

**Testimony of Elizabeth Appel, MD,  
Assistant Professor of Medicine  
UConn Health**

**Before the  
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**

**March 4,**

**RE: UCONN HEALTH BUDGET 2021**

**In support of the Appropriations Budget and a two-year moratorium on privatization**

Good evening, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you this evening in support of UConn Health, the only public academic medical center in Connecticut. My name is Doctor Elizabeth Appel, and I am a UConn Primary Care physician residing and practicing in West Hartford, CT. I am grateful for all you do every day for the citizens of Connecticut and to the General Assembly's enduring support of the UConn Health mission.

As your public employee and a busy clinician - I generate revenue - and I return a profit to the State of Connecticut year in and year out while teaching our next generation of clinicians. My experience as a trainee in a public hospital in Boston shaped my core values of compassion, open mindedness to all cultures, and doing the most sometimes with the least resources. These are core values across all of UConn and why I have chosen this clinical setting for over 20 years.

I am not just an employee but a patient as well. I have used several specialists at UConn, as has my family. My son just had a wrist MRI and came home glowing about the staff, calm environment and overall experience that exceeded one that he previously had with a private community radiology group. I can tell you what it feels like to have the same eye doctors at UConn for many years and I am proud to be part of this care system, where I know that my patients get that same level of care as my family.

I value our public hospital and clinic network where we have a culture of working collaboratively for the best clinical outcome for our patients. I can call or email a colleague about a patient that I am concerned about and often this will lead to a quicker diagnosis or prompt treatment of a seriously ill patient.

As COVID-19 unfolded, UConn was a leader in dissemination of information from our call center, providing testing, and formidable and advanced inpatient care for very sick patients in our hospital. Our leadership was incredible because many in leadership had a PUBLIC background, either in the Veteran's system or Public Health / CDC. These physicians are drawn to practice in a public hospital and clinical system such as UConn. The medical school/ AHEC trained our medical students to call all COVID-19 positive outpatients to see how they were doing in recovery. Many/ most of these patients resided in underserved neighborhoods in Hartford, hit extremely hard by COVID-19. This was done because UConn has a public mission to reach all citizens in Connecticut.

I am certain that a medical student call saved the life of at least one patient who was experiencing a decline in breathing but did not want to go back to the ER. They alerted our office, and we were able to talk the patient into getting care in a timely manner because of our personal relationship with the patient over many years. Fortunately, UConn hospitalists were using state of the art treatment for respiratory distress and the patient did very well. I believe the survival rate of patients admitted to UConn Health for COVID-19 has been very high, particularly with regard to under-served individuals.

Finally, in a novel approach to health disparities, one Medical Attending and Medical student developed a project with UConn undergraduate students to screen for social needs of our patients such as transportation / food/ shelter/ safety. It helps sensitize future physicians to the social factors influencing health and identifies patients who need a match to available social services.

As our Dr. Agwonobi states time and again, our wonderful public academic medical center, when well supported, is economically healthy and delivers exceptional quality.

I will close my testimony stating again that I love our public academic medical center, feel privileged to belong to UConn Health, and hope that the legislature will continue to fund Connecticut's' only public academic medical center, keep it in the public domain, and place a two-year moratorium on privatization. Thank you again for this opportunity to speak on this important state issue.