



March 1st, 2016

Testimony in Support of SB 147

An Act Assisting Students without Legal Immigration Status with the Cost of College

Dear Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis and members of the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement,

My name is Ana María Rivera-Forastieri, I am the Director of Advocacy and Program Development at Junta for Progressive Action—the oldest Latino community based non-profit organization in the City of New Haven. On behalf of our Agency, and the thousands of individuals and their families that we serve each year, we urge you to support SB 147.

This bill will accomplish the following:

- Equalize access to institutional aid at Connecticut public universities and colleges, regardless of immigration status.
- Create a realistic path to college for undocumented students who otherwise would not graduate from high school and matriculate in college.
- Invest in the future of young Connecticut residents who want to contribute to our economy.

At Junta, we see firsthand the difficulties that immigrant youth face in accessing higher education. We run a youth empowerment program and work with students from very diverse backgrounds. From first and second generation Americans to recent migrants that have escaped terrible violence in Central American, the dialogues that take place in these spaces are both fascinating and terrifying. These kids have lived through very different and awful struggles. But there is one thing that they have in common—they all dream about going to college. Unfortunately for many of them, it is a long and difficult journey ahead.

Immigration status and language are just some of the many obstacles faced before they even enroll in college. Like other students in the state, the huge financial hurdle that they are faced with is probably their biggest barrier. But for undocumented students, who are unable to receive federal financial aid, this barrier is even larger. While we have made important strides in the State of Connecticut to improve access to education by guaranteeing in-state tuition to undocumented students, this is far from enough. To put this into perspective, in-state tuition at UCONN is approximately \$10,000 and the office of Financial Aid estimates that after adding direct (housing and other fees) and indirect (books and transportation) expenses the estimated



169 Grand Avenue, New Haven, CT 06513
203.787.0191 www.juntainc.org

cost of attendance is approximately \$29,000. For most Connecticut families, paying that amount out-of-pocket is simply not reflective of our economic reality.

We believe that allowing undocumented students to access institutional aid, which they already pay and contribute into, will be another stepping stone in ensuring equal and better opportunities for students, regardless of their immigration status. Much has been written about our state's educational disparities and achievement gaps for low-income students and English Language Learners. If we are serious about closing these gaps, we must take the necessary steps to make college accessible to all.

Once again, we respectfully urge this committee to vote yes on SB 147.

Sincerely,

Ana María Rivera-Forastieri
Director of Advocacy and Program Development