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Daily OPINION

Blue lights reflect symbols of safety



Students walk past a blue light emergency phone on September 22, 2026. UConn recently announced plans to remove most emergency phones from campus.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL JEFFERS, GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

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In the past few weeks, countless news outlets have been reporting on the University of Connecticut's decision to phase out the "Blue Phone" system. UConn states multiple reasons for this decision, mainly coming down to a high cost of upkeep and a lack of usage. By taking down the phones, UConn intends to promote its own application "LiveSafe" that provides the same functions as the blue phones but can be used through students' cell phones.

While the cost-to-usage ratio is a valid reason to reevaluate — especially considering the financial straits of the University — the other arguments are merely selfish attempts to push their own intentions without thinking about what it's like for students facing potential danger.

Most importantly, they forget one of the most prevalent aspects of the blue phone system: symbolism. The blue phone system is an iconic staple on college campuses nationwide. Personally, I remember seeing or hearing about them on almost every college tour I went on, meaning people are aware of what the phones can do and the purpose they serve.

Having a system in place to help those facing danger serves as a natural deterrent itself. Knowing there's a third party in the area with the blue phones present prevents certain crimes from occurring in the first place.

Looking at only the statistics of how many times the phones were used ignores the number of assaults that were prevented by the mere existence of the device. This number cannot be tracked since you cannot track something that never occurred. The number of potential assaults, though, is something I would much rather have to guess than be able to place because they really happened.

The blue phones also serve as a symbol for those walking back alone late at night and find themselves in scenarios where assault is likely to occur. Having a visible symbol of safety helps to ease the minds of those making potentially dangerous walks.

As a woman who has had to make countless solo walks after midnight from D-Lot or Hilltop to my dorm 15 minutes away, it can be terrifying to hear another person come out of nowhere, especially when that person is a stranger whose intentions you cannot identify. Even though I've never needed to use the blue phones, I appreciate that they're there in case I do find myself in a dangerous scenario. God forbid something did happen, it's much more convenient to have to push a button on a giant blue pole than to fumble for my phone, unlock it, find an app and push another button.

The symbol the blue phones provide creates a placebo effect on the people near them. In a scientific sense, the placebo effect typically refers to when an ineffective drug or treatment is given to a subject who believes it is effective. The subject's brain and belief in the effectiveness of the treatment causes the drug to "work" even though the treatment itself had no actual function. The placebo effect is often seen at parties where people can appear drunk by being around drunk people even if they didn't drink themselves. You don't even have to ingest anything for the placebo effect to work; having an object without using it can cause a similar effect.

A few years ago, I was prescribed a needed anxiety medication from my doctor. She told me that even if I don't use it, just knowing it's there tends to calm panic attacks since patients know that there is something readily there to help them. Essentially, a symbol can cause real change without taking any action.

UConn's blue phone system serves the same jobs as my needed medication; they are a placebo for safety around campus. Sure, they cost the university money to upkeep and barely get used, but the number of crimes they prevent is more than any financial statement.

Taking them down removes a symbol of safety that protects students at this campus, especially women. I would rather pay my tuition as taxes to upkeep an outdated but effective symbol of safety then become another number on a safety statistic.



A blue light emergency phone stands next to a streetlight on September 22, 2026. UConn recently announced plans to remove most emergency phones from campus.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL JEFFERS, GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS