

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

My name is Stephanie Marquez and I am a member of the organization CT Students for a DREAM and a student at the University of Connecticut, pursuing Biomedical Engineering.

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 am originally from Peru and I came here when I was five years old. I have gone through the whole school system here in America and can honestly say that I identify myself as an American. I attended St. Augustine and Northwest Catholic High School. No one ever knew that I was an undocumented student, and that made my schooling a bit more stressful. It was as if I was in constant hiding, even though I would always be the best student in my class. All throughout school, we were taught that college was the next step, but when the time came it was as if I had hit a brick wall. Everyone expected me to go to my number one college and receive a full ride, however I could not. It was very frustrating because I could not “afford to dream”. My guidance counselor would offer me scholarship opportunities that I could not take. Everything seemed to come with a “Can Not”. At Northwest I was the only student that was going through that at that time and I felt very alone. I would not wish that situation upon anyone. My education is very important to me and I want to achieve them to create a better life for my family and me.

As undocumented students, they do not have access to financial aid or certain scholarships. The 2011 legislation that granted in-state tuition rates to some undocumented students was an important first step towards increasing access to higher education. However, it is not enough, many immigrant students and their families remain unable to afford the high cost of tuition—whether at in-state or out-of-state rates. Lowering the residency requirements and extending financial aid to undocumented students is an investment in the future of Connecticut. Having a realistic path to college will result in improved high school graduation rates and increased college graduation. Further expanding access to higher education will increase state revenue, in the short term through tuition from new students and in the long term as the higher incomes of these college graduates translate to increased taxes each year.

Many students, including myself, have to work at least two jobs to be able to afford it. Most of the time when we are working two jobs we can only attend school part-time, which causes the number of years in school to be longer. Also, juggling the situation of being undocumented, working, and going to school can cause a lot of stress on a student. I cannot not be generalize, but for the most part many of the students that would benefit from this are amazing students that deserve to “Afford to Dream”. The system already pays for their schooling from K – 12<sup>th</sup>, so why stop now? The state does not want to spend money unnecessarily but the money they invested on these students is basically going to waste; towards nothing.

I support HB 6844 and HB 6845 and hope the committee will do the same. We cannot afford to sit idly by and do nothing about the lack of access to higher education for Connecticut students. Each year, hundreds of talented undocumented students graduate from Connecticut high schools with hopes of college attendance. These students cannot wait any longer; we must do what we can right now to help them achieve their dreams.

Thank you,  
*Stephanie M. Marquez*