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Testimony of
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In favor: S.B. No. 398
An Act Assisting Students Accepted into the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals
Program with the Cost of College

My name is Jacob Wasserman, Ward One Co-Chair of the New Haven Democratic Town Committee, Vice President of the Yale College Democrats, and Chair of the Juvenile Justice Committee of the College Democrats of Connecticut, and I am here to testify in favor of S.B. No. 398. There is a reason I am able to come before you to deliver this testimony today: I have been so fortunate as to obtain an education in this state. For many residents of Connecticut, though, this dream is out of reach. While students of all immigration statuses can now attend state schools, this offer of education is utterly useless without the availability of financial aid. To hold out the tantalizing offer of a college degree in one hand but deny the necessary funding with the other is shameful and unfair. I have every hope that the committee can right this wrong.

Two weeks ago, a group of my fellow college students and I travelled to the Fair Haven School and had a conversation with elementary-school students in the Ballet Haven afterschool program. These creative and enterprising kids told us they hailed from Congo, South America, and any number of other regions across the world. All in all, roughly half were born outside the United States. We expected to talk to them about ballet, or their classes, or something else, but their very first question for us was about our experiences in college. Every face lit up when we told them about what university life was like and what we learned. These children born abroad could not have been more eager to pursue higher education, keen to contribute to our nation and our state. These students, whose immigration status we did not ask, are our future. But in order for them to pursue their passions and help our society, from the STEM fields to ballet, they will need to be able to afford college. We now have the chance to help them to their goals, which will ultimately help everyone.

While I certainly support this bill, I would urge the committee to consider modifying the proposal to help all undocumented students afford college, as a number of similar proposals have done. Though many young immigrants are enrolled in the DACA program, many more are not. According to the Migration Policy Institute, only about 600,000 out of 2.1 million eligible immigrants have enrolled in DACA, as of July 2014. The program's publicity has not reached enough people, and convincing immigrant families to give out personal information in order to sign up has proved a challenge. Plus, DACA could be ended by any future president, rendering the current bill before the committee useless. Besides these practical points, at a more basic level, all immigrants who hope to attend college will be of benefit to our American society. The vagaries and complex rules of DACA should not get in the way of needed reform on this front.

Regardless of the bill's ultimate scope, it cannot wait. The Yale College Democrats come here today with over 650 letters, signed by students of all political affiliations, in support of this proposal. They want action now. Not in a year, not after the budget is done—now. While

some of you may disagree with federal policy on immigration, it is a waste of time to make pointless gestures against national policy on a state level. Instead, let's focus on what statewide policy can do best: provide an affordable education for all.