

Connecticut General Assembly
Appropriations Committee Public Hearing

Testimony of: Paul Nwokeji
School of Dental Medicine, Class of 2022

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 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. 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, matured, and learned a lot about myself. For this invaluable 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 in Connecticut. 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 Connecticut again, as a resident of the State, 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 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.

-Paul Nwokeji