

Members of the Appropriations Committee,

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to speak to you today.

My Name is Damani Douglas. I am a junior studying Political science and Communication at UConn. I currently serve in the Undergraduate Student Government as its Chief Diversity officer. For the three minutes of your time that I have I would like to tell you how Diversity came to be important to me.

When I am not at school, I live not far from here in West Hartford. In middle school I went to my local public school where I was one of a few black students. My time at the middle school was not really notable, but it was formative. I remember in sixth grade my school started a Bring Your Own Device or “BOYD” program. The idea being to allow and enable students to bring technology into the classroom. I remember most of my peers (myself included) that wanted to have a laptop did.

When I went to high school this changed. Instead of going to the same high school as many of my friends I instead opted to go to a different kind of public school, a magnet school. In high school all of my peers had laptops, but they were laptops provided to by the students to the school.

The laptop program was not the only difference between these schools. There was a stark difference in the racial makeup of the school as well a significant difference in the socioeconomic backgrounds of the students.

For the first time I had a class with more than 2 other black students. For the first time I had a teacher ask the class if everyone had a reliable internet connection and one of my peers say “No”. For the first time I meet people who shared my racial identity but came from homes environments that were radically different from my own.

That experience changed a lot for me, but it only happened because I picked to go to that magnet school. My friends from middle school didn’t get that experience until they went to college.

Which brings me to UConn. UConn is a place where you can’t assume anything about anyone’s identity until they tell you. From race to gender, and religion to socioeconomic background, UConn mixes people with so many identities together in a way that makes us all stronger.

All of that is only possible with your support. It is the support of this committee and the Legislature that it serves that enables all of those people to come together. The dollars that the General Assembly sends to UConn mean that so many of the students who never had the chance to experience diversity in learning will get that chance.

Damani Roosevelt Douglas
UCONN class of 22