



## Connecticut Students for a Dream

*Empower. Educate. Advocate.*

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

We, Connecticut Students for a Dream, call on the members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee to pass and vote favorably on Senate Bill 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.

Connecticut Students for a Dream is a statewide youth led network fighting for the rights of undocumented youth and their families. We do this through many strategies including community organizing, leadership development, and advocacy. Our organization is made up of our members and leaders, who are high school aged, college aged, and young adults from the entire state of Connecticut. We have active teams in Danbury, Hartford, New Haven, Norwalk/Stamford, and Willimantic.

Connecticut Students for a Dream and our membership views this bill as an essential step in ensuring that all our students are able to pursue their dreams of college. Many undocumented immigrant students have dreams of pursuing a college education. That dream is hard for everyone, but it is monumentally harder for immigrant students. Undocumented immigrant youth are ineligible for all federal and state need-based financial aid. The 2011 legislation that granted in-state tuition rates to some undocumented students, and the 2015 legislation that enabled more undocumented students to be able to qualify for in-state tuition were important steps toward increasing access to higher education for all. However, without access to any aid or scholarships, many immigrant families remain unable to afford the high cost of tuition even at in-state tuition rates. Without access to financial assistance, college remains out of reach for these Connecticut residents.

Institutional aid is money given out by colleges and universities to students as need based grants. Institutional aid is funded by tuition revenue; it is not taxpayer money. In Connecticut, state colleges and universities are required by state statute to set aside a percentage of tuition revenue for institutional aid to students. Undocumented students, like all students, contribute to this pool of money, but unlike other students, they do not get access to these funds. Undocumented students should have access just like all other Connecticut students. S.B. 147 would change this injustice; it would allow all of Connecticut's students to have a more equal chance at college. S.B. 147 would equalize access to institutional financial aid to all Connecticut students who qualify regardless of immigration status and create a mechanism that allows undocumented students to get fair and equal access to this aid.

Low-income undocumented Connecticut residents are barred from receiving the financial aid that they help to pay into and that their classmates receive. Educating undocumented students furthers the State's education equity goals. We are not asking for special treatment, but only the opportunity to access institutional aid on the same level as all other students. We are not asking for a hand-out, but for a hand up. All students should have equal access to higher education, regardless of socioeconomic or



Connecticut Students for a Dream  
*Empower. Educate. Advocate.*

immigration status. Ensuring equality of access to higher education is a matter of justice that ensures everyone who works hard has a fair shot of success.

Extending financial aid to undocumented students is an investment in the economy of Connecticut. A realistic path to college will result in improved high school graduation rates and increased college matriculation. Further, it would will increase state revenue, in the short term through tuition from new students and in the long term as the higher incomes of these college graduates translate to increased taxes each year.

Beyond this bill, we urge the General Assembly to protect the budget of institutions of higher learning. This is important to our membership because Connecticut needs quality colleges available to our students when S.B. 147 passes. We are fighting for S.B. 147 this year, and we will continue to fight to improve Connecticut's higher education system for all students in years to come.

Attached to this testimony is a letter of support from nearly 30 organizations who stand with us on SB 147 and support it.

We hope the committee votes favorably on S.B. 147.

Camila Bortolletto  
Policy Coordinator  
CT Students for a Dream

camila@ct4adream.org  
203-482-7340  
[www.ct4adream.org](http://www.ct4adream.org)

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

As representatives of the following organizations, we write to ask for your support in expanding access to institutional financial aid at Connecticut universities and colleges to all students regardless of immigration status. We understand that the General Assembly is currently working on addressing this issue through legislation and we urge you to support it. We support legislation that takes vital steps towards higher education equality including opening access to institutional financial aid to undocumented immigrant students, and creation of a mechanism that allows undocumented students to get fair and equal access to this aid.

Many undocumented Connecticut high school students hope to pursue higher education. Unfortunately, many are unable to achieve this dream because they are ineligible for all federal and state need-based financial aid. The 2011 legislation that granted in-state tuition rates to some undocumented students, and the 2015 legislation that enable more undocumented students to be able to qualify for in-state tuition were important steps toward increasing access to higher education. Unfortunately many immigrant students and their families remain unable to afford the high cost of tuition without any financial assistance—whether at in-state or out-of-state rates. Without access to financial assistance higher education remains out of reach for these Connecticut residents.

We support a proposal that would expand access to institutional financial aid to undocumented immigrant students in CT. Institutional aid is money given out by colleges and universities to students as need based grants. Institutional Aid is funded by tuition revenue; it is not taxpayer money. In Connecticut state colleges and universities are required by state statute to set aside at least 15% of tuition revenue for institutional aid to students. Undocumented students contribute to this pool of money and they should have access just like all other CT students. We call on legislature to pass legislation and create a mechanism to allow all students regardless of immigration status to have access to institutional aid.

We see firsthand the difference that an education can make in a student's life, and we consider it our duty to expand higher education access for all Connecticut high school students. Extending institutional financial aid to undocumented students is an investment in the future of Connecticut. A realistic path to college for these students will result in improved high school graduation rates and increased college matriculation. Further, expanding access to higher education will increase state revenue, in the short term through tuition from new students and in the long term as the higher incomes of these college graduates translate to increased taxes each year.

All students deserve access to higher education, which is necessary in today's economy and for CT's fastest-growing jobs. Opening financial aid to undocumented students is one way to address the pressing need for educational equality in CT, which unfortunately is the state with the worst achievement gap in the country. Our legislature has adopted a goal of closing this achievement gap and of fostering progress among low-income and limited English-proficient students. Enabling access to higher education for undocumented students, who are often low-income and people of color, will help Connecticut meet its statutory mandate and increase racial and socioeconomic diversity in the state's colleges and universities.

We cannot afford to sit idly by and do nothing about the lack of access to higher education for our students. Each year, hundreds of talented undocumented students graduate from our high schools with hopes of college attendance. They cannot wait any longer; we must do what we can now to help them achieve their dreams. These changes will not only help ensure a more prosperous Connecticut economy, but also make a meaningful difference in the lives of many current and future students in Connecticut.

We hope that the Connecticut General Assembly will address this urgent problem.

Yours truly,

ACLU of CT  
AILA - CT  
American Federation of Teachers (AFT-CT)  
Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission  
Brazilian Immigrant Center  
Brazilian Alliance, Waterbury  
Center for Latino Progress  
Center for Youth Leadership  
CRISOL  
CSU-AAUP  
CT Immigrant Rights Alliance  
FWD Yale  
Hispanic Federation  
IICONN  
Junta for Progressive Action  
Latino Puerto Rican Affairs Commission  
Make the Road CT  
New Haven Peoples Center  
Planned Parenthood of Southern New England  
Stop the Raids at Trinity College  
The 4C's, CT Congress of Community Colleges  
The Immigration & Refugee Committee of The Unitarian Church in Westport  
UAW Region 9A (UConn Graduate employee union)  
United Action CT  
Working Families party  
Yale Dems  
YMCA Escape to the Arts  
Youth Council for Justice