

SB398.

February 26, 2015

Dear Members of the Connecticut General Assembly:

. 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.

As a student leader at Manchester Community College, I write to ask for your support in granting undocumented students access to financial aid at Connecticut universities and colleges on the same terms and conditions as other Connecticut students.

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, and may also fall short of the requirements for in-state tuition. The 2011 legislation that granted in-state tuition rates to some undocumented students was an important first step toward increasing access to higher education. Unfortunately, Connecticut remains a clear outlier in requiring that undocumented students complete four years of Connecticut high school in order to access in-state rates. No other state requires four years of in-state high school as a condition of receiving in-state tuition, and 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 and in-state tuition, higher education remains out of reach for these Connecticut residents.

A robust economy and vibrant future in Connecticut depend on increased availability of quality education for all. The time is now for Connecticut to invest in that future by increasing access to college educations for everyone.

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. These student's dreams are the future of Connecticut.

These simple policy changes will not only help ensure a more prosperous Connecticut economy, but also make a meaningful difference in the lives of many current and future students in Connecticut.

I urge the Connecticut General Assembly immediately act on the efforts of the C4D

Sincerely

Gordon Plouffe
President, Student Government Association
Manchester Community College
Office of Student Activities (SSC L 149)
Great Path, MS #7
P.O. Box 1046
Manchester, CT 06045-1046
Phone: 860-215-3292
Cell: 860-707-3710
E-Mail: ma-sga-president@manchestercc.edu

“In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.” Martin Luther King, Jr