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Via email: HEDTestimony@cga.ct.gov

Dear Members of the Higher Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Meghan Vesel, and I have had the privilege of working with the immigrant community in Connecticut since September 2012.

I am a strong supporter of two bills: House Bill 6844 AN ACT CONCERNING IN-STATE TUITION ELIGIBILITY which would lower the in-state residency requirement for undocumented students from four years to 2 years. AND House Bill 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 support 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, lowering of the in-state residency requirement for undocumented students, and creation of an alternative to the FAFSA that allows undocumented students to get fair and equal access to financial aid.

As the former deputy director of the Brazilian Immigrant Center, I had the pleasure and privilege of working with Connecticut's domestic workers, primarily in Bridgeport. As part of our work to encourage civic engagement in the immigrant community, the BIC collaborated with CT Students for a Dream. The dreamers provided training in civic engagement and legislative advocacy to domestic workers, many of whom are mothers of dreamers. The domestic workers themselves work extremely hard, pay taxes with the hope that their children will have access to higher education. Because the CT dreamers are exemplary in their work to investing in their own community and the broader community in our state, HB 6844 and 6845 will make public higher education more accessible to a group that has already demonstrated that they will succeed, prosper and also contribute to Connecticut's economy. These legislative initiatives make sense as college graduates make higher incomes and therefore pay more state income taxes. HB 6844 and 6845 represent an investment in the future of Connecticut's immigrant students who are destined to be high social contributors and community leaders. Our state needs their contributions, and their contributions can only be cultivated through broader educational opportunities. Expanded access to educational is a both a matter of social and economic justice and social investment in a group in our community whose families have already proven their outstanding contributions to our state.

The 2011 legislation that granted in-state tuition rates to some undocumented students was an important first step towards increasing access to higher education. However, it is not enough, many immigrant students and their families remain unable to afford the high cost of tuition—whether at in-state or out-of-state rates. Lowering the residency requirements and extending financial aid to undocumented students is an investment in the future of Connecticut. Having a realistic path to college will result in improved high school graduation rates and increased college graduation. Further, expanding access to higher education will increase state revenue, in the short term through tuition from new students and in the long term as the higher incomes of these college graduates translate to increased taxes each year.

These bills are a way to meaningfully addresses the educational equality achievement gap in Connecticut, which unfortunately is the state with the worst achievement gap in the country. Our

legislature has adopted a goal of closing this achievement gap and of fostering progress among low-income and limited English-proficient students. These bills would be a step in that direction.

I support HB 6844 and HB 6845 and urge the committee to do the same. Help make the dreams of the dreamer mothers and their children a reality in Connecticut.

Cordially,

Meghan Vesel