

Dear Members of the Higher Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Jessica Manfredini, and I am an undocumented student and a member of the organization CT Students for a DREAM. I stand in support of the following two bills. House Bill 6844 AN ACT CONCERNING IN-STATE TUITION ELIGIBILITY which would lower the in-state residency requirement for undocumented students from four years to 2 years. AND House Bill 6845 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GOVERNOR CONCERNING HIGHER EDUCATION, part of which would open up access to some financial aid for undocumented students.

I support 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, lowering of the in-state residency requirement for undocumented students, and creation of an alternative to the FAFSA that allows undocumented students to get fair and equal access to financial aid.

I was born in Brazil, but I came to United States at young age not only seeking opportunities but searching for the comforting embrace of a mother. Since the economy in my country was very weak and very poorly distributed my mother came to the United States to live the American Dream as many others did before. She left me with my father who always supported me in every way, however, as a teenager I needed the support of a mother. Adolescence was not an easy processes for me, I encountered many pressures along the way and the absence of a maternal figure worsened the process. My father and I were both emotionally affected by my mom's absence, and in a matter of time I developed a severe case of depression as described by my psychologist on that time. Tough I always prioritized school and my education, my grades were going down, I was demotivate and I honestly did not care if I lived or died. I felt like a victim of my own destiny until I came to the United States.

In America I found more than maternal affection, I found hopes and dreams where I could only see darkness. I had the opportunity to rebuild my life and for the first time I was given the freedom of expression and a freedom of choice which I never had before. This propitious environment restored the serenity in my mind and my heart. Once I was in peace with myself I could return my focus to my education. In High School I struggled with language and cultural barriers, however, it did not stop me from doing the best I could. Many times I had to stay over after school or lose my lunch period to get extra help. My determination paid off when I received my test scores and when I saw others asking me questions and wanting my help. Besides the educational setting, I also gave back to the community by joining Connecticut Students for a Dream, assisting on volunteering events and by providing food for those in need as the president of the club "fighting child hunger" in high school. Having the opportunity to study in the United States and geting involved with the community has been an amazing experience for me, but as I was about to graduate high school I came to realize that I had more obstacles ahead of me.

For me going to college is not a choice, it's a duty. I am very committed to get my bachelor's degree in Recreational Therapy. The fact that I was cured of my depression makes me want to help others on a clinical setting as I was helped in here through recreational activates I experienced in classroom. I believe that spiritual growth is only achieved through mutual assistance, based on that I want to be able to give back to this marvelous country. However, acquiring a higher education it is very expensive. As an undocumented student I do not get access to financial aid and since I only completed 3 years of high school in America I am required to pay out-of-state tuition. Therefore, I hereby give my testimony in favor of the mentioned bills. Those bills would positively impact my life by allowing me to afford my higher education. Passing those bills would create the chance to help students like me: eager learn and willing to help community.

Thank you,
Jessica Manfredini