

March 15, 2011

To: Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

**From: Rafael Aparicio
121 Old Kings Highway South
Darien, CT 06820**

**RE: H.B. 6390 AN ACT CONCERNING ACCESS TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION
In State Tuition for Children of Immigrants.**

Copied below is my personal testimony which was given to this committee in 2007 regarding essentially the same House Bill.

This same Bill had the support of the Chancellor of the Connecticut State University System, the Catholic Archdiocese as well as other State, civic and religious organizations. The Bill eventually made it through the House and Senate, but not without as without a demonstration of ugly partisan politics. Despite this Bill's sound economic, social and moral basis, practically every Republican voted against it, and every Democrat voted for it. At that time, a State Senator with significant political ambition, Dan Debicella, without mercy, lobbied against its passage. He even appeared on public radio and lambasted a young Brazilian student to tears who had called into the station during the radio show. The Bill eventually reached Governor Rell's desk, but she refused to act on it, and instead returned the Bill to the Secretary of State explaining that she believed that the Federal Government must first act on comprehensive immigration reform. My Republican colleagues had made this a platform issue, and I was ashamed for my party, our State, and our system of politics.

When a Bill such as this does nothing but improve economic welfare of our State by providing access to higher education to qualified students and State residents without cost, we must act to support and pass such legislation. We cannot play party politics with the future of children and our State.

I urge you that we must all take the moral center and do the right thing in supporting this Bill. To restate what I have written in my testimony:

If we do not pass this Bill, we might as well live in India, under the old caste system.

If we do not enact laws that help the millions of illegal Americans who work, pay taxes and contribute to society, and we do not provide access to higher education for their children, as they have earned, we will be creating a permanent underclass that will hinder all Americans forever. The great history of America is that it has been the land of opportunity; it really does take less than one generation to rise from poverty to self-sufficiency, to wealth. I don't know of one immigrant who has had the fortune to achieve success in this Country, and who has not given back tenfold.

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It would be criminal for us, legal Americans, to deprive others the education they have earned and deserve.

Please Vote to Pass This Bill

I admire you. You have taken a public office to serve our Country and your State, to impact the life of others in a positive way - to do the right thing.

The right thing to do is pass this Bill. Please vote to pass this bill in this Committee, and please work to ensure that the Bill gets to the House and Senate for the vote, and ultimately becomes law.

Thank you and God Bless You.



State of Connecticut – Higher Education Committee
Public Hearing – Bill 5329 In-State Tuition for Immigrant Students
Personal Testimony – Mr. Rafael Ostendarp Aparicio
February 13, 2007

Introduction

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, my name is Rafael Aparicio. I am extremely fortunate to live in Darien, CT, and I would like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to testify in favor of Bill 5329, the Bill that proposes in-state tuition for children of immigrants.

With me today, is my wife, Beth Ostendarp Aparicio, and my 7 year-old daughter Samantha. My other daughter, Alexandra, is an 11 year-old 6th grader. She wanted to be here, but she is on a field trip to the United Nations with her classmates.

Background – My Personal Experience

I would like to share with you my personal story and my experience with the very issue that this legislation seeks to address. Let me start with my background and personal experience.

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I immigrated to this wonderful Country when I was 7 years old. I am one of those children whose parents immigrated here illegally almost 40 years ago.

I attended the public schools in Stamford and graduated from High School, an honors student. I had the great fortune to attend college, the University of Central Florida, where I earned a bachelors degree in business. I also have a Masters Degree, an MBA, from New York University. I have been an executive for the most prestigious and admired global corporations, such as Cadbury Schweppes, IBM and The Coca-Cola Company. I now run my own company, a private equity firm. We invest and acquire other companies. My partners are executives who have been successful CEOs of world-class companies. I have been blessed. And now, it's my time to try and help others by testifying before you, and asking for your vote in favor of this Bill.

Background – The Decision to Immigrate to this Country

In 1969, when my Mother decided to come to this Country from Peru, she felt that she had no other choice. She was a divorced single mother with three boys, a seven-year old (me) and two teenagers, who were 17 and 18 years old, who wanted a better future for her boys. Given the political climate and what she viewed as an uncertain future, she felt she had to leave the Peru and risk everything by coming to the United States. She raised the money for our visas and plane tickets by selling everything we owned. I remember the tag sales, and how we sold all our furniture and my toys from our home until everything was gone. I remember holding my mother's hand, as we waited in line for a visa and while we purchased our plane tickets.

Don't misunderstand; it did not seem to me that we were poor. In fact, we were a middle-class family, even upper middle-class by the standards in Peru. And, for a woman of her generation, in a country like Peru, my mother was a remarkable person. She had earned a college degree while working during the day, and she studied by candlelight, and she helped support her family. Later, she started and ran her own private school, called Thomas Jefferson it operated for many years. The school taught business skills (accounting and bookkeeping) as well as clerical and secretarial skills. Students were required to take English classes and wear school uniforms (the letters TJ on their red sweaters). Students who could not afford to pay tuition, paid what they could, but often students could not pay any tuition. My mother didn't worry so much about their ability to pay, just their ability to do well at the school, she accepted students on ability and their desire. She thought, sooner or later, she will get paid back, perhaps after they graduated and found jobs. My mother affected many lives by providing access to education.

After a break-in at the school, she moved classes to our house. But she couldn't have enough students at the smaller house, and after a while, it became difficult to keep operating the school. She couldn't afford to pay all her teachers, some where Americans that were with her from the very beginning of the school. She had to close the school. I think now, at that point, we where poor. On her own, with 3 boys, she felt that there was no future for us in Peru, so she decided to sell everything in order to come to the United States, where she felt, her boys could have a better future. While I'm sure we carried luggage, it feels like we literally, came with only the clothes on our backs.

As a seven-year old, I just went with the flow. It must have been one big adventure. I remember being on the airplane, and seeing snow for the first time, through the window of the plane, and on the ground at Kennedy Airport – what a thrill!

Growing Up in Stamford and Attending the Public Schools

I moved around a lot growing up – between New York City and Stamford CT. My mother, my brothers and I almost always lived together. My mother and brothers worked to support the family. There was never any assistance from anyone, definitely never any thought of government assistance. My brothers worked as taxi drivers, restaurant workers and managers. My mother worked as a bookkeeper, she always had a job – everyone paid taxes.

I just went with the flow – pretty much a regular happy kid.

Eventually we settled in Stamford, long enough for me to attend middle school and all of high school. Getting good grades was easy. In middle school, it was also fun. My teachers would make a big deal when someone had a 98 or 100 on a test, you were “announced” as having the highest grade on the test, and extra stars would appear on your papers – and I was often the kid with the highest grade. It made things competitive, and once I figured out it was like a game, with winners and losers – I loved it. I loved getting the praise and the smiles from my teachers. I also smiled when other kids got upset because they did not “beat” me for the highest score on a test.

In high school, when I applied myself, I continued to perform well academically. I was on the honor roll every quarter in my Junior and Senior year. I was also on the football, wrestling and track teams. But at in high school, I noticed, for the first time that there was a big difference between the haves, and the have-nots, or the have-less, if you will. At Westhill High School, the kids from North Stamford wore nicer clothes, went on family skiing vacations and talked about getting into the best colleges. They lived in bigger houses. The kids for the West Side, were tough kids who played football or wrestled, and they were racially mixed, Black, Hispanic and Italians – many were my friends, but I had more friends from North Stamford. The West Side kids talked about going to work after graduating. If they thought about going to college, they thought about getting into Southern or Western Connecticut State. Not many could afford to go to out-of-state schools, unless they received financial aid, or through a sports scholarship. They lived in smaller houses or apartments, no yards. When I lived in New York, I did not know that there was a difference, because I did not know about a place like North Stamford. I decided, in my sophomore year, that I wanted to live in North Stamford, and that I had to go to college. I decided this all by myself. No-one pushed me or steered me in this direction. My mother did not know how to direct me; she was too busy working to pay the rent.

I was accepted to every school that I applied to – all out-of-state schools. I enrolled at the University of Central Florida, mainly because I could pay in-state tuition after establishing residency there in one year. The tuition rates were cheaper than the other schools. I graduated a

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Dean's List and President's List student. I went to work for a public accounting firm in Orlando, and became a C.P.A.

Years later, I moved back to Stamford CT with a job at a division of Cadbury Schweppes where I rose through the management ranks. Later I joined Coca-Cola and IBM in executive positions. Cadbury Schweppes helped pay my way though graduate school. I worked full time and attended school part-time. I got my MBA in 3 years.

My Mother Becomes a U.S. Citizen

Along the way, my Mother remarried and became a U.S. Citizen. She claimed me and my brothers, and we became U.S. citizens. In fact, I think I became a citizen in this very building – it was St. Patrick's Day. After the birth of my children, the day I became a citizen, was the greatest day of my life.

Why You Need to Know This

Why do you need to know all this about me? My story is nothing special, if fact, it is fairly typical of every immigrant child that has the ability and access to higher education. Everyone of our State's immigrant children, especially those whose parents came here illegally, and who want to attend college, will have persevered tremendous challenges, concurred fear and is driven to succeed. These students, if un-handicapped by the economic unfairness and discrimination of our State policy which forces them to pay out-of-state tuition will become successful, productive, law-bidding, loyal citizens of our country. They will give back ten-fold. They are a big part of our future. Do not handicap their path to prosperity and eventually to citizenship – give them an equal chance for a college education. It is the right thing to do.

They Deserve It

These children immigrated here with their parents, yes illegally, but not off their own choosing. They were too young to exercise their own free will. They had to come. They did not choose to break the law. But once in this country, they have done their part, they studied hard and achieved the grades to enter college. We should not hinder their progress.

My Experience Awarding Scholarships

I know these kids first hand. For the last two years, myself and a group of executives from the Stamford area have served on a committee to award scholarships to college students in Westchester and Fairfield Counties (CT). We interviewed the top academic achievers from area Universities and Colleges, including, Pace University, Iona, Fairfield University, Sacred Heart University, and the University of Connecticut – Stamford.

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I can tell you that among the best and the brightest at these Universities, there are undocumented students. They are scared to death about being interviewed – they always have to tell their personal stories. But they need our scholarship money in order to continue to attend these schools. They have great courage, and they know that I know their situation, and they break down in tears in front of me and my colleagues. They all receive our scholarship money, because we base our decision on merit and their future potential as leaders in industry.

There is No Good Reason Not to Pass This Bill

About two years ago, this Bill, or one similar to it, easily passed this committee. That Bill also easily passed the Judiciary Committee and I believe the Appropriations Committee, by wide margins. When it got to the House for a vote, it failed to pass. Shockingly and embarrassingly, every Republican but one, voted against it. I am a Republican and I was ashamed.

When I questioned my State Representative from Darien about his vote against this Bill (we attend the same Church), he looked at me as if he was a deer in the headlights. He just couldn't believe anyone from Darien would know about this Bill and how he voted. I did, and he had to explain his vote to me.

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His explanation went something like this:

- “Ralph, I wasn’t the only one to vote against it, every Republican voted against it”
- “If we pass this Bill, we could get sued. Wisconsin passed it and they got sued”
- “If we pass this Bill, what do we do about their immigration status, and their ability to work? They still can’t work.”

As absolutely absurd and invalid as these explanations are, they are nevertheless, his views. When considering the merits of this Bill, I know that you, the members of this committee will be a bit more thoughtful in deciding how to cast your vote. Once you have taken more than a minute to evaluate the facts, I am sure that you will vote in favor of the Bill. My response to the above points is this:

- You have to vote for what you believe is the right thing to do. Not because other people voted against it. Go against the party line if you need to.
- Wisconsin was never sued. Ten States have passed a Bill like this, and only 2 States have been challenged in court, Kansas and California, both suits were dismissed.
- We are not asking you to resolve their immigration status and their ability to work. Those are matters for the Federal Government, and other legislation. This Bill is for in-state tuition for deserving and academically qualified students.

Passing this Bill will broaden the pool of qualified candidates for our State’s University System. The admissions process will be more competitive – and that is good. The admissions process will be more purely based on merit.

Financially, to the University, there is no negative impact. The same number of students ends up being admitted, paying the same tuition. There is upside potential, more qualified graduates want to attend college, and therefore, you could open up more slots and you’ll receive more tuition dollars. As I understand it, there is capacity in the System.

What If You Do Not Pass This Bill?

We might as well live in India, under the old caste system.

If we do not enact laws that help the millions of illegal Americans who work, pay taxes and contribute to society, and we do not provide access to higher education for their children, as they have earned, we will be creating a permanent underclass that will hinder all Americans forever.

The great history of America is that it has been the land of opportunity; it really does take less than one generation to rise from poverty to self-sufficiency, to wealth. I don’t know of one

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immigrant who has had the fortune to achieve success in this Country, and who has not given back tenfold.

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I admire you. You have taken a public office to serve our Country and your State, to impact the life of others in a positive way - to do the right thing.

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Thank you and God Bless You.

Rafael Apunco