

March 12, 2015

Dear Madam Co-Chair and Esteemed Members of the Committee:

My name is Alison Martinez-Carrasco. I live in Windsor Locks, Connecticut and I am a member of the organization CT Students for a DREAM. I stand in support of the following two bills. House Bill No. 6844 AN ACT CONCERNING IN-STATE TUITION ELIGIBILITY which would lower the in-state residency requirement for undocumented students from four years to two years. And House Bill No. 6845 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GOVERNOR CONCERNING HIGHER EDUCATION, part of which would open up access to some financial aid for undocumented students. I arrived to the United States at the age of four from Ecuador. During my first five years of residing in Connecticut I went through the Hartford school public system. Afterwards, I migrated to Windsor Locks for the rest of my primary and secondary education. I am fortunate to have been able to move and place myself in a better school system. This is an opportunity that minorities do not usually get. We are usually placed in an urban area where the education we receive is not the best. At a young age I realized that in that perspective I was privileged and had to make the best out of this opportunity. I felt that nothing could stop me from being the first person in my family to go to college and have a career. But I was wrong. As I got older I learned what it meant to be an undocumented student. While researching how I could be admitted into college I learned that Connecticut did not welcome my pursuit of a higher education because like many undocumented students I was shut out of many scholarships and financial aid. Despite these circumstances I found the courage to apply to several schools, and when I got accepted to the University of Connecticut it reinforced that Connecticut is where I belong. While in my freshman year at UConn I paid out-of-state tuition because the CT Dream Act had not passed yet, and when it did I felt it raised hope that I would actually be able to finish school. But as years progressed it got harder to pay tuition. I expected to earn my degree in Urban and Community Studies this year. But my road to graduation has been slower than my classmates because of the financial barriers I face as an undocumented student. I realized that the CT Dream Act was not enough.

Despite working two jobs I constantly worry about not being able to pay for school anymore. I have been shut out of applying for institutional aid due to Connecticut not having an alternative to FAFSA for undocumented students to show need. I have paid an estimated 23,000 dollars into my college tuition these past four years which means that I have paid into the pot of money that makes up institutional aid. As a working class immigrant I should have the equal opportunity to apply for such aid. What keeps me from giving up on graduating from Connecticut is the time that I volunteer to make my home state a better place. Through my volunteer work, I see the change that I could bring, and a degree in Urban and Community studies will help me make even more change. I have also dedicated time to work with CT Students for a DREAM where I am also motivated by other undocumented students that do not give up hope that one day their human right to an education will be supported, and that is why I am testifying in support of legislation that takes vital steps towards education equality by making higher education more accessible for undocumented students, including but not limited to, opening access to institutional and state financial aid to undocumented students, broadening the number of students eligible for in state tuition through lowering of the in-state residency requirement, and creation of an alternative to the FAFSA that allows undocumented students to get fair and equal access to financial aid.

Thank you,

Alison Martinez-Carrasco