

Dear members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee,

My name is Samia El Osta and I am social work intern at Wilbur Cross High School's International Academy in New Haven, Connecticut. I would like to take this opportunity to show my support for SB 398.

The International Academy takes pride in its focus on supporting students who are U.S. citizens, immigrants, refugees, and undocumented students alike. As a social work intern, I work very closely with these students, their teachers, and their families with the intention of providing a supportive environment that will ensure students' high school graduation and future matriculation. I work especially closely with students who hold a refugee status in the United States. Although still teenagers, these students are by far the most courageous, assiduous, and eager people I have ever met. Their daily struggles to overcome difficult experiences from their past, their determination to learn English and assimilate, and their aspirations to graduate from college are astounding. In the last few months, I have assisted two students apply to college and complete their FAFSA documents. One of these students aspires to become a police officer. Because the United States offered this student refuge, the student wants to give back to our country and protect it in turn. The other student wants to become a medical doctor, believing it to be the noblest of careers because one is continuously helping others in the community. Thankfully, these students are eligible for financial aid. Without financial aid, their dreams would be significantly more difficult to achieve, and it would be to our community and our country's detriment.

I strongly support SB 398. I believe that access to financial aid needs to be as inclusive as possible to support undocumented students. The current Connecticut in-state tuition statute needs to be expanded to include more undocumented students so that students such as those whom attend Wilbur Cross High School can build a secure, successful, and prosperous future for themselves, their families, our community, and our country.

On September 29, 2014, WNPR's Diane Orson spoke to undocumented students from the International Academy<sup>1</sup>. These students described how they traveled by foot, car, and swam — going days without food or water — in hopes of reaching the United States. These students and their families have come with very strong aspirations to study, to learn, to work, and to improve their lives. I have first handedly seen the struggles of our refugee students and how important financial aid is for the actualization of their dreams. Not offering undocumented students the same support undermines their efforts, their numerous achievements, and their contributions to Connecticut's economic fabric. While legislation that benefits only a category of undocumented students is good, Connecticut needs legislation that is bolder, better, and more inclusive. It is in Connecticut's best interest to provide those who reside in our state with all the necessary resources to succeed, namely access to education and the financial resources to do so.

Sincerely,  
Samia El Osta

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<sup>1</sup> <http://wnpr.org/post/how-one-new-haven-high-school-supports-immigrant-students>