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Testimony for the General Assembly Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee  
March 15, 2011

**In Support of Raised Bill: H.B. 6390 – An Act Concerning Access to Postsecondary Education**

We, Sister Mary Alice Synkewecz, RSM, and Sister Linda Pepe, CSJ, the Director and Associate Director of the Collaborative Center for Justice, add our voices, and that of our six sponsoring congregations of women religious, along with their membership of approximately 1,000 sisters and associates, in support of H.B. 6390 – An Act Concerning Access to Postsecondary Education.

As advocates for justice and equity, we are compelled to speak in support of this raised bill that would allow young men and women the opportunity to attend our colleges and universities by paying in-state tuition rates. When students cannot afford higher education, they do not attend college. The ramifications of this decision are not only individual, but societal, because it means a less educated work force in Connecticut.

Opponents of this bill will raise the issue that these students are undocumented, and therefore, they do not deserve such consideration. We believe these young people do not deserve to be punished, or denied an affordable education, because they were brought to this country as infants and young children by their parents. Many of these students are products of our educational system from early childhood education through high school. They have been challenged by their teachers to develop their potential, and many of them are numbered among our brightest graduates. They have, therefore, demonstrated the intelligence and ability to compete with others who meet the criteria for admission in our colleges and universities. Is it right or just to punish children for the desperate acts of their parents? Should they be denied the opportunity to continue their education based on the geography and economics of birth? We think it is wrong to deny children a right to higher education based on the actions of their parents, or circumstances of their birth.

H.B. 6390 does not provide a “free ride” for these undocumented students. The bill specifically states that these students qualify only if they live in our State and have attended four years of high school in one of our cities or towns. Having met the criteria of residence and academic competence, should they not at least be given the opportunity to compete with other students from our State for a place in our colleges and universities? When education is unaffordable, we remove the most powerful tool an individual possesses to address poverty, violence, social injustices, unemployment, homelessness, and a myriad of other social, political and economic evils that plague our society. To deny these young people an affordable education, we not only deny them the tools to overcome the obstacles that have been placed in their path, but we also deny them the opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way to life in our State.

We believe education is a right, not a luxury, and as a right, we believe it should be extended to all, regardless of the circumstances surrounding birth. We support, and ask that you support, H.B. 6390 – An Act Concerning Access to Postsecondary Education.

Thank you.