

Testimony by Dr. H. Kenny Nienhusser, Assistant Professor, University of Hartford¹
Before the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
S.B. 398: An Act Assisting Students Accepted into the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program
with the Cost of College
February 26, 2015

Dear Chairperson Willis, Chairperson Bartolomeo, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

My name is H. Kenny Nienhusser and I am an Assistant Professor at the University of Hartford and a national expert on the topic of higher education policies for undocumented students and DACA recipients. I come before you today to testify in relation to S.B. 398, which if enacted would provide some higher education benefits to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) recipients.

As a national expert, I have conducted several research studies that have identified numerous barriers that undocumented students and DACA recipients encounter in relation to their access to and persistence in college. A significant barrier that prevents undocumented and DACA students' greater college access and success is the presence of public policies that discriminate against or the absence of public policies that provide higher education benefits to these populations. Currently, there exist federal and state public policies that severely impact the postsecondary education access of DACA recipients.²

DACA recipients are not eligible for any federal financial aid, which include programs such as: Work-Study, Pell Grant, Perkins Loan, Subsidized Loans, and Unsubsidized Loans. The exclusion from such federal financial aid programs places a significant economic hardship on DACA students' ability to finance college. It is important to note that DACA recipients often come from low-income households, which further challenges their ability to pay for college.

Connecticut is one of 19 states that has a tuition equity policy that affords certain undocumented and DACA students in-state resident tuition. However, the absence of state laws prevents these students from receiving any type of state aid. Other states (e.g., California, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, and Washington) have enacted legislation that provides students without documentation eligibility to postsecondary education benefits—in-state resident tuition and state financial aid. In response to these legislative mandates, states with such policies have developed financial aid applications and processes that collect necessary information for colleges and universities to make decisions—mostly notably are the CA Dream Act Application and Texas Application for State Financial Aid (TASFA).

Thus, without public policies such as S.B. 398, DACA recipients in the State of Connecticut would continue to be forced to pay for college entirely or nearly exclusively out-of-pocket.

The State of Connecticut has educated DACA students through most, if not all, of their K-12 education. However, the absence of state laws has prevented many students who lack citizenship status from enrolling in, persisting in, and graduating from postsecondary education. Enactment of S.B. 398 is one step Connecticut can take in an effort to expand postsecondary education access for students with DACA status.

Thank you for your time and attention.

¹ The viewpoints expressed here may or may not reflect those of the University of Hartford.

² Nienhusser, H. K. (2015). Undocumented immigrants and higher education policy: The policymaking environment of New York State. *Review of Higher Education*, 38(2), 271–303.