

Testimony, Connecticut Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed FY21 Budget Adjustments
February 18, 2020

Good Afternoon Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Gleb Reznik and I am the Deputy Chief Information Security Officer at Synchrony.

Headquartered in Stamford, Synchrony is a premier consumer financial services company that delivers customized financing programs across key industries including retail, health, auto, travel and home, along with award-winning consumer banking products. We have built partnerships with national and regional retailers, healthcare providers, manufacturers and more. At Synchrony, our investments in technology are across multiple platforms – in-store, online and mobile – which allows us to engage consumers where and when they want.

Synchrony is proud to partner with UConn Engineering to help advance technology education and digital expertise for future leaders. Our partnership with UConn is very strong and helps Synchrony in several important ways:

- First, this relationship helps us recruit engineering, math, computer science and technology talent, which is essential for our ongoing success.
- Second, we collaborate closely with UConn Engineering on numerous research projects, which helps us stay at the forefront of technological advances. This is critical to remaining competitive in the financial services industry.

I would like to provide several specific examples that demonstrate the importance of this partnership:

1. Founded in 2016, the “Synchrony Financial Center of Excellence in Cybersecurity” is a unique academic-corporate partnership to mitigate the growing cybersecurity exposures. The Center was established at the UConn Storrs campus, located in the Innovation Partnership Building. This Center allows Synchrony and UConn Engineering to focus on cybersecurity research across various industries. The Center advances education and research in cryptography, security and software engineering, security architectures, advanced persistent threats, using artificial intelligence for early attack detection and attribution, and deep learning methods for security-related applications. The Center is promoting cutting-edge research in a field that industry officials expect to grow from \$122 billion worldwide in 2016, to \$202 billion by 2021.



Synchrony and UConn aim to counter the growing threats of foreign and domestic cybercrime by developing information security talent and leading research to help companies and consumers stay ahead of these threats. The Center collaboration provides opportunities for students looking to pursue careers in cybersecurity and embeds students with Synchrony employees to learn more about the company and culture, which helps us build a robust talent pipeline.

2. The Synchrony Digital Technology Center is now open at UConn's Stamford campus. Twenty to 30 students work in the center. Students focus on Digital Media and Design, Computer Science & Engineering, and other business-related majors for UConn Stamford students.
3. Synchrony participated in and sponsored the CyberSEED event, which took place last October at the UConn Storrs Campus. CyberSEED brings together dozens of universities and colleges to compete in unique cybersecurity challenges.
4. Synchrony has sponsored several Senior Design projects from the School of Engineering. This is a great way to engage and recruit engineering talent and to explore new concepts with UConn faculty and students. In 2019, a four-person team worked on the Synchrony-sponsored project to enhance the user experience for Synchrony's customers. This included creating a voice assistant experience that included features such as "make a payment," an unlock/lock card, ability to check a balance, review prior transactions and set a pin. Synchrony is also sponsoring projects during the current academic year with the Computer Science & Engineering Department. We are hopeful the students will have another great experience collaborating with us.
5. Synchrony leadership is active and engaged in the Industry Advisory Board for the UConn School of Engineering. The Advisory Board allows us to provide timely input on important issues to the School so they can address needs and ensure the curriculum remains relevant.
6. Synchrony's commitment to UConn is reflective in our recent philanthropic gift of \$1 million in December 2019 to UConn's Connecticut Commitment, an initiative to provide free tuition to low-income undergraduate students.

These examples demonstrate the essential role that major research universities play in working with industry to develop a highly-skilled workforce and expertise in emerging technologies. Moreover, Synchrony currently has 65 employees working at our Stamford site that either graduated from UConn or are current students and have participated in internships.



Synchrony is proud of the partnership with UConn and looks forward to continuing this important work. Thank you for your time.