



Testimony of

**Sal Luciano, President
Connecticut AFL-CIO**

Appropriations Committee - February 18, 2020

***HB 5005 An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2021
UConn Health***

Good evening Representative Walker, Senator Osten and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Sal Luciano and I am proud to serve as the President of the Connecticut AFL-CIO, a federation of hundreds of local unions representing more than 220,000 members in the private sector, public sector, and building trades. Our members live and work in every city and town in our state, and reflect the diversity that makes Connecticut great. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony today on behalf of the thousands of dedicated professionals who work at UConn Health Center.

In his State of the State address earlier this month Governor Lamont encouraged us all to stop badmouthing Connecticut. There is much to be proud of in this state and we should be the first ones to say so. Let me begin:

- John Dempsey Hospital is our state's only public hospital. It serves over 1 million patients annually, 25% of whom are Medicaid patients.
- UConn Health Center is the state's only public academic medical center, housing UConn's medical and dental schools and premier academic research facilities.
- UConn's School of Dental Medicine is among the top in the nation.
- UConn's doctors, residents, dentists and students provide thousands of hours of free healthcare each year to Connecticut's most vulnerable residents.
- UConn Health is fast becoming a hub for bioscience and biotech research and education with partners like The Jackson Laboratory.
- UConn Health brings in more than \$100 million in research grants and provides nearly \$2.2 billion in positive economic impact for the state and the region.

We can be very proud of UConn Health and the amazing professionals who make it work. These are significant state assets worthy of investment. These are institutions that contribute to our quality of life, our economy and to our state overall.

It's true, UConn Health has inherited challenging legacy costs from administrations that refused to save for the promises they made. But that does not mean we should turn our backs on UConn Health and those who depend upon it.

We should be proud that uninsured and underinsured patients are not turned away at Dempsey hospital. The staff treats patients with conditions that are not profitable. Paying for those services is not a "subsidy" as many in the administration are fond of calling it. That is what a public hospital does. That is what our public hospital does.

In order to continue to fulfill its mission as a public hospital, UConn Health needs an increase of \$50 million in its block grant next fiscal year, an increase of \$75 million in the following year and \$100 million in the next year. Appropriating such funds is not a "bailout" for hospital or university mismanagement. Instead, it would be recognition by the General Assembly that UConn Health has never had the level of control over its pension and healthcare costs that the legislature has.

There has been much discussion about the financial viability of UConn Health Center. This body ordered UConn Health to secure a public-private partnership to strengthen its financial footing. After a nationwide search, no proposal was deemed feasible. While UConn Health may still attempt to find a mutually beneficial partnership, we urge this Committee and the General Assembly to protect its investment in UConn Health.

We urge you not to destroy our state's only public hospital by once again underfunding it or selling it to the highest bidder. Too many vulnerable people in our state depend on the services Dempsey Hospital and the Health Center provide. We urge recognize what is good about UConn Health and fully fund it so it may continue its work for Connecticut residents.

Thank you.