

## **Testimony Regarding S.B.147: An Act Assisting Students Without Legal Immigration Status With The Cost Of College**

*Lucas Codognolla*

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

March 1, 2016

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis, and Distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify in support of an issue that has great importance to me.

My name is Lucas Codognolla and I am an undocumented immigrant from Brazil. My family and I arrived in the United States nearly 16 years ago, when I was 9 years old. Today, I am 25 years old, a Norwalk Community College and a UCONN graduate, a community organizer, and Lead Coordinator of Connecticut Students for a Dream. I stand here today in strong support for Senate Bill 147, which would equalize access to institutional financial aid. This is a common-sense step in the right direction towards making higher education affordable and attainable to all students, regardless of immigration status.

Growing up undocumented in Connecticut, I did not have a full understanding about how my immigration status, or lack thereof, would impact my education. It was not until I was 16 and in high school, that the realities and struggles of being undocumented became tangible and real. I was not able to get a driver's license, take advantage of an opportunity to go to China with my school, and the realization of one day having to exchange my dream of going to college for a low-paying, under the table job haunted me at night. If it was not for my high school guidance counselor, Ms. Sanso, I would have never known of the possibilities for my future after high school, and most importantly, I would not have hope.

Out of 65,000 undocumented students that graduate high school every year, only 5% continue their education. As an undocumented college student, before Connecticut passed in-state tuition legislation in 2011, I was working 3 part-time jobs, taking a full course load, and spending over 2 hours a day commuting between school, work, and home. And while it was difficult and stressful for me and family, I still consider myself privileged to have had the minimal support of merit-based scholarships and a support-system that helped me figure out how to make ends meet. This is not the reality for most undocumented young people, many of whom drop out of high school or college because of financial reasons.

Expanding access to institutional financial aid for undocumented students is the moral thing to do. It is important to understand what this pool of money is and what it is not. Institutional Aid from public Connecticut colleges and universities is funded by tuition revenue, not taxpayer money. Expanding access to this aid provides fairness to a system that is currently discriminating against undocumented students, despite having nothing in Connecticut statutes and regulations disqualifying students without legal status in accessing this aid. This is not providing preferential treatment in any way, but in fact, making an investment in Connecticut's economy and furthering the state's education equity goals.

In my capacity as part of Connecticut Students for a Dream, I have had the privilege to hear countless stories from undocumented youth, many of whom if given the chance to go to college with institutional aid, their lives would be changed forever. I cannot express how important such legislation can be to a low-income, first generation undocumented student, growing up in an environment where they feel criminalized and ostracized because of their status. It is my goal to travel across the state come this summer, and share the hope as it was once shared with me. As members of this committee, you have the power to make this goal a reality, and the power to have the dreams of hundreds of students in Connecticut come true.

I strongly endorse Senate Bill 147 and urge the committee to vote favorably. Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lucas Codognolla', written in a cursive style.

Lucas Codognolla  
*Lead Coordinator, CT Students for a Dream*