

Testimony to the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee  
Re: SB 398: An Act Assisting Students Accepted into the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals  
Program with the Cost of College (HED)

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Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis and the other members of the Higher Education and Employment Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important bill. My name is Mary Ann Mahony and I am Professor of History and Coordinator of the Latin American section of the International and Area Studies Program at CCSU, where I am also President of the CCSU Chapter of the American Association of University Professors. I had not expected that I would be able to testify in person, because I imagined that the hearing would conflict with my teaching schedule today. But, an hour ago, when I finished class, I turned on CT-N and saw that you were just reaching SB 398. As a result, I left my office, got in the car, and came here to testify.

I strongly support SB 398. In the almost 25 years that I have taught Latin American history, I have had the pleasure to get to know students from all over the United States, Latin America and the world. Given how difficult it is to obtain permission to immigrate to the United States or to adjust one's status if one has already entered the country without inspection, I am sure that a great many of them were undocumented. Thousands of citizens of foreign nations come to Connecticut each year to study at our colleges and universities or as tourists, with visas specific to that purpose. Immigrants come legally to Connecticut to work for institutions and companies that sponsor their applications for legal residence or as the fiancée or family member of a U.S. citizen. To do so, they spend thousands of dollars. To give just one example, Brazil is South America's largest nation, and, indeed, it is larger than the continental United States. Yet every Brazilian who wishes to obtain a visa—whether permanent or temporary—must demonstrate significant financial resources and interview at one of only four U.S. Consulates in that country. I know of one individual who travelled more than 24 hours each way for his interview, only to be told he did not qualify for a visa. On top of the expense, relatives of U.S. citizens who apply for immigrant visas have long waits before they can legally enter the United States. The U.S. State Department is only now processing visa applications for the relatives of U.S. citizens that were filed in October of 1994. That's right, October of 1994. Each year some lucky immigrants win a visa through the State Department lottery, but that is unusual. For a citizen of a Latin American nation who is not a member of the elite, immigrating to or even visiting the United States is nearly impossible. When we combine the difficulty in obtaining a visa with the economic problems, political persecution and civil wars that plagued Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s, it is hardly surprising that many citizens of our neighboring nations to the south came to the United States "without inspection."

The Pew Hispanic Research Center reports that most children in the United States who are undocumented have siblings and cousins who are citizens. That means that, here in Connecticut, we have many families in which some children are eligible for financial aid at state colleges and universities and others are not. I realize that this is a difficult budget year, but I urge you resolve this unfortunate situation by extending financial aid to all students who graduate from Connecticut high schools, without regard to their immigration status. It is the fair thing to do and it will benefit our institutions and our State in the long run.

Respectfully submitted,  
Mary Ann Mahony