

Dear Honorable Appropriations Committee,

My name is Victor Munoz, I am a third-year dental student at the University of Connecticut School of Dental Medicine. I have volunteered to speak to you today because I wanted to share how the University of Connecticut has supported me through my almost 8-year tenure.

I am an immigrant from Peru, arriving in the US when I was 10. Though I grew up in Peru, Connecticut has been my home for the past 15 years. I did most of my schooling here and graduated from Conard High School in West Hartford, and from the University of Connecticut with a 4-year bachelor's degree in Biological Sciences. I really cherished my time at UConn undergrad as it helped me make my decision to embark on this journey of becoming a physician. Through various outreach programs, workshops, and events hosted by UConn Health, I was able to see what it was like to be part of UConn Dental. I could see myself joining such a tight knit community. Every student I saw and talked to during my visits seemed so happy to be there. It felt as if students and faculty were a family working towards one common goal.

I was delighted when I found out that I was admitted to UConn Dental. I was ready to work together with my fellow classmates and continuing being part of the UConn family. Though the dental program is often rigorous and demanding, I have received a great amount of support from faculty as well as my classmates. Through many difficult exams, we have motivated and pushed each other, working together to become knowledgeable and successful physicians. This unity between students and faculty has really shown during this pandemic as we have all had to demonstrate resilience and perseverance throughout.

Unfortunately, my mother, father and I all tested positive for COVID in late May of last year. This was one of the, if not, the hardest experiences I've ever dealt with. Not knowing how this virus was going to affect me or my parents made me feel hopeless and alone. During this time, I was still attending virtual classes and made sure to let faculty know what I was going through in case I needed additional time with assignments or class. Unsurprisingly, all of the faculty that I reached out to were very supportive and caring. I would receive emails every couple of days asking for updates on how my family and I were doing, even volunteering to help us with groceries or anything we had in mind. I was fortunate to have this type of support from my school, and it definitely helped make a very stressful situation a little bit more comfortable.

As we slowly return to a semblance of normalcy and I progress further in my studies. I am still reminded every day of how lucky I am to be a part of a program as supportive and genuinely caring as UConn. The faculty here will use whatever resources they have available to them to help us succeed, as they even did for me during one of the most challenging periods of my life. I know I am one of many who were negatively impacted during this pandemic and many people need help to get through this difficult period. I urge you to continue supporting UConn Health so they can continue helping us students become the next generation of physicians.