

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

My name is Camila Bortolletto. I am a member and leader of the organization, CT Students for a DREAM, currently serving as the Policy Coordinator. I am also “undocumented/a DACA recipient”.

I am in support of Senate Bill 398 AN ACT ASSISTING STUDENTS ACCEPTED INTO THE DEFERRED ACTION FOR CHILDHOOD ARRIVALS PROGRAM WITH THE COST OF COLLEGE. This bill would open access to financial aid for undocumented Connecticut Students.

CT Students for a DREAM is 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.

As part of CT Students for a DREAM, I have fought and advocate for higher educational access to undocumented students since we began in 2011. We were involved in the work that passed the in-state tuition bill in 2011 and I am glad to see the next steps, financial aid for undocumented students, on the table for consideration.

More than an advocate, I am also someone is has been personally affect by this. I am undocumented, I came to CT, to Danbury, at the age of 9 with my parents and sister from Brazil. I’ve always know that I was undocumented, but it was a slow process of coming to really understand what that status would mean for my future and for my life. Like many undocumented immigrant students, the reality only became apparent when it came time for college applications.

Without a social security number and being undocumented, I could not get any financial aid, state or federal, or most scholarships. I saw my dreams of college dashed. But I was one of the lucky ones, I got accepted to Western CT State University, and due to my grades and SAT scores I was able to get a merit scholarship from the honors program to cover some of my tuition.

I went to college in 2006-2010, this was before the in-state tuition bill passed that allowed undocumented students who are long-time CT residents to be able to pay the in-state state tuition rate. I had not known that when I enrolled in WCSU, I assumed I would pay the in-state tuition rate, at the point I had lived in CT for almost 10 years, I had gone to elementary school, middle school, and high school in CT. Much to my surprise I was charged and had to pay the much higher out of state tuition. Even with my merit scholarship I still had to pay double of what an instate student paid.

We have come a long way since I was a student at college, now undocumented students have access to in state tuition, but more needs to be done. In state tuition is only the first step. I am glad and proud to see and have worked for such progress in the state of CT.

This bill would allow many more deserving students to fulfill their dreams of college in the state they consider home. In short, this bill is an investment in Connecticut’s economy: Tuition dollars from new college students will increase state revenue, and increased financial aid leads to higher graduation rates and increased tax revenue. Educating undocumented students furthers the State's education equity goals. Ensuring access of undocumented students to state aid will increase racial and socioeconomic diversity in CT colleges and universities.

I support and hope the committee votes favorably on SB 398,

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