

March 1, 2016

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

My name is Erik Muñoz, I am an advocate for undocumented students and I live in New Haven, CT. I am a member of the organization Unidad Latina en Accion- New Haven. I am 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 was born in Ecuador and I have been living in the United States for seven years. I attended Maloney High School in Meriden and graduated in 2013. In 2014, I enrolled in Middlesex Community College and was there for three months, I paid two-thousand dollars for to obtain ten credits. I have always struggled economically, therefore, I stopped attending college in the summer of 2014 because I thought it would be better to work and save money to go back to school in 2015. Unfortunately, things did not go as planned. I had a lot of problems towards the end of October 2014. I was without a job for two months and a half and everything that I saved up during the summer, which was supposed to be for school ended up being for rent, food and transportation. I started working again in January 2015 in demolition. I worked there for two months. At first, I was paid on time but then I was not getting paid anymore. In fact, they still owe me three-thousand dollars. When they never ended up paying me for my hard work I felt robbed and helpless because that was the money I thought of using to go back to school with. I became jobless again for a month and began to look for jobs at restaurants and in cleaning. Finally, I got a phone call to work in carpentry and got paid minimum wage, which is difficult to depend on to help me go back to school. Yet, I am saving as much as I can to make my dream of going back to school a reality. This is a dream that I am not alone in having. Each one of us dreams of being the first in our families to graduate from college.

I have tried to progress but all of the barriers that I have experienced have caused me to feel mad and depressed. Being undocumented and not qualifying for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals makes me feel even smaller. But it helps me when I think about how there are people out there who care to help, and that eventually I will be able to obtain what I really want, which is a higher education. S.B. 147 would be of great help for me and my community because it would help us worry less about paying for school and help us feel more at peace as we pursue a higher education. It would help us try to live a normal life without having to always worry whether we could afford to enroll for each semester or not. Access to institutional financial aid would help alleviate a part of our stressful lives. S.B. 147 would be of great help for our future and I just ask for the opportunity to obtain financial aid just as other students are able to.

Thank you for your time,  
Erik Muñoz