



February 25, 2015

Testimony in Support of Proposed SB 398

AN ACT ASSISTING STUDENTS ACCEPTED INTO THE DEFERRED ACTION FOR CHILDHOOD ARRIVALS PROGRAM WITH THE COST OF COLLEGE.

Dear Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis, and members of the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement, thank you for the opportunity to provide you with written testimony on this important legislation.

I write to ask for your support in granting undocumented students access to institutional financial aid at our state universities and community colleges, just like any other Connecticut high school graduates. We urge the committee to favorably consider legislation that would:

- Open access to institutional and state financial aid to undocumented students;
- Expand the number of undocumented students eligible for in-state tuition; and
- Create an alternative application to state financial aid that is not based on FAFSA.

At Junta for Progressive Action, we see firsthand the difficulties that immigrant high school students face in accessing higher education. Legal status and language are just some of the many barriers these students encounter before they even enroll in college. Yet many who overcome these barriers still face a huge financial hurdle. We understand the difference that an education can make in a student's life and we consider it our duty to expand higher education access for all Connecticut high school students. Financial aid for 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. We believe that providing access to financial aid will be another stepping stone in ensuring equal and better opportunities for Connecticut students, regardless of their immigration status.

Much has been written about our state's educational disparities and achievement gaps for low-income students and English Language Learners. Increasing access to higher education sends a message to these students that Connecticut's policymakers value them and want them to succeed. If we have any hope of closing these achievement gaps, it must include taking the necessary steps to make college accessible to all. By supporting these legislative measures, many students will see college as a viable option for their futures.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nick Torres
Director of Advocacy