for the patient while the surgeon performs open heart surgery. The heart team consists of the Surgeon, an anesthesiologist, a nurse, a surgical tech and a perfusionist.

Perfusionist also supports ECMO in the ICU at Connecticut Children's Medical Center, which is short for Extra Corporal Membrane Oxygenation. And there is no quiz at the end of this. [Laughing] This is a bedside version of the heart/lung machine. We use ECMO to treat critically ill infants, children and adults who have acute respiratory failure that threatens their survival. Our team takes call and are available for emergencies 24/7. We also provide cell salvaging in the operating room where anticipated blood loss can be life threatening. We process the blood and give it back to the patient to avoid donor blood.

Over 15 years ago, thru public hearings, the Office of Health Care Access granted a Certificate of Need to the Heart Center of Greater Waterbury to provide open heart surgery to St. Mary's and Waterbury Hospital. UConn Health was asked to develop and to support these two programs. UConn Health staff trained nurses, surgical techs and support staff and got St. Mary's and Waterbury Hospital ready within three months. This was an amazing accomplishment.

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Ten years ago, Connecticut Children's Medical Center asked UConn Health for help with their Heart Program. UConn Health agreed to support CCMC and expanded our services again, hiring a specially trained Pediatric Perfusionist from UCLA Medical Center. I am proud to say that over 2,600 open heart procedures for the Heart Center of Greater Waterbury that we have done -- 2,600 open heart procedures for Center of Greater Waterbury and provided 24/7 coverage for the city of Waterbury and the surrounding communities.

In addition, we have performed over 470 open heart procedures at CCMC and supported almost 40 ECMO patients. These services are in addition to over 1,000 heart procedures at UConn Health over the last 15 years. The services we provide to these communities generates revenue and extends the visibility of UCONN Health's' clinical expertise in our state. We are delivering great care and UCONN Health at its' finest. Please financially support UCONN Health's excellence in the State of Connecticut. Thank you very much.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. [Applause]  
Kirsten.

KIRSTEN EK: Hi there. Good evening.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Good evening.

KIRSTEN EK: Members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Kirsten Ek. I thank you all for sitting and listening to us. I feel like I should have UConn Health stamped all over my body and my face. I am a patient of UConn. I also delivered three of my four daughters at UConn in the basement there. At some point in my life I thought

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it would be a good idea to have four children and decide to go to medical school, and people told me that was probably not a great idea. I researched it very carefully. When I called around to the medical schools I was accepted to, I asked how friendly would it be for a woman pursuing a career in science and trying to build a family at the same time. Just to be clear, I had -- I did not have grey hair at that time.

When I called UConn I found the warmest, most receptive place. I enrolled. I brought my husband here. He was an attorney in New York and we settled here for med school. When I finished -- it was a great choice by the way. It was supported every stop of the way by my deans, by my professors. I had some flexibility in time. It was a wonderful survivable experience. When I finished I couldn't think of anywhere else, didn't trust my residency training in internal medicine so I stayed.

I completed my residency here again with the support of the UConn Health dean faculty and it was a wonderful, survivable experience. At the end, I was going to turn in my beeper and I didn't. I stayed on as faculty. I cannot thank you enough for supporting UConn Health and for me and my family. We stayed to pay taxes here in the state. Our four children go to local public schools and are very happy. I love the fact that I now have a chance to pay back what I -- what I gained from you all and from the state of Connecticut.

I had an opportunity to bring 110 first-year medical students North Hartford Promise Zone, three neighborhoods to meet with those citizens there and to hear from members of the Hartford area including

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Hartford Health and Human Services, the Urban League, Intercommunity Health and members of those three neighborhoods who talked about what it's like to receive care and why there is a 20-year life expectancy between Farmington and Hartford. These 110 students heard that and I would like to read to you some of their reflections. I will keep them anonymous. But one said, "After I left the North Hartford Promise Zone," this was written last week by the way, "I felt like I had seen a community I had lived next to my whole life for the first time. I felt like it is my obligation as an aspiring physician to know the inextricable ties between where you live and your health outcome and to speak out with people and serve here."

I'm so proud that I can give back in that way and to teach the next generation of people trying to be doctors. I also work with nurses and many others in the interprofessional setting at UConn Health. I'm proud to be a patient, a physician and an educator here. Because of UConn Health I was attracted to this state and I have stayed. I hope that you will continue to fund it as our public hospital, and I will do my best to make you proud. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): [Applause] Thank you. Anybody who goes to med school with four kids, we're proud. [Laughing] Next, Dr. Christopher Trombley. After him, Dr. Kathleen Skoczen. Okay, and after Dr. Kathleen, Dr. Bruce Mayer. Is Bruce Mayer here? Okay, great. Go right ahead.

DR CHRISTOPHER TROMBLEY: Good evening. Thanks so much for having us. As you well know, public higher education is by no means the only publicly funded enterprise that is being stretched increasingly

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thin. It is, however, a compelling case in point and the reason why we're all here, this

For far too long, we citizens and the officials whom we've elected to represent us have resisted tax increases. On one level, and for many of us, this resistance has made good sense; our household incomes have not kept up with our expenses; we've needed to cut back our household spending in areas in which we'd have preferred not to in order to cover the costs of items that formerly had been less expensive or even free. These items are by now familiar, but despite being commonplace nevertheless serve as genuine shocks to the systems of families throughout Connecticut and across the country. The exponentiating costs of our absurdly complex and unforgivably unaccountable system of paying for healthcare have held families' incomes down as monies that employers would otherwise have used to fund increased salaries are instead used to cover skyrocketing insurance costs for their employees. To add insult to injury, larger and larger amounts of the money that families do take home are consumed by deductibles, co-pays, and prescription costs that previously had been only nominal.

Families are increasingly asked to shoulder the costs in the form of fees assessed by school districts for such things as co-curricular activities and athletics that previously had been provided free of charge as integral components of a student's public school experience.

Most germane to this evening's session, the costs of attending a public institution of higher education like the previously mentioned costs of healthcare have risen at a rate far higher than what most

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families and individuals can reasonably be expected to bear. Where state colleges and universities in the past served as viable options for students who lacked the resources to attend more prestigious and more expensive private institutions, they now are no more accessible than their private counterparts. Young people today have no such viable alternative, especially since they can't possibly earn enough working multiple jobs to pay their way through school even part-time. Instead, they are increasingly trapped between the rock of not going on to college at all, and the hard place of taking on a burden of student loan debt that they can't hope to repay in anything approaching a timely manner. You all now face the unenviable task of appropriating funds from a pie that is far smaller than is reasonable.

In the short term I ask you to recognize that whatever public higher education expenses you do not subsidize through your appropriation will of necessity be borne by faculty and staff who are already doing more and more with less and less, and even more regrettably by students and families who are already desperately overburdened. Thank you.

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

KATHLEEN SKOCZEN: Hello, Representative Walker, Representative Haddad, and other members of the Committee. Thank you for having us. I'm going to start with a quote. The undergraduate from the bottom one-fifth quintile of income must find a way to finance an amount equivalent to 157 percent of his family income to pay for college, while it costs a wealthy family just 14 percent or less of its

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income to send a student to college. For those students hailing from the bottom quintile, the state university system is a safety net guaranteeing our state that we do not lose this pool of talent to harsh economic inequality.

There is a prevalent myth out there that if students do not pay for their education they will not value it. I would like to challenge that myth. I was one of six children. I started out in a private school that my family, even with grants and loans, could not afford. I finished my undergraduate degree at San Diego State, where working as a waitress I put myself through school. SDSU cost \$50 per semester at that time and I cherished the education I received there, not only for the outstanding faculty, but also, because at that price, the classroom was robustly diverse with many voices: we were all there because we valued a higher education.

No, we are not California, but we charged approximately the same amount for an education in the 1970s. We have now increased that cost 100-fold, 100-fold. My husband and I went over it a couple of times. Since I have come to Southern, 22 years ago, I have seen the cost of education escalate. In 1998 a commuter student paid approximately \$3578 a year; today that same commuter is paying \$11,446, as three times -- more than three times as much.

Perhaps we cannot ask for free, publicly funded education but are we as economically as prosperous as a state like Georgia. Georgia has seen its economy improve over the last 20 years. Why is that. The Governor of Georgia had the good sense in 1992 to understand that the future of his state lay

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in an educated workforce. He instituted the Hope -- he instituted the Hope Scholarship Program, similar to the New Haven Promise, but for the state university system. After two generations of students the state universities in Georgia have seen stronger, better prepared students. This kind of slow cultural shift that rewards hard work in K-12, with an accessible college education is something Connecticut can surely afford.

You can find money -- I just want to close really quickly, that you spend twice as much for the Department of Corrections than you do on education and I would ask you to think about where the value is. Not that I would ask you to cut that budget by any stretch of the imagination but you need to invest in the future of our students that cannot afford to go to these -- to go to Yale, like we should not leave that talent on the table. Thank you very much.

REP. WALKER (93RD): [Applause] Thank you, and thank you for your testimony. Bruce Mayer followed by Bruce Margaret Briggs-Gowan; is she here? Yep. Go right ahead.

BRUCE MAYER: I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Bruce Mayer and I am a Professor and Vice-Chair in the Department of Genetics and Genome Sciences at UConn Health. I am also an officer of UCHCAAUP, the union that represents the faculty.

So my colleagues and I are proud to do research at UConn Health. My lab has worked for over 25 years on the basic biology of cancer; how cancer cells differ from normal cells, and how we can use those differences to develop better and more precise

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therapies. And over the years I have been fortunate to fund my lab with millions of dollars of grants funding from the NIH, and those funds supported jobs and economic activity right here in the state of Connecticut.

In recent years, however, that funding has been much more difficult to obtain and one of the major reasons is that at UConn Health, we can support fewer people per grant dollar because of extraordinarily high fringe rates, due in large part to the legacy costs associated with the unfunded pension and retirement healthcare liabilities. That means simply my lab is less productive than labs at other institutions, and it also means I can hire fewer of the high-tech workers we should be encouraging to live and pay taxes in Connecticut.

I am thankful for the legislature's generous support to UConn Health over the years but I implore you to work with us to find a long-term solution to these legacy costs. This is by far the most important concern of our research faculty and it is one that will make -- present -- delay the goal of doubling research funding next to impossible. As you know, state employees hired over the last decade do not contribute to unfunded pension liability problem. They pay the actuarial cost sufficient to support their future retirement. It is in my view both unfair and counterproductive to impose on these UConn researchers the costs associated with the mistakes of the past decades. Just the entire state benefited through lower taxes from past underfunding of employee retirement costs, the entire state now needs to be part of the solution to this problem. Thank you for your attention.

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REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, sir. Thank you for testimony. [Applause] Margaret Briggs. After that Sandra Garrett. Is Sandra Garrett here? Sandra Garrett? Oh, okay, come on down, go right ahead.

MARGARET BRIGGS-GOWAN: Okay. I'm Margaret Briggs-Gowan and I'm a child psychologist and a tenured associated professor in psychiatry at UConn Health. I'm here to speak about the unfunded pension liability and the impact that it has on research at UConn Health and the competitiveness in the broader national scene.

First of all, the additional pension costs place a burden on our grants that reduce the competitiveness of our grant applications. I sit on grant review committees at the NIH and I have been the investigator on many grants myself and I can tell you for sure that our budgets can't support the amount of personnel that we need to support to be competitive to propose grants that are the scope that will be seen as strong proposals. And this impacts us in many different ways.

One, we are simply not going to be writing grants if we can't write grants that would be competitive.

Two, we farm out our personnel costs to other institutions, and I've done this myself. I have grants where I've chosen to collect the data in Chicago because I have a collaborator there who can do the work for me, with me for a lower cost. And what that means is, we don't have the educational opportunity for our trainees here at UConn. It also means we don't get the indirect costs on the subcontract that goes to my colleague at Northwestern University.

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And another is just that our grants don't get funded. When we do write them, and writing grants takes hundreds and hundreds of hours; when we do write them they're not getting funded because grant reviewers look at our budgets and say, what the heck is going on there? That can't be right. So I'm not -- I'm not exaggerating about that.

Another is that there's a real burden on the investigators themselves to fill the staffing gaps. I have an NIH grant now which is so constrained in our personnel costs because of the fringe rate burden that I personally am conducting four hour assessments, four hour study; it's a great study of the effects of domestic violence on young children, but I'm personally in there on Saturdays and Sundays when I should be home writing grants or writing papers; I'm actually in there waiting to see if the family comes and then I'm sitting with that child who may have the flu because a lot of times they are not feeling well when they come in. And I'm doing those assessments. I love doing the assessments but it means that I'm not writing what I should be writing. I'm not competing for the dollars I should be competing for and I'm spending a lot of additional time trying to get students and volunteers involved who I don't have to pay to be doing the full-time work that I need them to be doing. That's a great learning opportunity, but I shouldn't really be spending the amount of time that I am to do that.

This means that we have reduced time for education and mentoring of students at all levels, from undergraduate all the way up through the medical school. It also means that we aren't as competitive in recruiting new faculty. I'm currently the

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interim Chair of the Child and Adolescent Division and I'm the Chair of the search for my replacement and it's hard to convince research faculty from other institutions that they should come here when they have constraints on their research funding.

So thank you very much. I urge you to please support HB-5115, which would remove the legacy cost for our research grants. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, have a good evening. [Applause] Sandra Garrett, Abdul Osman. Okay, come on down. Rakim O'Neill, Rakim O'Neill, oh. Rakim? Okay. Go right in front. There you go. Okay, go right ahead, go ahead.

DR. SANDRA GARRETT: Hi, my name is Sandra Garrett and I'm a new Professor in the Department of Genetics and Genome Sciences at UConn Health. I also thank you for giving me a chance to pass along my perspective on UConn Health, however, as a new professor I don't have the -- I don't have the in depth knowledge of how UConn works, I can't tell you much about budgets or administrative so what I want to present tonight is just sort of the newcomer's perspective, anecdotal, my personal perspective on UConn Health. So, I'm not native to Connecticut. I'm originally from South Carolina. I grew up there and then I did an undergraduate degree and a master's degree at the University of Florida in Gainesville medical entomology. After that I moved to Puerto Rico for personal reasons and did a PhD in biology there. So once I finished my PhD I wanted to do post-doctoral training learning about something called, Next Generation Sequencing, which was a new, exciting set of techniques for biological research at that time and I looked at a lot of

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different places and UConn Health seemed like the best fit for my post-doctoral studies because of the facilities and expertise.

So, I made a plan. I would come to UConn Health for a couple of years. I would learn as much as I could about Next Generation Sequencing and then I would go and find more permanent work somewhere else in a more -- you know larger research community. That was the plan anyway. So early 2013 I moved here with my two children and almost immediately after we got there that long-term plan started to shift for multiple reasons. Well first off my children had settled in Farmington. It's a very easy place to live, excellent public schools, excellent place to raise a family so while my children were thriving I have the stability and peace of mind to be able to focus on my research and that was very important.

But also very quickly my outlook on UConn Health started to change and I think it started to change because it seemed like UConn Health itself was evolving. So when I first got there it seemed like an excellent campus but a little bit isolated in some ways; and also walking around the campus it was just full of construction and in some ways was a bit of a mess. At the time I thought maybe it was an overly ambitious mess. I think they were working on Jackson Laboratories and they were working on Outpatient Pavilion and like I said, it was a little bit overwhelming. But now looking back I don't think of it as an overly ambitious mess, I think of it as the beginning of something very, very important.

So over the last seven years I think that mess has had a lot more interaction. So for example, I

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recently started collaborating with a scientist at Jackson Laboratories. I study these interesting genes and bacteria called CRISPR. They study the assemblage of bacteria called the microbiome in humans and we trade ideas about how these genes influence and microbiome influence patient health for example.

In addition I see a lot of interaction with TIP, which is the Technology Incubation Program. So when I first started there was just a few labs, just a few scientists and I see them interacting with people at Jackson. I see them interacting with UConn Health Sciences. So seven years on I see UConn Health as sort of emerging scientific hub. It doesn't seem like just an academic institute and just a hospital; it seems like a dynamic place with growing opportunity so I don't want to stay for two years only, I don't want to stay for seven years only; ideally I would stay here long-term. I think it presents that to a lot of other scientists early in their career; so whatever you're doing, keep doing it. [Laughing]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. [Applause] Abdul. Is Maureen Chalmers here? Go right ahead.

ABDUL OSMANU: Hello, my name is Abdul Osman. I'm a student at Southern Connecticut State University. Tonight I stand before you, Representative Walker and other members of the Committee, I'm -- I stand before you imploring you as legislators and fellow stakeholders within our broader community to take steps towards alleviating the incessant rise of costs for higher education within the state.

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With tuition set to rise around 3 to 4 percent for the next academic year we are continuing a rather concerning trend of tuition increases in our state colleges. Though 3 to 4 percent appears to be a modest increase on paper, that amounts to around \$400 for commuters and \$800 for residents. For many of the people that attend our state schools, this is just a number that isn't so affordable, and it's an increase that easily make the chance at higher education one that is just no longer feasible.

Such a situation is not foreign to me and the others behind me. We know many, whether strangers or the closest of friends that have been financially strangled by the yearly increases in tuition for our state schools, schools that are supposed to give opportunity for upward mobility and financial relief to those of us that don't have the money to pay for many of the prestigious private colleges. Even as a state that has been able to move towards free community college, the consequences of increasing tuition are unavoidable and bound to affect these same community college graduates as they move onto our public colleges. This gives many students the unenviable dilemma of wondering whether they want to saddle themselves with debt or not go to any institution that gives them the chance at higher education.

I truly understand the difficulty and thanklessness associated with your jobs, but also ask that you take a second to think of the effects of your commitment to higher education. With every increase in tuition and cut in higher education you are slamming the door shut on many people my age; denying some of the most vulnerable yet brightest minds in our state from having a chance to achieve

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what society and their surroundings often tells them they aren't capable of, graduating and being able to lift themselves out of their economic situations. Often times these students hold the hopes of a family, a future generation trying to lift themselves out of their dire economic situations.

All I ask is for you realize that budgets quite an issue of morality to me. I feel like budgets are a document of morality and I ask you to take that within your consideration and value the public education of the kids that need it most in this state. Thank you. [Applause]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Good to see you again. Rakim and after Rakim, Maureen. After Maureen, Shevonne Renee White; is she here? Okay, great. After Shevonne, Ellen Benson. Is Ellen Benson here? No? Okay. Becky Simonsen, Becky Simonsen. Okay. Okay.

RAKIM O'NEILL: Good evening Appropriations Committee. For college, there is already an enormous barrier to entry: that is tuition costs. I know so many people just as smart as me, if not brighter who will never step foot on a college campus dropped out after just one semester because they simply don't have the money. My own brother was accepted to UConn years ago, and he never went because it's a giant financial gamble and we just didn't have the money to put up the chips.

One of my close friends who has some of the most profound ideas I have heard and is one of the most articulate writers I know, left after just one semester because of financial pressures and the already unbelievable cost of attendance. Personally, just to keep up with the current tuition

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I reach out to my entire family, every semester for as much support as I can get. And that's on top of the \$15,000 of debt that I pile on every year. Last semester I worked three jobs, six days a week so that I would not be forced out as others routinely are for not being able to keep up with their bill. Can you imagine how this affects people's academics?

But I don't tell you this so you can feel sorry for me. I'm still one of the lucky ones because at least I've been afforded the opportunity to be here. So how hard should we be expected to work. Understand, it's not just us students who will pay for the increased cost of tuition. The state and our society as a whole will too. By alienating our young geniuses, who have so much to offer, but can't afford higher education, we will all come -- we will all pay by never seeing their contributions to society come to light.

The cost of education has increased tremendously over the years, yet our state funding remains stagnant, and has for a long time. Because of this, every year we are being asked to invest just a little more in our education. Well the vast majority of us don't have any more to invest. Five percent a year, every year, which is the current norm and what we are told to expect if nothing changes, is simply not trivial to most of us. If we keep moving in this direction college will no longer be a place where one can educate themselves and hope to make it out of poverty or the lower middle class. University will become reserved for only the obscenely wealthy and there will be major consequences to that.

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We can't keep balancing the budget on the backs of our students so we ask your help. I want the next generation to have the same opportunity we did and if nothing changes I can guarantee you there is not a chance of that. And I would just like to close with a few questions and figures about this budget. Why are we spending more than \$600 million to keep people in prison and not even half that to keep them in schools? Why is the proposed increase in funding for prisons nearly \$20 million and to public higher education just a little north of \$10? What does that signal? And why does the Governor say he wants to decrease recidivism while using not a penny of that \$20 million budget increase to go towards programs and services that have been proven to actually keep people from going back to prison. So where is that \$20 million going? What is it really supporting?

It may seem that I'm talking about post-secondary education and prisons as if they're connected. Well it's because they are. When people have no opportunities or the kind of education that offers a real future, they turn to crime. And while our prisons -- while our prisons create criminals our schools create that opportunity and education everyone needs, yet we only care about those half as much. That's how the budget reads. I guarantee you if it was as easy to end up in the Connecticut University system as it was to end up in the CT justice system, our outcomes and statistics would be much different. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. [Applause] Did I see you guys -- you -- did I see you and Abdul the other day? I thought you sounded familiar. Good job, thank you both, thank you. Maureen Chalmers.

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MAUREEN CHALMERS: Before I begin, I just want to praise the students that have been here. I was very fortunate to be here and to quote Confucius, "If you find a job you love you never work a day in your life," and I've been blessed to work in the community college system for 33 years and you heard just a touch of what our students and what they accomplish in their hardships. I get to enjoy that on a daily basis. So now formally to begin. Good evening Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee, and thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 5005, AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2021. My name is Maureen Chalmers and I am the President of the Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges which represents full and part-time faculty and staff at the state's twelve community colleges.

Our community college students are worthy of your investment as you heard from their own mouths earlier. Our students overwhelmingly stay in Connecticut to live and work, and to become productive taxpayers and future leaders to our community. Our colleges work with businesses in our communities to create academic programs so that our graduates have the skills to thrive. A 2019 economic impact report showed that 1 out of 19 jobs in Connecticut are supported by CSCU and its students. The same report demonstrated that for every dollar of taxpayer support toward the community colleges and state universities they receive \$3.80 in added tax revenue and savings.

The 4Cs have also been long proponents of debt-free community college. We understand the fiscal challenges that the state currently faces, but we urge this committee to fund the tuition and fee free

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program as it was passed last year; open to all Connecticut residents that graduated from Connecticut high schools and with no income limitations. When you put a means test to things people choose not to go for it because they're afraid they're getting charity and there are people who will then target it and say, this is my money, why are you giving it to somebody else.

We have people who are making \$90,000 a year and they've got three children in college or they have a business that they're trying to grow, but how am I going to put my child through school. If they knew they could put their son through school and focus their entire personal revenues into growing their income, they'd be creating jobs for other people so please don't make it a means test.

The Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, there are currently four bills that the 4Cs encourages legislators to support to increase the credibility, accountability and transparency of the CSCU system moving forward; AN ACT REQUIRING TRAINING FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNING BOARDS OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION, AN ACT REQUIRING LEGISLATIVE APPROVAL FOR THE MERGER OR CLOSING OF INSTITUTIONS WITHIN THE CONNECTICUT STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES, AN ACT CONCERNING THE BUDGET OF THE CONNECTICUT STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES and AN ACT REQUIRING FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY OF THE STUDENTS FIRST PLAN. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and thank you for your testimony. [Applause] Shevonne Renee White, yep. After you is Chris DeFrancisco. Chris, Chris, okay after Chris, Becky. I see you popped up there. You're next. Patty O'Neal. Oh, she's not here,

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okay. And Adam Perrin. Okay, great. Go right ahead.

SHEVONNE RENEE WHITE: Good evening Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Shevonne Renee White, and I am the primary neurosurgical technologist at UConn Health. I have been working as a surgical tech for -- in the operating room for 12 years. I'm here before you today to request that you continue to fund UConn Health. This hospital provides quality patient care to the public. It is also important that we keep UConn a public hospital because it is accountable to the people of Connecticut and it is a great asset to our communities.

The Health Center provides cutting edge patient care supported by academic research, outstanding faculty and award winning safety ratings. I came to UConn because I fell in love with the staff and the quality of care we provide to patients. My colleagues have become my friends and family. We work as a team to get the job done.

When I was in school training to be a surgical tech I completed a surgical rotation at UConn. After working in several hospitals across the region I decided to continue my career at UConn because of the community it serves and builds within its walls. When poor Medicaid patients are turned away from private hospitals because it is not profitable to care for them, we happily provide care for them at UConn Health. On a daily basis I along side the rest of the surgical team complete many different tasks to keep the operating room running. Every morning we are assigned to a surgical suite where there are surgeries scheduled throughout the day.

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It is our job to ensure that we have the correct instrumentation and equipment, medications, etc. prepared to the surgeon's preferences for all of the procedures that day.

We take care of all the details that are necessary in order for surgeries to be conducted smoothly and safely. I am extremely proud of the work that I do. Every day I feel like I am a part of changing someone's life. For example, we had a patient with hemifacial spasms, which means every time the heart rate the patient's face twitches and that patient's actually part of a support group on Facebook and reached out to other members who recommended UConn for their care, and said to that patient that if you are -- if you -- if you go to UConn and you have Georgia Preason as your nurse you'll be in great hands. [Laughing] The surgeons performed a craniotomy to alleviate the problem and now she lives a normal life.

We do many of those types of procedures and I'm very proud to be part of a team that helps people in this way. It is an honor to work in a teaching hospital. We want our next neurosurgeon, our next orthopedic surgeon, our next vascular surgeon to have UConn Health behind their name. Please continue to fund the UConn Health Center this year and in the years to come. This hospital is an important asset worth protecting. Not only does UConn Health provide quality care for all residents of Connecticut regardless of their economic standing, but it is where the nurses, doctors and surgical technicians of tomorrow are being developed. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and thank you for your testimony. [Applause] Becky Simonsen.

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BECKY SIMONSEN: Good Evening Representative Walker and members of the Committee, my name is Becky Simonsen and I am a Lead Organizer with the Service Employees International Union District 1199NE. Our union represents 26,000 healthcare workers across the public and private sectors in Connecticut, including 7,000 healthcare workers at state agencies. We have about 300 members employed by the University of Connecticut Health Center.

Our members working at UConn Health are nurses' aides, transportation aides, phlebotomists, respiratory therapists, dental assistants, operating room technicians, pharmacy technicians, and other health care professionals. 1199 members perform critical functions at UConn. they draw blood, prepare medication, transport patients, and assist and aid nurses, doctors, dentists, and medical students. Our members, along with the over 4,000 other union members at UConn Health, take care of the 1 million patients UConn serves each year and make the hospital run. 1199 members take great pride in the work they do at our flagship university's hospital.

The UConn Health Center is Connecticut's only public hospital, serving over 500,000 Medicaid and Medicare patients each year. We know our system of healthcare delivery is in crisis nationwide. Healthcare costs are skyrocketing as hospital chains merge and insurance companies become more powerful. In Connecticut, Yale New Haven Hospital and Hartford Healthcare control super majority of the healthcare market, and all of us pay the price; hospitals and insurance companies amass their wealth from patients' pockets in paying a higher co-pay, higher

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deductibles, and higher costs 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 should oppose any efforts to re-orient this mission towards profit and away from the public good through short-sighted privatization efforts. We need to provide UConn Health with the sustained, permanent investment it needs, and these funds should not be labeled a subsidy or considered short term. We need to protect the mission of providing high quality, low cost healthcare, developing the next generation of health care professionals, and producing cutting edge research by protecting our public hospital. As a public institution, it has a democratic accountability to the public that other hospitals evade and often to their financial benefit.

UConn Health should not be a site of any hasty cost-saving measure in a budget that should reflect our values as a state. We need to continue to fund the UConn Health Center and make a real investment in public health in our state. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and thank you for your testimony. [Applause] Chris DeFrancisco and Dr. Steve you're next and then Adam Perrin. Good evening.

CHRIS DEFRANCISCO: Good evening, Senator Flexor, Representative Haddad and Representative Walker, and I'm sorry more of your friends aren't here to hear this 'cause I feel like you folks might already be on our side on this one but hope can change a few minds down the road. My name is Chris DeFrancesco. I live in Newington, and I work at UConn Health.

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It recently was suggested that some people in positions of state leadership and influence view UConn Health as little more than a failing business that the state is subsidizing, and I'm here to tell you that perception is sadly short-sighted. I can't help but wonder if the following folks would agree with that assertion. Adults living with sickle cell disease, as the New England Sickle Cell Institute at UConn Health is their best option for care once they outgrow their pediatrician.

Parents of children with cystic fibrosis, as UConn Health's pathology lab is involved in 70 percent of newborn CF screenings in Connecticut. Minority students who became or who are on their way to becoming doctors, dentists, or scientists, after the Health Career Opportunity Programs at UConn Health exposed them to a path they otherwise may never have considered. Indigent populations who've been cared for by trainees under the supervision of UConn Health faculty at places like the South Park Inc, migrant farmworker clinics, and dental missions. Elderly patients who are discharged from the hospital into a post-acute care facility, where a UConn geriatrician is their physician, optimizing continuity of care and reducing re-admissions. Heart attack and stroke survivors who had favorable outcomes because of UConn Health's record door-to-balloon and door-to-needle times. In fact anyone who has received care from a paramedic, critical care nurse, or emergency medicine provider.

And recovering alcoholics, who might not even realize, that the science behind their treatment was greatly advanced by the Alcohol Research Center at UConn Health, an incomparable world-renowned program that has earned tens of millions of dollars in

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continuous NIH funding since it started more than 40 years ago. Now I have an administrative position at UConn Health, and for the last 12-plus years I've had the privilege of telling these stories, and others like them, that make UConn Health an indispensable public asset worthy of continued investment that it is. Jeopardizing the future of UConn Health also jeopardizes the future of some of our most vulnerable populations. And if we truly believe that one of the responsibilities of government is to protect its most vulnerable citizens, we are failing if we fail to invest in the state's only academic medical center. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and thank you for your testimony. [Applause] It was good testimony, thank you. Steve and Adam.

DR. STEPHEN TOMCZAK: Good evening Representative Walker and members of the Committee. I come before you this evening not only as an associate professor in the Department of Social work at Southern Connecticut State University and chapter president of AAUP, but also as an SCSU alumnus. I know that many members of this committee are also alumni of our excellent state universities. Together, we are living proof that our four regional state universities, Central, Eastern, Southern, and Western educate a vast majority of Connecticut students who not only learn here and live here after graduation. It is this understanding that I hope will guide you as you consider levels of state support for our public institutions of higher education. I also hope you will consider the fact that the benefits of a higher education degree are not merely a higher paycheck for graduates.

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Indeed, the benefits reach deeply into every facet of our communities. University graduates are 24 percent more likely to be employed and 2.4 percent less likely to receive workers' compensation. Lifetime taxes of university graduates are 215 percent greater than those without degrees, which makes them a greater contributor to governmental services, social programs, and the overall public good.

Employment in the nonprofit sector is twice as likely for university graduates and volunteering is 2.3 times more likely. Crime rates are lower and philanthropic contributions are higher in communities with more college graduates. But in order for the state to gain these benefits, investments have to be made to make public education affordable. When I attended Southern in the 1980s, we paid about \$500 a semester in tuition. A student in that time period could have a summer job and save up the money necessary to go to a school like Southern. I was lucky to grow up in a time period when the state invested in kids like me, who wanted to improve themselves by getting an education. In 1989, the year I graduated, the state contributed 74 percent of the cost of tuition.

Today, the state contributes about 33 percent and my students spend ten times the amount in tuition. There is no way that they can cover this with summer income, which is why most of them are working not just one, but often several jobs. This is the direct result of declining state contributions to public higher education. If you took the tuition we paid in the 1980s and just adjusted it for inflation, my students would pay slightly over

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\$1,000, less than one fifth of what they currently pay. Even worse, if you were taking the tuition that my mother in law paid when she attended Southern in the 1950s, roughly \$50 a semester and adjust it for inflation, my student would pay \$464.00 a semester, actually less in nominal dollars than what we paid in the 1980s.

So I ask you please to invest in our -- in our institutions of higher education to create the workforce of the future and I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and thank you for your testimony. [Applause] Is there anybody else who did not testify who wanted to testify? Okay. You are the last person. Yeah, the closer.

DR. ADAM PERRIN: Okay. I am Adam Perrin and I am with the Department of Medicine at UConn Health, and I thank the members of the Appropriations Committee for holding this hearing for the opportunity to speak this evening. I also thank the General Assembly for their past support and I'm here today as a primary care clinician member of the UConn Health family to ask that your support continue unabated.

I come before you as a citizen of Middlefield, Connecticut, as well as an employee and faculty member of UConn Health. I joined UConn Health in 2012, having sought a position in academic medicine after two decades of fulltime clinical practice in Middlesex County. I was drawn to UConn Health in particular to the School of Medicine because of its excellent reputation at a public institution dedicated to the production of highly skilled and empathetic health care providers, many of whom

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dedicate their careers to the care of destitute and underserved populations. I came to UConn Health with the understanding that it was the ONLY public academic medical center in the State dedicated to the provision of care for the neediest and most vulnerable people in our State.

I have the distinct advantage of seeing how incredibly impactful a UConn Health education can be from a multitude of positions and perspectives including patient care provider and preceptor in the UConn Family Medicine Residency Program, instructor and course co-director in our new and highly effective team-based undergraduate medical/dental curriculum, and as an administrator with oversight of Student Affairs issues and Student Wellness programming. Such diversity of roles and responsibilities, fully supported by an involved and accessible Dean, has allowed me substantial insight into the great and lasting value of a UConn Health education.

What has impressed me most is UConn Health's unwavering support of the production of primary care providers, an ongoing process of which our Dean is hugely supportive. An example of this support has manifested itself in the formation of our Primary Care Loan Program, which was designed to support the aspirations of UConn School of Medicine students interested in a career in primary care. For each year of the program, which can accommodate up to four students per year with a maximum duration of support of three years, a substantial low interest educational loan is provided in exchange for a year of service practicing fulltime as a primary care physician in Connecticut.

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But perhaps the most impressive manifestation of UConn Health's dedication to understanding and serving our neediest state residents is our Urban Service Track, a program of the Connecticut Area Health Education Center. UST Scholars, who are drawn from six different healthcare disciplines, follow an interprofessional educational track designed to support students who are interested in working in urban and underserved settings. UST Scholars receive targeted education on how to take care of vulnerable populations such as the elderly, homeless, veterans, and refugees and are given ample opportunity to apply their newly acquired knowledge and clinical skills in a variety of community settings in areas of high medical need.

So, UConn Health and its School of Medicine is on the cutting-edge of medical education, thanks in large part to your support. Your continued support of the School of Medicine is a crucial investment in a new crop of physicians who will advance the quality of healthcare in the state because they see beyond the history of present illness and treat the patient in the larger context of their medical and social history.

And finally, please support UConn Health and its mission to serve our students and all of our Connecticut citizens with cutting edge medical care focusing on our citizens' needs rather than on their ability to pay, which is likely not to happen if we partner with a private enterprise. I feel strongly that UConn should remain public, and free to fulfill its intended mission. Give us the chance and we will continue to make you proud. State funding for UConn is a wise and practical investment in Connecticut's future. Thank you. [Applause]

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REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you all for staying and testifying. Thank you for hanging in there. This concludes the public hearing for Higher Education in Appros. Tomorrow we will be doing, I'll tell you in a minute -- oh goody. Tomorrow we'll be doing the Department of Children and Families, Department of Social Services and then our public hearing will begin at 4:00 tomorrow. Thank you, and everybody have a safe drive home.