

March 1, 2016

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

My name is Alison Martinez-Carrasco. I am an undergraduate college student at the University of Connecticut- West Hartford Campus, and I am majoring in Urban and Community Studies. I live in Windsor Locks and I am a member of Connecticut Students for a Dream, a statewide organization that advocates for the rights of undocumented immigrant students. I am 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 Ecuador and came to the United States at the age of four years old with my parents who left everything behind to give our family the basic necessities that we need to survive. I went through the Hartford Public School system from kindergarten until fifth grade. At ten years old I moved to Windsor Locks to finish the rest of my schooling there. This is when I experienced inequality in the education system as I started receiving a better quality education just because my school was placed in a better neighborhood. Due to not having the same opportunities as my peers had in Windsor Locks while I lived in Ecuador and in Hartford, I would always have to work a lot harder to catch up to them and prove myself worthy of a better education. I was secretive about being an undocumented immigrant until I reached twelfth grade and had to tell my guidance counselor how I wanted to pursue a higher education. There was uncertainty on how to help me. But I still applied to UConn and I have been going there ever since fall 2011. It was truly a happy day for my family the day I got accepted into higher education. But things turned upside down when trying to figure out ways to pay for college. I had already been employed since I was sixteen years old. Therefore, it was no surprise that I would continue to work while in college. But the constant stress and worrying each semester about whether I will be able to afford to stay in school or not makes my future seem blurry. It leads me to wonder when I will finally be able to graduate. Being able to do so would allow me to recompense everything that my parents and I gave up in order to have a better life in this country.

Thus far, I have paid an estimate total amount of \$37,000 for my college tuition these past five years as a part-time student while juggling two or three jobs. I am not one to be a quitter. But I cannot help but think that is what the state of Connecticut wants me to be the more we delay in passing an act that would assist undocumented students in Connecticut to pay for school. The more I invest in my education the more I feel trapped in a vicious cycle where I am discriminated against as I pay into the pool of money that makes up institutional aid, yet, do not have any access to it because Connecticut does not have an alternative to the FAFSA form for undocumented students to fill out. Having to defend my human right to an education brings me back to how I first felt as a young child in Windsor Locks where I had to try a lot harder than my U.S. citizen peers just to prove that I was worthy enough to be treated equally, although I was not born with the same privileges as them. Supporting SB 147 means that we care about Connecticut being on the right path to ensuring equality of access to higher education as a matter of justice that ensures everyone who works hard has a fair shot of success.

I hope that the Higher Education Committee votes in favor of SB 147.

Thank you for your time,

Alison Martinez-Carrasco