

Good evening everyone, I hope you are all doing well. Before I begin, I would like to thank you all for giving me this opportunity to share my voice and story.

My name is Darlene Burckson, and I am an undergraduate student at the University of Connecticut majoring in Biological Sciences with a minor in Human Development and Family Sciences.

I am from South Windsor, CT, and I was raised by my two incredibly strong immigrant parents, Charles and Jennifer Burckson, who came to this country with one suitcase from Ghana in search of a better life for their kids. Growing up and seeing their resilience and dedication has shaped who I am today. Knowing that anything is possible regardless of the odds is the mindset I had when deciding to not only be the first person in my family to attend a 4-year university but the first doctor as well.

During my senior year of high school, I received an acceptance letter from UConn. Although reading the letter with my family was an amazing moment, I knew there was one thing at the back of all of our minds. How were we going to afford this?

Being a woman of color in STEM, I knew immediately upon my acceptance into UConn that I should apply to the Women in Math Science and Engineering Learning Community. Being involved with the LC program has resulted in nothing less than positive contributions to a transformative journey during the past three years. With the LC staff's continued and consistent support, I've always had access to resources that allowed me to thrive in an academically rigorous environment.

One of my most significant accomplishments at UConn thus far has been receiving acceptance into the third cohort of The BOLD Women's Leadership Network. BOLD's mission is to empower young women like myself to become leaders in our lives and careers after college. Navigating the financial aspect of college has not been an easy journey, but receiving this scholarship has alleviated an enormous amount of financial pressure off of my family and allowed me to fully focus on my education. In addition to financial support, I am advised and supported by all of the highly motivated and accomplished women who help make the program possible.

Upon my graduation from UConn, my priority will be to give back to the community that has given so much to me. I will do this by remaining active in the programs mentioned and more to mentor and encourage students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and instill the principle that anything is possible with hard work.

Lastly, I would like to emphasize that your past and continued funding to FYP like LCs and Enrichment programs such as BOLD and many others that support student's growth is important because they ingrain the confidence in students like myself that **we can one day make a change in the world and turn our dreams into a reality.**

Thank you all for your time and your investments in the future of students.