

Hello, my name is Eric Bueno and 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 4 years ago, I would have thought you were joking.

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 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 7 years ago, UCAP was a 6-week program and offered creativity stimulating courses such as art and music. The past three

summers, the program was only 5 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 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.