

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

My name is Eric Cruz Lopez, I am from Bridgeport. I am the regional organizer for Willimantic/Storrs with Connecticut Students for a Dream.

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

I come to you as undocumented, as poor, and as a minority from a disadvantaged neighborhood. I arrived in this country 13 years ago escaping the poverty that was my home in Mexico. I arrived here in only to find discrimination, low wages, and a dysfunctional school system that was not able to serve the needs of all of its students. Students that came from a variety of backgrounds and with various levels of documentation. There were undocumented students from Jamaica and Haiti, students with TPS from Honduras and recent migrants from Puerto Rico, besides these there were countless others who shared and still share in the struggle of being undocumented. In the eyes of the school system we were all the same, immigrants who didn't deserve to be here, and treated us as such with poor education and even worse English language learning. What they failed to see was the resistance capital in the eyes of the students, they failed to see that these students had crossed national borders escaping one thing or another. We had made long treacherous journeys that many of the people present here would never be able to comprehend and now upon our arrival in a safe land we are just met with more barriers and treated as criminals.

Fortunately, through my own privilege and the support of my family I was able succeed in my education and end up at the University of Connecticut. But the system always allows for one or two students to "make it out of the hood" just to show that it can be done. That is not the case with all the friends I grew up with, they desired to go to college but as we know having food to eat and surviving is more important. I know this because as I went to the local food pantry to get food to eat I was worried about how I would pay for the education I so desperately saw as the great equalizer. It pains me to think that this college education was a way for my friends and I to finally be able to provide for our families and lessen the burden that they had to deal with. And yet it was financially out of reach.

Why should you support this? Because it would allow the students I work with to be able to obtain the education they crave, because it is an injustice that we are not allowed access to institutional aid. Because it will improve high school graduation rates by creating a realistic path to college, because it will help the CT economy through tuition revenue in the short term and the higher incomes of these college graduates in the long term. Because we will also become teachers, doctors, and workers who will and are a part of the society and economy here.

So, I come to you today with all of my identities to ask that you vote favorably on SB 147 because all it is asking for is access to funds that we pay into but do not have access to. To vote and support the great equalizer that is education, because all students should have access to high education, regardless of socioeconomic status or immigration status.

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

Thank you for your time,

Eric Cruz Lopez

