

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

My name is Danilo Machado and I am an undocumented student at the University of Connecticut-Stamford. I am part of the coordinating committee for Connecticut Students for a Dream, a statewide organization of undocumented youth and allies. 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.

My family and I came from Colombia in 2000 on a tourist visa. Once that visa expired, we had no path to citizenship and, in turn, became undocumented. My immigration status became a tangible reality my senior year of High School when I was applying to colleges. Despite being in the top of my class, I faced financial barriers to my dream schools because of my status. Because of the work of undocumented youth before me, who had organized for and won institutional aid, the local UConn campus was accessible. It was during this time that I went to my first Connecticut Students for a Dream meeting, where I met other undocumented youth also going through the same process.

At UConn, it has been a semester by semester struggle to pay for school. I've had to go part time some semesters because I am still paying full tuition out of pocket. While I will be graduating in may, I know that I am in the minority of undocumented students who have made it past the many barriers to complete my degree. Most undocumented students are low income students of color who already face racial and economic barriers in the state with the largest achievement gap, made even more difficult by their immigration status. This is not about them not trying or them trying to take advantage of the system, this is about a system that is not supporting them. Over the last five years, our organization has been committed to education equity. Our state must show the same commitment by passing legislation that equalizes access to institutional financial aid for all students regardless of immigration status. This aid is something that I've paid into but haven't received the benefits of. It is not taxpayer money, it is tuition revenue. There is nothing in the Connecticut statutes and regulations that prevents undocumented students from accessing this aid. This bill is in part an effort to make Connecticut public universities places that welcome students and not places that are seen as completely inaccessible.

I support SB 147 and hope the committee will vote favorably on SB 147.

Thank you for your time,

Danilo Machado