

Dear Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is John Stephen Volpini. I reside at 185 Miller Avenue, Meriden. I am President of United Action Connecticut, which is a faith-based social action organization which brings people of various religious backgrounds together to fight for social justice.

In the past several years we have been very active supporting the cause of undocumented members of our Connecticut communities. We sponsored clinics at which young people could apply for the benefits of DACA, or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. This Federal initiative allows young adults who came to this country without documentation to remain here and continue their education and seek work without the fear of being deported because they lacked legal status.

Hundreds of young adults have taken advantage of this and are now in college, working productively, or doing both.

We also fought to allow these students to be able to attend Connecticut colleges at the lower cost in-state tuition, which Connecticut has granted.

We are proud of our support for these fine young women and men who are pursuing the American dream. We have also conducted dozens of Immigration Forums at houses of worship and colleges throughout the state. Through these forums, we have helped hundreds of people come to know these young adults and learn of their struggles arriving in the United States, hear about their ambitions, and see in their eyes the promise of the future of this state and country. Immigrants have flocked to these shores for more than three hundred years and made it a place of industry and industriousness.

SB 147 is the next step the State can take to help these talented young people reach their educational and career goals. Remember: Institutional Aid is not taxpayer money. It is funded by college, into which all college students pay. Fairness would dictate that the immigrant students—just as all others—be granted scholarships from this source. Further, there is nothing in state law preventing access to these funds. But it is up to the legislature to mandate that immigrant students have equal access to them.

If we are to encourage more students to attend state universities, we must make it possible financially for them to do so. Immigrant students—despite their talents—do not have the deep community roots or networks of support that help other students born to U.S. citizens. These students ask not for a favor; they ask only that they be given consideration based on their academic promise and economic need.

We at UACT have been inspired by their grit and determination. We have seen how their parents work hard, sometimes in discriminatory circumstances. As a friendly state that has offered generations of immigrants opportunities to succeed, we think it is natural that Connecticut extend this earned benefit to those who will contribute to our future.

Please support SB 147, so the legislation can be passed by the entire Assembly and signed into law.

Thank you for your attention,

John S. Volpini, UACT President