

February 26, 2015

In favor:

S.B. No. 398

An Act Assisting Students Accepted into the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program with the Cost of College

Dear Members of the Connecticut General Assembly:

As representatives of the social justice group, Movimiento Estudiantil Chican@ de Aztlán (MEChA) de Yale, we 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. We understand that the General Assembly is currently working on addressing this issue and we urge you to consider legislation that will open up access to financial aid to as many students as possible and also expand the number of students that are able to access in state tuition to be more inclusive of the diverse undocumented community. We 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.

Last Spring, MEChA de Yale awarded the first Sueños Scholarship for Undocumented Students to an undocumented student from a public high school in the greater New Haven area and who now attends the University of New Haven. Our grassroots efforts have developed out of our support of undocumented students pursuing higher education and our concern for the current restrictions and barriers they face in acquiring financial aid to fund their education at institutions of higher learning. While we continue in our efforts to fundraise and make the small, but meaningful Sueños award possible, we acknowledge the fact that we organize in this way because the system of financial aid and in-state tuition in Connecticut poses a serious issue for aspiring undocumented students, scholars, researchers, creators, writers, scientists, mathematicians, artists, musicians, doctors, lawyers, curators, deans, etc. Without access to financial aid and in-state tuition, higher education remains out of reach for these Connecticut residents.

Extending financial aid and in-state tuition to undocumented students is an investment in the future of Connecticut. A realistic path to college for these students will result in improved high school graduation rates and increased college matriculation. Further, expanding access to higher education will increase state revenue, in the short term through tuition from new students and in the long term

as the higher incomes of these college graduates translate to increased taxes each year.

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 people of color and low income, 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. Sueños is not enough, the system needs to be repaired, and now. These students cannot wait any longer; we must do what we can right now to help them achieve their dreams. Please join us in our efforts to make higher education attainable for undocumented students.

Yours truly,
MEChA de Yale