

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

My name is Carlos Espinoza, I am from West Hartford, CT but currently serving in the Peace Corps in Ecuador. I am an ally of undocumented students in CT who also participated in the campaign last year with CT Students for a Dream (C4D). 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.

This issue has hit close to home for me and my family. I have two cousins who came to the country at a young age and have had a long and difficult road in achieving higher education. The family has been tested and faced adversity in all forms, in particularly financial instability and lack of resources to continue following a career that they both would feel proud of fulfilling. Because of this struggle that I have observed first hand and because I am also an immigrant, I decided to get involved in the social justice movement that is immigration rights. I have worked with undocumented students as part of the C4D campaign for Institutional Aid last year and have been privy to the unfortunate marginalization this group of students have endure. Because of this injustice they are put at a disadvantage, culminating as a possible indicator for poverty and disenfranchisement. But because undocumented students are resilient they are forced to work twice as hard to achieve the dream of earning a college diploma. I have seen my cousins endure hardship and anguish, but at the same time I have seen determination and motivation exude from their everyday struggle. Undocumented students will benefit from this bill because it will set a level playing field by getting the financial resources they need to compete in today's public educational institutions.

This is an important issue regarding education equality because it ensures that everyone gets the same treatment in order to fulfill their educational needs. As a progressive state that has welcomed immigrants since its very existence, Connecticut would join states like Texas and California that already allow such policies to aid undocumented students. The bill seeks students to have access to Institutional Aid, which is aid funded by tuition revenue and not taxpayer money. Undocumented students pay into and contribute to the pool of funds but do not have access to the aid. They, just like other students should be eligible for the aid, more so because their currently is no law or statute barring them from the aid. In addition, progressive policies not only benefit the individual in the form of equality, it also helps the economy of Connecticut because it is an investment into the future of the state. A realistic path to college for these students will result in improved high school graduation rates and increased college matriculation. Expanding access to higher education will increase state revenue, in the short term through tuition from new students and in the long term as higher incomes of college graduates lead to increased tax revenue. Equalizing access to aid to undocumented students will cost taxpayers \$0

I am in full support of SB 147 and know our leaders in the committee will vote favorably on SB 147.

Thank you for your time,

Carlos Espinoza, MSW