



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION



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Alok Bhatt

Thursday, February 26, 2015

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis, and esteemed members of the Higher Education & Employment Advancement,

My name is Alok Bhatt. I serve as Legislative Analyst for the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission (APAAC/the Commission).

In supporting the rights of Connecticut's foreign-born students, the Commission writes in strong support of SB 398: AN ACT ASSISTING STUDENTS ACCEPTED INTO THE DEFERRED ACTION FOR CHILDHOOD ARRIVALS PROGRAM WITH THE COST OF COLLEGE.

In regarding the civil and human rights of Connecticut residents, the Commission does not discriminate along any lines of identity or status. We believe all students deserve an opportunity for higher education. In realizing this principle, we stand behind effective efforts to relieve the increasing financial burden of pursuing this goal, for citizens and non-citizens alike.

Although the Commission notes recommends State of Connecticut grant assistance with the cost of college extended to students who are ineligible for the federal Deferred Action Childhood Arrival (DACA) program, we laud the General Assembly's consideration of a policy that will open higher education up to an already marginalized community. Many of our undocumented residents lack access to health care and other essential services. While necessary shifts in federal immigration policy remain virtually immovable in Congress, we in Connecticut must recognize the rights of all people in our state. We must enable all students to advance themselves, and ultimately be able to contribute positively on local and global levels.

The right to educate one's self and explore personal potential are paramount in any society built on principles such as freedom and justice. We cannot accept the denial of higher education access based on immigration status, ability to pay, or any other socially constructed barrier.

Having worked closely with many undocumented students in Connecticut, the Commission has witnessed firsthand their immense passion and ambition. They, like all students, deserve a chance to reach the increasingly unaffordable goal of a college degree.

APAAC appreciates the Committee's consideration of this significant matter to the future of our state.

Respectfully Submitted,

Alok Bhatt

*Legislative Analyst, Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission*

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