

Testimony for Public Hearing
Higher Education Sub-Committee
February 26, 2015
S.B 398
Carlos Espinoza, MSW

Good Afternoon Chairwomen Bye and Willis, and distinguished members of the Higher Education Committee, my name is Carlos Espinoza. I'm a social worker and an ally of CT Students for a Dream as well as Co-Chair of the City of Hartford Commission on Refugee and Immigrant Affairs. I'm here because I am in support of Senate Bill Number 398. Passing this legislation would signify the state is moving towards education equality, many undocumented students who are at a disadvantage while pursuing higher education could see their dreams of attaining a college degree becoming more of a reality.

Undocumented students have faced many barriers since arriving in this country, whether its language, acculturation, or financial hardship, each student has overcome and achieve expectations when all signs point against them. Federal law allows undocumented kids to be enrolled in K-12 public schools, the State and the Country investments resources and time into their education and their well being. Many students in high school prepare themselves to go to college, a mantra that is instilled in them either by their family or by society, which will enable them to become a useful and respected member of society.

Unfortunately higher education becomes out of reach for many students when they leave high school because they lack the financial means, most undocumented families come from low-income families battling through economic disparities excluding many and creating inequalities. Public policies have put many at a disadvantage, causing a wide gap in college graduation rates. According to a report from the University of Pennsylvania and the Pell Institute for Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, "College completion rates for wealthy students have soared in 40 years but barely budged for low-income students"¹. **Seventy-seven percent** of students from families in the top income bracket earned at least a bachelor, compared to **nine percent** from the lowest income bracket.

Legislation to aid this population of students is an investment in their future and the state, as well as a civil duty by legislators to pass policies that create an inclusive and progressive environment. Financial assistance to undocumented students allows the state to continue their investment that started in the classrooms of elementary, middle and high schools. The investment will help shape the future of the state, creating career professionals that will contribute to the U.S and Connecticut's social and economy landscape. Immigration has and will continue to shape this country, contributions from immigrants is at the core of our society, the future of this country depends on their contributions that will strengthen the U.S.

¹ <http://www.wsj.com/articles/big-gap-in-college-graduation-rates-for-rich-and-poor-study-finds-1422997677>

I will like to end by stating this quote from Thomas Jefferson.

“Born in other countries, yet believing you could be happy in this, our laws acknowledge, as they should do, your right to join us in society, conforming, as I doubt not you will do, to our established rules. That these rules shall be as equal as prudential considerations will admit, will certainly be the aim of our legislatures, general and particular. “

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony.