

March 1, 2016

Dear Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Ainslya Charlton, a Political Science and Human Rights major at Trinity College. I am a member of CT Students for a Dream that is standing in support of SB 147: AN ACT ASSISTING STUDENTS WITHOUT LEGAL IMMIGRATION STATUS WITH THE COST OF COLLEGE. This bill would equalize access to institutional financial aid at Connecticut public universities and colleges to all students regardless of immigration status.

I was born in Jamaica. My parents raised me in the United States since I was four years old alongside my father's siblings, after an automobile accident left my grandfather comatose while my grandmother was in the late stages of cancer. When our visas expired, I knew I was undocumented then but did not know that hard work would not guarantee my documented peers and I the same shot at success. By my junior year of high school, scholarship offers were coming in and my counselor was nominating me for every one that she could find. Reality set in when my immigration status disqualified me from most scholarships except one. The POSSE Foundation and Trinity College took a chance and granted me a full tuition leadership-merit scholarship.

Still yet, after receiving DACA, I am the only government authorized worker in my household but not the only one mandated to pay taxes. Accounting for the billions of dollars undocumented immigrants pay annually in local, state and federal taxes, my family is not unique in this. We were also not unique when both my parents lost their jobs in the November of my freshman year in college and were not eligible for government assistance. They received stipends deemed sufficient to feed my sister, a citizen by birth, and to pay her proportion of the rent, light bill and of the other utilities. My parents had to find ways to pay the other portions themselves, largely through our church. As I heard my classmates talking about how "illegal immigrants" were draining money from the system, I was thinking about stopping school to pay the bills. Ultimately, I was able to take on several jobs, find ways to contribute however I could and maintain my status as a full time student.

Getting into college and making my way to graduation has and is proving to be very difficult. However, I am currently writing a thesis on how standardized international human rights law impacts Senegalese women's rights and intend to graduate from Trinity with honors this year. I have no doubt that the surviving spirit of my undocumented brothers and sisters, who have not met the same stroke of chance that I did, would drive them to achieve their dreams if given the opportunity to do so. I am very familiar with the feeling of hopelessness and desperation undocumented students feel when you yearn to continue your education but sense the end after years of hard work. With that, I wholeheartedly support SB147 and hope that the Higher Education Committee will vote in favor on it. Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Ainslya Charlton