

American Association of University Professors
University of Connecticut Health Center Chapter
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Written Testimony for the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
S.B 8 AN ACT CONCERNING THE UNFUNDED PENSION LIABILITY PORTION OF THE FRINGE BENEFIT COST FOR
EMPLOYEES OF THE CONSTITUENT UNITS OF THE STATE SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

February 17, 2022

Laura Haynes, Ph.D. Professor

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Treasurer, UCHC-AAUP

Dear Committee Members:

My name is Laura Haynes and I am a Professor at the Center on Aging at the Department of Immunology. My work examines how aging impacts the response to infectious diseases such as influenza. This is important because older folks are more susceptible to infection and they exhibit significantly decreased resilience following infection. For example, we are examining how influenza infection impacts muscle loss and how this is related to physical disability in older folks.

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. I have also had to severely limit the percent effort of my staff on my grants. This limits the number of experiments that I can conduct and it also limits the number of follow up experiments that we can do when we find something interesting or unexpected. The end 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.

I support SB 8 with the Amendment to the statute as follows: Section 1. (NEW) (Effective on passage). For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023, and for each fiscal year thereafter, the Comptroller shall fund the retiree pension and retiree health care liability portion of the fringe benefit costs for all employees of the constituent units of the state system of higher education.

Thank you,
Laura Haynes