

SB 398
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My name is Chloe Shiras and I am senior at Trinity College in Hartford. Originally from Baltimore, Maryland I have had the great opportunity to meet and work with DREAMers in both Connecticut and Maryland. Having worked on the Maryland DREAM Act campaign for in-state tuition in 2012, I was shown firsthand just how important equal opportunities in education are for all students, regardless of immigration status. I have been able to see how undocumented students succeed and contribute to the community and the economy when given the chance to pursue an education, and I have seen how some undocumented students struggle and make sacrifices to find any way possible to follow their dreams of obtaining higher education.

This issue does not affect me directly, and people often ask me why I stay involved, why I continue to come to meetings, why I care. While I deeply believe that education is the strongest tool to becoming successful and overcoming poverty, and believe that education equality is a fundamental human right, the real reason I continue to be involved in the fight for education access for undocumented students is because of the truly amazing and inspiring undocumented students that I have met along the way. Hearing the tumultuous stories of DREAMers, the hardships they have overcome, and the striking optimism that they maintain is what has kept me enthralled in the fight for equal access to higher education for *all* students. These DREAMers are the face of this issue, and it is their futures and dreams that are on the line.

In the last couple of months I have conducted fieldwork in Connecticut for my Senior Thesis at Trinity College, which focuses on how Deferred Action for Childhood

Arrivals (DACA) has affected recipients' access to higher education. My findings have shown that the biggest way in which DACA has increased undocumented students' access to higher education is due to receiving the work permit. This allows DREAMers to work for higher wages, enabling them to pursue higher education. However, the majority of DREAMer participants in my study are attending community college or can only take classes part-time due to economic constraints. By far, the biggest factor that is prohibiting some of Connecticut's brightest students from pursuing an education is the lack of financial aid available for the undocumented community. These are students that did everything right. They worked hard in school, they made sacrifices, and they have lived American lives. Some of these students that I have met, and am proud to call my friends, graduated in the top of their class, volunteer and give back to the community in Connecticut, and their parents are small business owners that employ American citizens and augment the workforce. To deny these students the opportunity to pursue an education and live out to their full potential is past unfair, it is unjust. Further, to deny the state, the country, and even the world from the potential talents that these students could foster through higher education is irresponsible and wildly misguided.

I mentioned before that this issue does not directly affect me, but in reality, I am directly affected. In fact, all Connecticut students are directly affected by undocumented students' inability to attend college due to financial reasons. Part of this campaign is to ensure that the top students are able to receive the education that they deserve. As of now, some of the best and brightest students in Connecticut are unable to share a classroom with me because of financial issues; I am unable to learn from them and they are unable

to learn from me. As a student at Trinity College, I can appreciate the value of having diverse opinions in the classroom, a practice that cannot ensue without financial aid.

Connecticut is a state that cares deeply about education. In fact, according to the Migration Policy Institute, Connecticut has the fourth highest rate of DACA applicants that are currently enrolled in college with 25%—just after Massachusetts, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. We are a state that sees the benefits of a just and quality education system. Let's not lose sight of that. Let Connecticut serve as an example to the rest of the country of the benefits that arise when all students are given access to higher education and as a state that believes in justice and equal opportunities for all.