

Testimony of Gretchen Raffa, MSW
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In support of proposed *Senate Bill 398 An Act Assisting Students Accepted Into the Deferred Action For Childhood Arrivals Program With the Cost of College*

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis and honorable members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, my name is Gretchen Raffa, Directory of Public Policy & Advocacy at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England testifying in support of proposed *Senate Bill 398 An Act Assisting Students Accepted Into the Deferred Action For Childhood Arrivals Program With the Cost of College*. Planned Parenthood of Southern New England serves over 65,000 patients yearly for reproductive and sexual health services. As a health care provider and advocate, Planned Parenthood's top priority is ensuring that all individuals have access to the health care they need, including the full range of reproductive health services.

Sadly, many immigrant individuals and families are unable to access quality, affordable health care coverage and we are there to offer them quality, comprehensive coverage, regardless of citizenship. As we worked to enroll as many uninsured residents in the Affordable Care Act we saw firsthand how excluding certain portions of the immigrant community harmed people and limited their options for health care access. Currently, federal law prohibits undocumented immigrants, as well as many lawfully present immigrants, from enrolling in Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Federal law also blocks undocumented immigrants from purchasing affordable health insurance on the Marketplace.

The same is true for access to education for the many undocumented students who can only dream of higher education because without access to financial aid, higher education remains out of reach for many undocumented students. For the estimated 65,000 undocumented students who graduate from high school nationwide annually, only 5 percent of are able continue to a higher education institution because of cost and lack of financial aid. SB 398 will help make higher education a reality for many of those students in our state who have given up on their dream of higher education because they simply can't afford it.

Planned Parenthood of Southern New England has long fought for a woman's right to control her reproductive destiny which includes planning her family and raising her family in safe and healthy environments. We have a growing concern that the complexities of a woman's environment, including her physical geography, race, class, immigration status and access to education and healthcare, to name a few, can play a debilitating role on her fertility and reproductive health. Access to higher education is an important part of a broader strategy of building our nation's economy through stimulating job growth. Education attainment is also a key component to reducing reproductive health disparities. We need to find solutions that create opportunities for more students to continue their educational path past high school.

We must continue to move forward and update laws and policies to ensure a more equitable and just society. While we have made great progress in our state to provide immigrants access to education through in state tuition costs, we must work together to do more. We must work to reform our nation's immigration system, including the implementation of policies that give all people the opportunity for affordable, comprehensive health care and full access to affordable higher education. *Senate Bill 398 An Act Assisting Students Accepted Into the Deferred Action For Childhood Arrivals Program With the Cost of College* is a step in the right direction and we strongly urge you to support this important legislation that will give access to affordable education to many undocumented students in our state that currently don't have access due to the financial burden it puts on them and their families.