

Good Afternoon everyone.

First and foremost, thank you for the committee members for holding this hearing and giving students such as myself a chance to speak.

My name is Syed Saud, and I am a 4th year dental student at the University of Connecticut. I am nothing more than a suburban kid who has been guided by the UConn school system to become the healthcare professional sitting before you here today.

Let me be frank with you, when I got into UConn as an undergrad student, I was looking at so many options. I was looking forward to moving away- to test new limits and new horizons in different states and cities. Little did I know that those new limits and horizons would be right here in our little northeastern state. My undergrad experience was so incredibly fulfilling. I joined organizations, I led fundraisers, I made lifelong friendships. I was a part of the Honor's College that propelled me to new heights in research and creation. I've witnessed friends and colleagues commit to incredible research and begin startups in UConn incubators.

The most important thing that UConn undergrad experience has done for me, however, was lead me to UConn School of Dental Medicine. This health center means so much to me and other students like me. The sheer name of UCONN Dental is respected in residencies all across the country. The education in medical and dental sciences that UCONN SODM provides is unparalleled. I sit with friends from other dental schools and I understand the differences in what it means to be a well-rounded dentist.

Even in the crisis that was COVID-19, UCONN did its best to keep the safety of our students and our patients at the forefront of any decisions to be made. Fall classes were switched to Spring semester to maximize clinic blocks when it came time to reopen. Residents were still at work handling emergencies day in and day out. We had rotating schedules and assigned chairs to make sure patients were still seen in a safe manner. We repurposed physical space in the hospital to provide care for an additional 446 patients during COVID crisis. Quality education, highly skilled faculty, and the camaraderie amongst students are the reasons I came here. It is the reasons I stayed in Connecticut and hope to work in Connecticut.

What this school does is close to miraculous. Our patients are sometimes the neediest and most vulnerable in the state. We see patients many other providers don't. I have had many patients who came to UConn Health because they had nowhere else to go. Not only is this school affordable for someone like myself but it's affordable to the citizens of Connecticut. If you continue to fund this school you will continue to see graduates live and work in Connecticut. The shortage of future healthcare professionals will only be filled by the Health Center.

Without UConn, I literally would not be who I am today. Investing in the bright minds working on research, innovation, medicine and dentistry now will only lead to solutions for a bright future. Please maintain your support for the next generation of students just like me.

Thank you.