

American Association of University Professors
University of Connecticut Health Center Chapter

Written Testimony for the Appropriation Committee
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Laura Haynes, Ph.D. Professor
Center on Aging Department of Immunology
University of Connecticut Health 263 Farmington Avenue Farmington, CT 06030
Treasurer, UCHC-AAUP

My name is Laura Haynes and I am a Professor in the Center on Aging and the Department of Immunology at UConn Health. The research that is being carried out in my laboratory is highly significant for older adults in Connecticut. Our work examines how aging impacts the response to infectious diseases such as influenza. This topic is important because older adults are more susceptible to infection, and they exhibit significantly decreased resilience following infection. One of the most prominent symptoms in older adults is the loss of mobility.

Healthy older adults who are hospitalized with influenza often need assistance walking (use of a walker or cane) following discharge. Ultimately, loss of mobility resulting from influenza infection could result in the inability to live independently and require relocation to an assisted care facility. We are using an aging mouse model of influenza infection to understand the mechanisms of how flu impacts muscle and how this can be prevented.

My research is funded by NIH grants. Because of the high fringe benefit rates for employees at UConn Health, I have had to cut back on the experiments proposed for each grant that I have submitted. Importantly, this can severely impact the overall strength of the grants that I can submit and is disadvantageous since our competitors do not have to deal with this issue. The result is that our research is not as robust and cutting edge when compared to our competitors, and our chances of obtaining future funding from NIH are diminished because of this.

Aside from the scientific implications, this also has economic implications: Overall, researchers at UConn Health hire fewer people. Also, this can drive successful research faculty at UConn Health to seek positions in other institutions that don't have such high fringe rates. At a time when we are trying to enhance the research that is going on at UConn, these high fringe rates are impairing our ability to do so.

Because of these issues, we are asking for three things:

- (1) That the Appropriations Committee cover 100% of the state legacy costs (retiree unfunded pension and retiree health). The bill in Higher Education SB 8 just covers the pension piece.
- (2) We are asking our block grant to be increased sufficiently in FY22 & FY23 to fund the collective bargaining increases negotiated by SEBAC. We are requesting an additional \$25M (salary and fringe) be added to the Block grant to cover the entire amount.
- (3) In FY23, there are 27 pay periods. The approved budget only includes 26 for higher ed units. UConn is requesting a parity adjustment and to be treated like all other state agencies with the state covering the 27th payroll.

Thank you for your time,

Laura Haynes