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United for Quality Care

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Becky Simonsen, Lead Organizer
SEIU District 1199 New England
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Evening Senator Osten, 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 health care workers across the public and private sectors in Connecticut, including 7,000 health care 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 health care delivery is in crisis nationwide. Health care costs are skyrocketing as hospital chains merge and insurance companies become more powerful. In Connecticut, Yale New Haven Hospital and Hartford Healthcare control about 80% of the health care 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 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 health care, 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, 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.