



Testimony of Juan Hernandez, CT District Leader, 32BJ SEIU

SB No. 147

March 1, 2016

Thank you to the Committee Members for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Juan Hernandez and I am the District Director for SEIU 32BJ in the State of Connecticut. I am here today to urge you to support Senate Bill No.147, An Act Assisting Students without Legal Immigration Status with the Cost of College.

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32BJ represents over 4,500 men and women in the State of Connecticut. Our members are the backbone of the property industry – building workers; security officers; and office, school, theatre, stadium and window cleaners. 32BJ members come from 64 different countries, speak 28 different languages, and represent a microcosm of immigrants as well as families with long histories in the U.S. We all share the American Dream, a commitment to making life better for working families, and a fundamental respect for the dignity of all people.

Connecticut has taken important steps in the fight to give undocumented youth equal access to higher education. In 2011, Governor Malloy made the dream of attending college that much more of a reality for undocumented youth when he signed a bill into law that allowed undocumented high school students access to in-state tuition. Despite this great first step, far too many of our youth are still unable to access our State's higher education programs due to prohibitive cost barriers. Because undocumented students are unable to apply for federal financial aid to assist with the cost of college, in-state programs in the State of Connecticut remain a costly endeavor that is out of reach for many students. Without any financial aid, in-state tuition costs at University of Connecticut's Main Campus for 2015-2016 are over \$25,000 a year.ⁱ At this rate, a bachelor's degree will currently cost an undocumented student over \$100K to achieve.

The students and the families that this bill will help have built their lives in our State. They work here, they pay taxes here, and they are active member of our communities. The estimated 130,000ⁱⁱ undocumented immigrants currently living in CT comprise 3.6% of our population of 3.5 million.ⁱⁱⁱ Moreover, undocumented immigrants make up about 5%^{iv} of our labor force and collectively pay almost \$136 million dollars in tax to the State.^v About 1 in 25 students in our Elementary and Secondary Schools are the children of undocumented immigrants.^{vi} It is only right that we give undocumented students the same access to an affordable degree and quality education that their peers have access to. By expanding access we encourage our talented students to stay in our State and become leaders in our community.

Over 20 States have already moved to expand tuition support to undocumented students and 6 have allowed undocumented students to access state education grants or scholarships.^{vii} We strongly urge the legislature to join these states and act to ensure that inaccessibility does not prevent our young people from fulfilling their potential and achieving their dreams.

The Center for American Progress estimates that expanding tuition support for undocumented students would benefit the State's economy by \$1.6 billion dollars over two decades in the form of increased wages, productivity and taxation.^{viii} By expanding access to financial aid to all of our State's high school youth, we are not only investing in their future, we are also investing in our financial future and health as a State. Please do the right thing and support SB No. 147.

ⁱ <http://admissions.uconn.edu/content/tuition>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2014/11/18/appendix-a-additional-tables-4/> (Table A1)

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/09>

^{iv} Figure based on CT Department of Labor Statistics (<https://www1.ctdol.state.ct.us/lmi/laborforce.asp>) and Pew Research Center Statistics (<http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/09>) (Table A2)

^v http://itep.org/itep_reports/2015/04/undocumented-immigrants-state-local-tax-contributions.php#.Vp_k8Jgo7cs (Table 1)

^{vi} <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2014/11/18/appendix-a-additional-tables-4/> (Table A4)

^{vii} <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/TXDreamAct-webfig1.png>

^{viii} https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/statesProfiles_v10.pdf (Page 8)