

Written Testimony in Support of Raised S.B. No. 147: An Act Assisting Students without Legal Immigration Status with the Cost of College

By Elizabeth Kellert

About 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high school in the U.S. each year, but only a small percentage go on to attend college (Barnhardt et al., 2013). This is largely due to the fact that for many undocumented students the cost of higher education is beyond their reach. Unable to access federal and state tuition grants and loans, and often coming from homes with limited financial resources, many undocumented students cannot make their dreams of college and professional careers a reality.

Many undocumented youth came to the U.S. as small children, have faced the challenges of adapting to a foreign culture, and have worked hard to succeed in the American public school system. Many of them view the United States as their home, perhaps even the only country they have known, and aspire to be contributing members of society as adults. However our immigration policies have placed often-insurmountable barriers in their path and have resulted in the systematic marginalization of this vulnerable population. Before Obama's executive order of the Dream Act in 2012, undocumented youth without pathways to citizenship were unable to work legally as adults and were forced to live in the shadows of society under constant fear of deportation. With the Dream Act, now qualifying individuals have opportunities to gain legal means of income and to focus their educational pathways toward professional goals and greater economic success for themselves, their families, and their communities. This largely untapped talent pool can now be a contributing asset to the growth of our economy rather than a marginalized population of unrealized potential.

Despite the Dream Act, undocumented students still often lack the necessary financial resources to attend college and pursue their dreams. While comprehensive immigration reform continues to be unaccomplished on a federal level, states have the opportunity to affect immediate positive change within their jurisdiction. Here in Connecticut, our state's public colleges put aside at least 15% of tuition dollars for financial aid; but despite the fact that tuition paid by undocumented students contributes to this pool of about \$140 million, they are currently not eligible for the aid (Thomas, 2015). With this bill, that would change, and motivated, hard-working, and talented undocumented Connecticut youth would be able to compete for state grants and financial aid along with their native-born peers. Please allow for these youth a chance to succeed in and give back to the state that they call home.

Barnhardt, C., Ramos, M., & Reyes, K. (2013). Equity and inclusion in practice: Administrative responsibility for fostering undocumented students' learning. *About Campus*, 18(2), 20-26.

Thomas, Jaqueline R. (2015). Retrieved from <http://ctmirror.org/2015/05/19/senate-passes-financial-aid-for-undocumented-students-house-debates-in-state-tuition/>