

WORKING FOR A BETTER UCONN

UCONN Graduate Employee Union
United Auto Workers, Local 6950
1734 Storrs Rd. Storrs, CT 06268



Testimony of William Biel on behalf of the

Graduate Employee Union Local 6950
United Automobile Workers of America (GEU-UAW UCONN)

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing
Thursday, March 4, 2021

In support of: H.B. No. 6439 (Comm) An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium
Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, and Making Appropriations Therefor

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representatives Dathan and Nolan,
and members of the Appropriations Committee;

My name is William Biel, and I am both a graduate student and graduate assistant in the English department at the University of Connecticut and a member of the Graduate Employee Union (GEU-UAW Local 6950). I am writing to testify on the Budget Hearing for Higher Education.

As a graduate assistant, I teach writing and composition to anywhere from 50 to over 100 undergraduates per semester. Along with other English graduate assistants, I teach critical skills like digital information literacy, the vitality of which is hopefully clear in this time of conspiracy theories. I am also a researcher, specifically of medieval literature. My historical studies deeply inform my pedagogy, as I try to pass on a long-term perspective to my students. I came to UConn because of multiple recommendations from other graduate students given at conferences in both North America and Europe: UConn has long been considered an international leader in this field.

Unfortunately, this venerable and renowned program has already all but vanished during my time at UConn. Due to lack of funds, graduate student teaching loads have increased without matching increases in pay, and these poor work conditions keep talented minds from ever coming to this state and lead to the dismantling of small but important research programs. I also despair of being able to provide high-quality instruction to an ever-growing number of students per semester. I simply cannot give time and attention to over 100 students at once, which leaves students paying for sub-standard education. This can be remedied with proper state funding for UConn.

Beyond the civic function of education, support for UConn also directly stimulates Connecticut's economy. It provides jobs throughout the state, bringing and keeping faculty, staff and their families to Connecticut, and driving innovation and entrepreneurship in the state. I, myself, moved to Connecticut in 2015 specifically for my doctoral program at UConn. This program is how I met my wife, a fellow PhD student in English, and together we plan to buy a home and keep our new family here in Connecticut. I know I am merely one of countless others who have come and grown Connecticut's communities and economy because of UConn.

UConn is a vital asset to the State of Connecticut. In the past, the state budget has provided generous support to UConn's important mission of providing education, service, and research to the state and residents of Connecticut, and I strongly encourage you to continue this generosity in the next budget.

Sincerely,
William Biel
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