

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

My name is Mayra Aguilar, I am from Hartford, Connecticut. I am from Connecticut Students for a Dream and 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.

Arriving to this country at age five with only my mother, who till this day has not left my side and has supported me in everything she could, was one of the most life changing experiences I had ever encountered. My mother had decided to come to this country because she wanted a better life for me. A better life meaning eventually growing up, going to college, having a career, being successful. In my mother's eyes, working hard to graduate from college and to be a professional in my field of study, was being successful.

I started my journey through the education system by going to a bilingual kindergarten in New Jersey. My mother then decided to move us to Connecticut where I started first grade at Henry C. Dwight Elementary School right here in Hartford. The summer before first grade started my mother had landed a job that did not fit my school schedule, which meant she could not take me to school or pick me up. Since we lived in an apartment building, she met an older woman who she started to make conversation with, she wanted to get to know this woman to eventually ask her if she could just do her the favor of taking me to school, which was right across the street and to pick me up. She agreed.

My very first day of first grade, it hit me, I was different, since I did not know the language I could not communicate with anyone. I remember my mother telling me I used to come home crying everyday because of the language barrier. I was lucky enough to have a teacher who was very patient and even helped my mother by taking me to the crosswalk after school so that I was able to cross the street to the babysitter and should would wait every morning at the crosswalk so that I could attend school every morning. I eventually learned English and by the time I got to fifth grade, I was lucky again to have another great teacher, Tamika Knight. She pushed me to be better and never stopped believing in me, even when all I wanted to do was give up.

I had finally become a permanent resident of the United States while being in middle school in the sixth grade. I saw how much easier that made things for my mother and saw how hard she was working so that we had a roof over our heads and food on the table. It was a lot of weight off my mother's shoulders. I then became a citizen of the United States my sophomore year of high school. I did not really understand the advantages of being a citizen here besides not being able to get deported. My junior and senior year of high school as I began the college process, I realized that attending college would mean taking out loans and spending thousands of dollars in order to be successful. I quickly learned about FAFSA. FAFSA was not going to cover all of my expenses but it did lift some weight off my shoulders because any type of financial help I could receive was acceptable and surely appreciated.

My journey through the education system motivates me to speak out for equal access to higher education because going through the college process of applying, writing essays and then deciding which school is better for you financial is stressful as it is. I can only imagine how much more stressful it is for an undocumented student who receives no financial help whatsoever has to go through. Stressing out about where the money is going to come from, college acceptances they have to give up in order to work, save up money, then go back to school, or even attending college and working one or multiple jobs to go to school just because they want to be successful. They work just as hard as everyone else who goes to school and have goals, and want to succeed.

I know many people who will benefit from SB 147, some of them I know personally and many others through out the state of Connecticut whom I do not know, but I do know will benefit from this because I believe everyone has a right to education and I know finances are always setting them back.

Legislators should support the bill because it is not fair that undocumented students pay into and contribute to the institutional aid pool of funds, but do not have access to this aid. Not only is there nothing in the Connecticut statutes and regulations that prevents undocumented students from accessing this aid, but undocumented students having access to this aid is an investment in the future of Connecticut. Access to this aid could result in improved high school graduation rates and increased college matriculation. Lastly, access to this aid will result to more students attending college, which will then increase state revenue, in the short term

through tuition from new students and in the long term as higher incomes of college graduates lead to increased tax revenue and will cost taxpayers nothing.

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

Thank you for your time,

Mayra Aguilar
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