

# FWDYale

Testimony of Elaine To  
Communications Ambassador, FWDYale

February 28, 2016  
300 College Street  
New Haven, CT 06511

In favor: S.B. 147  
An Act Assisting Students without Legal Immigration Status with the Cost of College.

To the Connecticut General Assembly Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement:

In order for there to be true education equity in the state of Connecticut, we must extend financial aid access in public colleges and universities to undocumented students. Many undocumented students come from low-income backgrounds and are faced with situations that don't offer many opportunities for advancement in life. Connecticut's achievement gap is currently the worst among all fifty states. Not allowing equal access to financial aid for undocumented students will only exacerbate these conditions.

As a low-income student who is currently on financial aid, I have lived through the struggle of wondering whether I could actually afford a college education. Though I worked hard throughout high school to get into colleges, at many times I wondered if that work would ever pay off, quite literally, in the form of scholarships and financial aid. I know that if I had not had the viable prospect of institutional aid within my reach, I would not have been nearly as motivated to succeed academically, because higher education would simply not be an option for me. Low-income undocumented students face this same obstacle. As a result, we see a drastic disparity between the percentage of undocumented students who have high school diplomas (60%) and U.S. born students who do (92%). If there are more ways for students to rise from their current situation, then there will be more reason for them to graduate high school in the first place.

I am lucky enough to be a student at a private university that offers generous financial aid, but not all low-income students are so fortunate. Undocumented students in Connecticut who are low-income face significant barriers to higher education because their options are limited to only private universities that choose to admit and offer aid to undocumented students. A student's chances at higher education and subsequent career advancement – in essence, a student's entire future – should not be in the hands of these few institutions. This is why Bill 147 is so important; it will provide more opportunities for undocumented students to take their future into their own hands and achieve their goals.

Sincerely,

Elaine To