

G.B.-6844 and G.B.-6845

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis, and members of the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement,

My name is Adan Martinez, and I am a law student intern with the Worker and Immigrants Rights Advocacy Clinic at Yale Law School. We represent Connecticut Students for a Dream, who have been working tirelessly since 2011 to ensure students across Connecticut access higher education regardless of immigration status. We are here today to emphasize how vitally important it is that you end unequal access to higher education in Connecticut. Today there are students across the state who cannot go to college because they lack access to financial aid—bright students, hard-working students, students bursting with promise. But without financial aid, they cannot afford tuition at our state's public colleges and universities. They cannot further their education, earn their degree, enter the middle class, and fully contribute to Connecticut's economy. Connecticut must equalize access to aid regardless of immigration status and tear down the barriers that hold back these students and hamper Connecticut's economic growth.

No student should be denied the opportunity to attain higher education and contribute to their community because of their immigration status. Undocumented students are among the best and brightest Connecticut has to offer. Many have worked to support their families even while studying through high school, graduating as valued members of their school community. They play on teams, join clubs, sing in the choir, write for the school newspaper, and act in school plays. They have the potential to be future business and community leaders—some already are. That potential will be squandered, however, if we fail to ensure they have equal access to Connecticut's colleges and universities.

Not only does unequal access to education hurt these students, it hurts the state. These students want to use their education to establish meaningful lives here in Connecticut. They will become engines of economic growth, they will also bolster state tax revenue. A college degree translates to an average lifetime increase in taxes paid of more than \$55,000. Providing students access to financial aid would give them the opportunity to make Connecticut a better place. This is particularly important given that Connecticut has already invested in the high school education of these students. Connecticut should benefit from that investment by allowing undocumented students to stay in Connecticut to pursue their degrees and build their lives.

This expansion is the natural next step after Connecticut granted undocumented immigrants equal access to in-state tuition in 2011. 19 other states have also equalized tuition rates, and a number of them have also equalized access to financial aid, including California, New Mexico, Washington, and Texas. We can look to these states for lessons while implementing it here in a way that fits Connecticut's particular character and needs.

While some state agencies may want to help all students succeed regardless of immigration status, they cannot act themselves. Congress has said that it is up to the state

legislatures to take this kind of action. It is up to you, the members of the committee, and your colleagues to ensure equal access to education. Only you can act.

Governor Malloy's GB-6844 and GB-6845 are important steps toward ensuring equal access to higher education. GB-6844 allows undocumented students to pay in-state tuition after two years rather than four. Currently Connecticut's four-year requirement is the most conservative of the 19 states that grant in-state tuition to undocumented students. GB-6845 sets aside funds to be used to aid undocumented students in paying for their educations. As important as these steps are, there is more we can do for these students. Undocumented students should be able to access institutional aid as well as state aid. Though we support the steps proposed by the Governor, we believe it is important not to create a separate fund for undocumented students, but rather to give undocumented students the same access all students have to institutional and state financial aid. This is consistent with Senator Looney's recent proposal to grant undocumented students access to institutional aid. Additionally, we believe that the funds proposed by the Governor should not be merit based, but rather should be need and merit based to better equalize access to higher education. In this way, we can ensure that all Connecticut students have an equal opportunity to pursue their education.

Thank you,

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