



Testimony by President James Schmotter  
Western Connecticut State University  
Before the Higher Education and Employment  
Advancement Committee  
March 15, 2011

For the record, I am James W. Schmotter, President of Western Connecticut State University, and I write in regard to House Bill 6390, "An Act Concerning Access to Postsecondary Education." I am writing in support of the provision which allows undocumented students who went to high school in Connecticut and live in the state to receive in-state tuition at the state's public postsecondary institutions.

This provision addresses an unfortunate dilemma that, **through no fault of their own**, promising young residents of Connecticut face. Often brought to our state by undocumented parents as young children, these individuals complete—and often excel—in high school curricula. They then find the door to affordable higher education effectively closed because of the current policy that requires, because of their visa status, that they pay out-of-state tuition. Few such potential students have the financial wherewithal to surmount this obstacle. Thus hardworking, intelligent potential members of the state's future knowledge workforce are denied opportunity.

Many commentators and scholars have observed that the nation's federal immigration policies are complex and, in many ways, broken. Yet while we wait for a neat fix of this massive issue (a fix unlikely given other national priorities and the fierce level of emotional partisanship that surrounds immigration), each year produces more and more graduates of Connecticut's high schools whose dreams of higher education and social mobility must be deferred or even abandoned. The commonsense policy changes House Bill 6390 proposes can remedy that.

The young people who will benefit from this change want, unlike many, to stay in our state and build careers and lives here. With the solid education gained at our public colleges and universities, they will be our future scientists, business owners, teachers and nurses. It is not only in their interest, but in the interest of all citizens of Connecticut that they have this opportunity.

House Bill 6390 is also an example of the inclusive spirit that, over the decades, has attracted millions of immigrants to our shores—immigrants who have built today's America. That history of immigration is full of pendulum swings between restriction and welcome. In this small way, we can push it toward the latter here in Connecticut. For reasons both moral and economic, it is the right thing to do.

I thank the committee for reading my comments.