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I urge you to act favorably on Raised SB 147, An Act Assisting Students Without Legal Immigration Status With The Cost Of College.

I have worked with many undocumented students. As an attorney I volunteered my services at several clinics to process requests for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). I have also supervised a program at Connecticut Legal Services in which our attorneys represent individual DACA applicants, and I have handled many applications myself.

A recent report by the American Immigration Council entitled "DACA at Year Three: Challenges and Opportunities in Accessing Higher Education and Employment" concluded that:

Despite these promising opportunities, a number of barriers still stand in the way of DACAmented young adults' dreams. In particular, where one resides within the United States dramatically shapes a multitude of experiences based on local impediments and opportunities. Lack of access to financial aid and in-state tuition in many states continues to block many DACA beneficiaries from enrolling in college and completing their degrees. Without financial aid, DACA beneficiaries must work long hours, taking away from the time they can spend on schoolwork. Not only do these barriers decrease their ability to attend school continuously or full-time, they also affect their ability to perform well in school, especially compared to their documented peers who do not face this added financial hardship.

[Full report enclosed with testimony]

Several years ago, this legislature took the first step and passed the In State Tuition bill, which recognized the value of making education easier for undocumented students who have grown up in Connecticut. Access to financial aid is a reasonable next step to making college a reality for many of these students.

One of the questions I am frequently asked by my clients is whether there are any funds available to assist them to go to college. I point out that while there are some private scholarships, there are not a lot of opportunities to obtain financial aid. Many of these students are exactly the people we should be encouraging as a society. They are bright and energetic. They get good grades and have the work ethic generally associated with upwardly mobile immigrants throughout our history.

We would do well to encourage such talented people to go to college and remain in Connecticut. They would be a great resource for our future if their futures aren't limited by their inability to afford college. Other states, including some not considered as immigrant friendly as Connecticut, have seen the usefulness of approving similar measures.

This measure will have no fiscal impact on the state budget. The Institutional Aid which would pay for this financial aid is funded by students' tuition. That tuition is paid by undocumented

as well as documented students, yet at this time the undocumented students cannot benefit from the funds.

Please support this bill and enable these students to afford a college education and to prosper.

Thank you.

Joanne Lewis
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