

Good morning, my name is Farnoush Baghestani, and I'm a second-year Ph.D. student in the biomedical engineering department at UConn. I'm here to speak against the 5-year fiscal plan calling for 15-19% budget cuts. Since my arrival in 2022 as an international student, I've been fully dependent on my income as a graduate assistant.

In my first year, I had the opportunity to present my work at the IEEE International Conference on Body Sensor Networks in the MIT Media Lab in Boston and was honored with the Best Paper Award. Participation in this conference opened a new door for me as a young member of the field of body sensors. Conference participation is important to our academic growth and ability to network, but also plays a key role in showcasing the work we do here at UConn. Unfortunately, the proposed budget cuts entail a substantial decrease in the travel funds and conference participation awards accessible to students. Without this funding, I am concerned participating in conferences will become more difficult for myself and other graduate students.

Additionally, this semester, due to one of our lab members leaving UConn, I've had to unexpectedly take on the role of teaching assistant alongside my research duties for the third time. I've welcomed undergraduate students into our lab space to teach them how to use our equipment and conduct research. Witnessing young women participate in our class has been particularly rewarding, and I hope to inspire them as a woman in engineering. However, this additional responsibility takes up time that would otherwise be focused on my research and progress towards my thesis. With budget cuts, there will be less funding for TAs, and graduate students like myself, who are currently TAs will likely find themselves burdened with increased duties. This reduction in teaching assistants, coupled with a growing student population means greater workloads for TAs and less individualized attention for each student, which is unfair to both students and TAs alike.

As an international student, most of my social circle consists of fellow graduate students. Many of us have no financial support from back home, specially being on a single-entry F1 visa, which is the case for a lot of Iranians students at least, means we can't simply go home. Adequate funds for international graduate students in summer, which this proposal threatens, should be a priority if UConn aims to maintain its status as an R1 research institute, with vibrant and healthy minds driving its progress.

The 5-year fiscal plan dramatically cutting UConn's academic budget, exacerbates our existing financial burdens. Finding affordable housing for instance, often means either sharing with multiple roommates or sacrificing other essential needs for a more private space. In my first semester, I even had to put my clothes in a suitcase and walk through the snow for twenty minutes to reach a laundry room because our three-bedroom apartment

didn't have a washing machine. Even if some of us eventually manage to buy a used car, covering the unexpected expenses of car ownership remains a serious stress.

We, as graduate students, are valuable contributions to this school, this state, and this country. In fact, I've recently allocated nearly all of my savings towards taxes! I sincerely hope that this heartfelt speech attracts the attention of the esteemed decision-makers at UConn and prompts them to reconsider the proposed budget cuts . Thank you for your attention.