



## Connecticut Students for a Dream

*Empower. Educate. Advocate.*

March 12, 2015

Dear Madam Co-Chair and Esteemed Members of the Committee:

We, Connecticut Students for a Dream, urge the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee to support both bills under consideration today: House Bill 6844 and House Bill 6845. We commend the Governor and his office for taking these steps to increase access to higher education for undocumented students.

Connecticut Students for a Dream has been actively working on higher education access and equality since our founding as an organization. We are a statewide organization of undocumented youth and allies that seek to fight for the rights of undocumented youth and their families and empower them through community organizing, leadership development, and advocacy.

We support any legislation that takes vital steps towards education equality by making higher education more accessible for undocumented students, including but not limited to, opening access to institutional and state financial aid to undocumented students, broadening the number of students eligible for in state tuition through lowering of the in-state residency requirement, and creation of an alternative to the FAFSA that allows undocumented students to get fair and equal access to financial aid.

Many undocumented Connecticut high school students hope to pursue higher education. Unfortunately, many are unable to achieve this dream because they are ineligible for all federal and state need-based financial aid, and may also fall short of the requirements for in-state tuition. Without access to financial aid and in-state tuition, higher education remains out of reach for many low-income, deserving students. These bills would address these concerns.

Connecticut Students for a Dream stands in support of House Bill 6844 AN ACT CONCERNING IN-STATE TUITION ELIGIBILITY, which would lower the in-state residency requirement for undocumented students from 4 years to 2 years. The 2011 legislation that granted in-state tuition rates to some undocumented students was an important first step toward increasing access to higher education. Unfortunately, Connecticut remains a clear outlier in requiring that undocumented students complete four years of Connecticut high school in order to access in-state rates. Out of the 19 states that have in-state tuition for undocumented students, no other state requires four years of in-state high school as a condition of receiving in-state tuition. We've seen time and time again students who have been in the country for most of their lives, but moved to CT,

usually from New York State during their high schools years as either a freshman or sophomore. These students would not qualify for in-state tuition, even though their American classmates in the same situation would. HB 6844 will bring Connecticut policies more in line with the other states that passed similar legislation and give many more Connecticut students the ability to afford college.

We commend the Governor's office on his efforts to increase financial aid to undocumented students in House Bill 6845 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GOVERNOR CONCERNING HIGHER EDUCATION. This bill would establish a student financial aid program through the New Haven Promise Fund that would provide merit-based aid to undocumented students and has the potential to make real change in the lives of so many undocumented students who consider Connecticut their only home. However, we share a concern that this legislation, by focusing on only merit-based aid, is not as inclusive as it could be. The proposal as it stands now, overlooks some of Connecticut's neediest students – low-income students of color from immigrant families. We urge the legislature to consider expanding this legislation to include need-based assistance as well.

We understand that this could be a stumbling block as the FAFSA that is commonly used within institutions to calculate a student's need is not sufficient to determine need for undocumented students due to their lack of a social security number. However, We firmly believe that there is a cost-efficient way to include need-based aid, which will allow this legislation to reach an even greater number of students and truly begin addressing the barriers to higher education for undocumented students. Other states have successfully addressed this concern and have implemented an alternative form to the FAFSA.

Through our organization's "College Access Program" and our work to help students achieve their dream of going to college, we've seen firsthand the difference that an education can make in a student's life, and consider it our duty to expand higher education access for all Connecticut high school students. We urge the committee to consider and favorably vote on bills that will sufficiently address our concerns of educational equality for undocumented Connecticut students.

CT Students for a Dream