

Maria Camila Bortolletto

Testimony for **Governor's Bill 6930**: An Act concerning Access to Post Secondary Education

Hello Chairwoman Bye, and members of the Committee. I would like to thank you for hearing our testimony today. My name is Maria Camila Bortolletto and I am here to testify in favor of Governor's Bill 6930.

I am a recent graduate of Western Connecticut State University. I graduated with a BA in Biology and a minor in International studies, Summa Cum Laude. I was in the University Honors Program, I was also the co-editor in chief of my university yearbook and the head of the Commuter Student Organization. Here's something not in my resume, I am an undocumented immigrant student. I came here from Brazil with my parents when I was 9 years old.

I attended elementary school, middle school, and high school in Danbury, CT. I grew up feeling like any other American teenager, but when it came time for college I discovered that I wasn't like my classmates. Because even though I had lived most of my life in Danbury, CT, less than 10 minutes from WCSU, I had to pay out of state tuition at WCSU. At that point in my life, I was rather naive about my situation. In my mind I had lived most of my life in Danbury, had graduated from Danbury High, and my parents paid taxes, I had just assumed that I would pay in state tuition, it did not cross my mind that I would have to pay the out of state rate. I actually only found out that I had to pay the out of state rate after I had already registered for classes; it really came as a shock. It was very tough for my family to pay for both me and my sister to attend college. I almost wasn't able to attend.

But most undocumented students can't afford out of state tuition, and as a result don't go to college. This is because out of state tuition is more than double the cost of in state tuition. At WCSU in state tuition is \$4,451.50 and out of state is \$9,634.00. As such, the law as it stands right now presents a huge barrier to higher education for most immigrant families. For undocumented students, this bill would mean the difference between actually being able to go to college and not going at all. One of the arguments against this bill is that "all those undocumented students paying out of state tuition would switch to in state tuition and the state would lose money" but the truth is that there are *very few* undocumented students that actually can afford out of state tuition and are going to college.

It is important to note that undocumented students do not qualify for any federal financial aid or for most scholarships, and this bill would do nothing to change that. So even those undocumented students who would take advantage of in state tuition, would be paying their own entire way to college, which even with in state is still expensive. Most documented college students receive aid. This bill is not a hand out, it is not giving a benefit only to undocumented students, it is merely a step to providing equal access to higher education to our all state's students.

The truth of the matter is that this is a very narrowly tailored bill; there are not a huge number of students that would benefit from it. However, the bill would have a huge impact on the lives of those that it does affect, by enabling them to continue their education. You might say that this bill does not fix these students' immigration status, and you're right it doesn't. But it is not up to the CT assembly to change that, it is up to the federal government. And while they're playing politics in DC, while you wait, kids' lives are passing them by. Bright, motivated students; students that are at the top of their high schools classes, and if given the chance could be at the top of their college classes, are not going to college and giving up on their future. Is this what we want? An uneducated group of young people? How long must we wait? This bill would

change that by allowing these students to go college. Documented or not, an education creates character, an education opens doors, an education can never be taken away from you. Educated young people can only benefit Connecticut's future. And that's what this bill is about, about increasing access to higher education. The students that this bill would benefit are students just like me, who have lived in CT for most of their lives, students who may not even remember their "home country", students who will stay in CT because this is the only place they consider home. We cannot let these students give up, this bill would give them hope, hope that there is a future for them. I urge you to help these students achieve their dreams and pass this bill.