

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

My name is Julian Rose, I am from Farmington. I am an engineering student at UConn and I stand 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.

As a son and grandson of immigrants who struggled to attain legal citizenship, it is a personal issue to my family and myself to ensure that immigrants, of all kinds and statuses, have access to opportunity in this country. I love America. And though I am a first generation American, I have come to love the idea that anyone within our bounds may aspire to realize selfhood and success, with hard work. Due to aspects of educational inequity, many individuals within America have a significantly more difficult time attaining access to opportunity regardless of the work they put into the dream. This is largely disturbing, as the fabric of American ideals is supposed to be equality. I ask you, what does it mean to be American? Immigrants come here, work hard, pay taxes, appreciate and contribute to American culture, visit national monuments, and participate in 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebrations. Are they not American? Immigrants go through the oft grueling process of moving to another country, and establishing oneself, due to an intense love of what America represents. Why would we, as Americans, squander this love? Higher education is a main aspect of access to success in this country, and the cost of education is a major obstacle to that opportunity. Millions of students drop out of school due to costs, and are crippled by debt after graduation. Limitations of financial assistance to any group of people, especially people that largely contribute through taxes, is a limitation on opportunity itself. The issue of financially assisting undocumented students is not just a financial one, governed by calculators and budgets, but a moral issue. Do we support people trying to work hard, make something of themselves, and give back to both their families and America? Or, do we turn them away, and tell them they are not worth the investment. Everyone deserves opportunity, especially those who sacrifice so much for a shot at American life.

Connecticut has historically been at the forefront of initiatives and philosophies that expand justice and freedom both locally and nationally. From Constitutional meetings, to the abolitionists in Farmington welcoming Cinque of the Amistad, to New Haven freedom trail guides, to education reform, many progressive actions have taken place in CT. Our government has a moral and traditional responsibility to carry this history into the present. CT must pass legislation that equalizes access to institutional financial aid regardless of immigration status, because any other action would suggest that one's human right to opportunity should depend on immigration status.

There are a few important facts about institutional aid that are important to note. Institutional aid is funded by tuition revenue, NOT taxpayer money. Additionally, undocumented students pay into the institutional aid pool and yet, for some reason, do not have access to the aid they contribute to. For this reason, undocumented students should, like other students that pay tuition, have access to institutional aid. Finally, there is nothing in the Connecticut statutes and regulations that prevents undocumented students from accessing this aid. Supporting this bill means supporting expanded opportunities in Connecticut for the future.

Educational inequity is prevalent issue across the nation and the correlation between access to quality education and income have become evident. Generally, low-income students struggle to pay for education and stay in educational programs due to the financial toll of tuition and other associated fees. Financial aid is one method to alleviate this economic barrier, and in some ways level the playing field, so to speak. The issue is that undocumented students are barred from receiving the financial aid, barring them from modes to equality, which is something they actually help to pay into so that their classmates can receive aid. Regardless of socioeconomic or immigration status of the individual, all students should have equal access to higher education. Access to institutional aid, or lack thereof, is a matter of whether or not everyone who works hard has a fair shot of success.

What will extending financial aid to undocumented students mean for Connecticut's economy? Extending financial aid to undocumented students is absolutely an investment in the future of Connecticut, as these students call Connecticut HOME, they love this state and want to contribute to its growth. Making the opportunity of college more realistic for students will result in improved high school graduation rates and college matriculation.

Expanding access to higher ed will increase state revenue both in the short term and the long term. Making higher education a more viable option in Connecticut will attract students, increasing funds raised by tuition as well as increasing tax revenue through higher incomes of college graduates. Similar programs in other states have not displaced students or been a financial drain. Finally, equalizing access to aid to undocumented students will cost taxpayers \$0.00.

I support SB 147 and hope the committee will vote favorably on SB 147.

Thank you for your time,  
Julian Rose