

Good Afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee, my name is Zayira Cotto and I am a pediatric dental assistant at UConn Health. I have been working at UConn for three years. I began working as a dental assistant ten years ago.

I am here today to ask that you continue to fund the budget for UConn Health. At the end of the day, we see patients that private practices may not see otherwise. As a public hospital we are the only institution that will take patients with behavioral issues such as autism. We are also obligated to work with patients that are on Medicare and Medicaid. Our pediatric clinic specializes in treating children who have behavioral issues and special needs.

I came to UConn because it is one of the best workplaces for dental assistants in the state. The mission of this institution sees people as its bottom line, not profits. This mission makes UConn feel very different from the private practices where I used to work. I got into the dental field because of my son. When he was only seven years old, my son went through an intensive surgery on many of his teeth. He was in a lot of pain. Because of my Medicaid insurance, my son was able to undergo that surgery. After that, I began paying more attention to his oral health, and became interested in dentistry. I applied to be a receptionist at a dental office, then an administrative assistant, and finally a dental assistant. The same doctor that performed my son's surgery was the doctor that offered me a receptionist position at his office.

On a daily basis, I come in and prepare the rooms and equipment for procedures. During the procedures, I assist with the preparation of all of the materials and instruments. I also conduct x-rays. Then I clean up the room and the instruments and prepare things for the next patient. Since we are a teaching hospital with UConn, I interact with many students and residents. I work closely with the students and learn a lot from working in a teaching and learning environment.

As much as I love my job, there are struggles that make our days difficult. The ratio of dental assistants to students, residents, and faculty can be very taxing on the assistants. There are so many procedures going on at the same time that it is very rare for assistants to be able to practice four handed dentistry, which is when both a dentist and an assistant are working together throughout a procedure. This practice is used in dentistry because it moves the process along more smoothly for the patient

and is necessary for many procedures. I often feel like I am not able to truly assist, because I am usually running around to prepare materials and clean and prepare the chairs for patients. If we had more resources and more staff, I would be able to actually do the job that I am trained for.

I came here after work today to make sure that you are all aware of the importance of funding UConn and understand the need to protect it as a public good.

Thank you for your time.