

March 1, 2016

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

My name is Alberto Cifuentes, Jr., and I am from New Britain. I am an ally of Connecticut Students for a Dream (C4D) as well as a licensed social worker in the State of Connecticut. I stand 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.

As a child of immigrants and an alumnus of Southern Connecticut State University and the University of Connecticut, I have been instilled with the invaluable importance of education and admirable pursuit of higher education regardless of race/ethnicity and nationality. I have met many of the students affiliated with C4D and can attest that most simply want access to educational opportunities that are granted to students of legal status. This value of educational equity is a central tenet of our public higher education system. Depriving undocumented students of this right to higher education through access to institutional aid is not representative of our state's educational mission and values. SB 147 will give undocumented students who have worked hard and persevered in the face of socioeconomic and institutional challenges a fair chance at success.

As a social worker and advocate for social justice, I firmly believe that granting undocumented students access to institutional aid will put them on an even playing field with other students. Moreover, helping undocumented students enroll in public colleges and universities helps increase general enrollment, retention, and state revenue. Since institutional aid does not come from taxpayer money but money all students already pay in tuition and fees, it makes little sense for undocumented students to not have access to this pool of funds. By supporting SB 147, we respect the dignity and potential of all individuals that place their faith and hope in public education.

The time has come for the State of Connecticut to perform its ethical duty of offering equal educational opportunities for all students regardless of legal status. I support SB 147 and hope the committee will vote favorably on this vital bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alberto Cifuentes, Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Alberto Cifuentes, Jr., LMSW