

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

My name is Betsy Warner, I am a teacher at Windham Middle School, and I stand in support of SB 147: AN ACT ASSISTING STUDENTS WITHOUT LEGAL IMMIGRATION STATUS WITH THE COST OF COLLEGE and encourage you to do the same. This bill would equalize access to institutional financial aid at Connecticut public universities and colleges to all students regardless of immigration status.

As a teacher at Windham Middle School, I have had the pleasure of teaching many hardworking and talented young students. I teach eighth grade, so I am a part of these students' lives as they figure out who and what they want to be in life, especially as they consider their high school options in and near Willimantic, CT. My students' families have welcomed me into their hearts and homes and I have seen firsthand, particularly among undocumented students and their families, how much they sacrifice and how hard they work to have better opportunities. They deserve access to those opportunities, for themselves and for our future.

There are students in particular who come to my mind. One student is currently a junior in high school. He is a kind, caring, and charismatic young man with academic and athletic potential. He would love to go to college to become a coach and mentor to youth similar to himself, and last year at an awards banquet for winter sports, his basketball coach told the audience that this young man could be the first student he's ever coached to play high-level college basketball. However, this promising young man is not even planning on going to college because he believes that college is not a financial possibility for him without institutional aid. He is instead planning on entering a trade after high school.

Another young man is now a sophomore in high school. He has integrity and character beyond his age, doing and standing up for what is right even when it's difficult. He helps his family, his school, his church, and his community. He would like to go to college to become a police officer, so that he can make a career of helping others, and even with all of his extracurricular involvements he makes education his priority, taking advanced classes and earning honor roll, which is especially impressive considering English is not his first language. However, he too, does not believe college is a viable option for him because he knows he does not have access to financial aid. He is instead also focusing on a vocational career.

Barring students from access to institutional financial aid means we are not only denying students equal opportunities for higher education, we are wasting potential for our future. All students deserve the opportunity for higher education, and access to that education through access to institutional aid, regardless of their immigration status. When undocumented students go to college, they pay into a pool of funds that is used for institutional aid they are not able to access, even though they contribute to the source of funds. Undocumented students should be eligible for institutional aid, just as all other students who pay into the pool. We must pass legislation that provides equal opportunity to these funds, regardless of immigration status. Without the possibility of institutional aid, undocumented students are not even exploring their options for higher education. These are students who become our future, and we, as educators, are responsible for educating our future. If we do not offer institutional financial aid to students regardless of immigration status, we are wasting potential.

I support SB 147 and am hopeful that the committee will vote favorably on SB 147. It is the right thing to do.

Thank you for your time,

Betsy Warner

