

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

I, Abigail Amorim, stand in support of Senate Bill 398 AN ACT ASSISTING STUDENTS ACCEPTED INTO THE DEFERRED ACTION FOR CHILDHOOD ARRIVALS PROGRAM WITH THE COST OF COLLEGE.

I write to ask for your support in granting undocumented students access to financial aid at Connecticut universities and colleges. I support legislation that takes vital steps towards education equality including opening access to institutional and state financial aid to undocumented students, broadening the number of students eligible for in state tuition 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. The 2011 legislation that granted in-state tuition rates to some undocumented students was an important first step toward increasing access to higher education. That 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. Without access to financial aid, higher education remains out of reach for these Connecticut residents.

I know firsthand the difference that an education can make in a student's life, and I consider it my duty to expand higher education access for all Connecticut high school students. Extending financial aid to undocumented students is an investment in the future of Connecticut. A realistic path to college for these students will result in improved high school graduation rates and increased college matriculation. 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.

All students deserve access to higher education, which is increasingly necessary in today's economy and for Connecticut's fastest-growing jobs. Opening financial aid to undocumented students is one way to meaningfully address the pressing need for educational equality in Connecticut, which unfortunately is the state with the worst achievement gap in the country. Our legislature has adopted a goal of closing this achievement gap and of fostering progress among low-income and limited English-proficient students. Enabling access to higher education for undocumented students, who are often low-income and people of color, will help Connecticut meet its statutory mandate and increase racial and socioeconomic diversity in the state's colleges and universities.

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.

I support SB 398 and hope the committee will do the same, hope that the Connecticut General Assembly will address this urgent problem.

Yours truly,

Abigail Amorim