

Good afternoon. My name is Steven Santos. I am a senior computer science major at the University of Connecticut, and I am from Wethersfield, CT. Before I begin I want to thank the committee for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to speak today. I also want to thank the General Assembly for their past support of UConn and its programs.

When I was a senior at Wethersfield High School I remember applying for colleges, hoping to stay in state so that I could be close to home and have an affordable education. As the first person in my family to be college bound, my parents were not able to provide me any guidance on college, and I was not even confident if I would be accepted to UConn because of my lower SAT scores and grades. I felt so fortunate to be accepted not only to UConn, but also the Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation, or LSAMP, which has helped me ease the transition from high school to college. LSAMP supports underrepresented students in STEM and has been an important part of my UConn education.

In my first semester, LSAMP afforded me the opportunity to enroll in a class which taught me all about STEM, including UConn's resources in the field, career pathways, and research opportunities. Through LSAMP I also established a community and support system by making friends who have become an important part of my life, and I have participated in several career and research-focused opportunities that have prepared me well for my senior year. The LSAMP program made the big, intimidating campus feel much smaller and more accessible for a first-generation student like me.

In my sophomore year, the LSAMP coordinator introduced me to another instrumental program in my journey, which is the McNair Scholars Program. The McNair program prepares first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students for Ph.D studies in STEM fields by providing mentorship, research opportunities, GRE preparation courses, seminars, and support in

applying for graduate studies and post-graduate careers. I was intrigued by research, so I decided to apply to the McNair Fellows program, which was a one semester introductory research experience where I shadowed a lab, and then the McNair Scholars program, through which I have been able to conduct my own research in the Computer Science and Engineering Department. Through the McNair Scholars Program, I have been involved with a research project to test autonomous driving algorithms, which has been so exciting for me, as I have been interested in this topic for a long time. In addition, I am thankful for the support the McNair program has provided to me, including connecting me to a faculty mentor and the McNair coordinator, who have given me a lot of guidance as I prepare for life after graduation.

Both the LSAMP and McNair programs have been especially meaningful to me; in addition to researching and gaining skills to prepare me for my future, I have also gotten to mentor students in the UConn College and Access Preparation Program, who are from under-resourced high schools. By teaching them laboratory skills in physics and computer science, I had the opportunity to pay it forward and give the students something that I wish I had when I was younger. In addition to working with younger students, I have also had the opportunity to have a seat at the table with other scholars, by presenting my research project findings to the university and engaging with STEM faculty. With the help of LSAMP and McNair I have learned a lot about myself and who I want to be.

Now in my senior year, I will be entering the field of software engineering before returning to school to earn my Master's and PhD. Four years ago, I was unsure if I would get into UConn, but today I feel accomplished as a student and researcher, and prepared for my career. All of this is possible because of the quality of education and support I received from UConn. I know many of my friends from Wethersfield, who are also first-generation, who

would have benefitted from acceptance to UConn and the support of these programs. Again I want to thank you for your past support of UConn and its programs, and I hope you will provide additional funding to support more students like me.

Thank you for listening to my story today.