

# FWD Yale

February 28, 2016  
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Testimony of Jose Rodriguez  
Vice President of FWD Yale

In favor:       S.B. 147  
                  An Act Assisting Students without Legal Immigration Status with the Cost  
                  of College.

To the Connecticut General Assembly Committee on Higher Education and Employment  
Advancement:

Hearing back from colleges is one of most exciting moments of a young adult's life. Receiving an acceptance letter from your first choice of college is surreal – you feel ecstatic, like you are on the top of the world. It reaffirms all the hard work you put into your classes for the past four years. Sadly, millions of students around the country never get the chance to experience such feeling. Why? Because millions of undocumented youth are not given a fair chance of even applying to college.

Having gone to high school in South Central LA, I witnessed some of my peers say no to schools that had accepted them, and say no to college altogether because they could not afford to attend. And just to be clear, they are citizens and were offered financial aid. So take a second to think about it: is it realistic and fair to expect undocumented youth, who, in many cases, are not receiving financial aid, are also not allowed to work legally, and are disproportionately affected by a flawed educational system, to attend and pay for college successfully? No.

As an undocumented student at one of the world's best universities, I know how lucky and privileged I am to be where I am today. I was lucky enough to have lived in a state that offers financial aid to all students regardless of their legal status. I was lucky to have been accepted to a private institution that is willing and capable of funding my education. Luck, although not the sole reason I am here today, is, admittedly, a big part of it. But the truth of the matter is that not everyone is as lucky as I was, nor should luck be a factor in a student's decision to attend college.

Thanks to the work I have done with FWD Yale and other campus groups, I have been able to interact with many of the undocumented students at the local high schools. These kids are all very passionate and want to do better – be better than they are now – but many of them are also afraid that college is not something they will get to experience. Many of these high school students come from low-income families and without S.B. 147, their dream of attending college will remain just that – a dream.

Attending college should not be dependent of someone's luck. It should be a choice every student, regardless of his or her legal status, is allowed to make. Although the current educational system is flawed in many ways, you, men and women of the General Assembly, have been given an opportunity to help fix some of that in the state of Connecticut. You can give the undocumented youth of this state a chance at a better and brighter future.

Respectfully,  
Jose Rodriguez