

Dear Members of the Higher Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Mayra Reyes-Ruiz, I am from Wallingford, CT. I am a graduate student in the Department of Educational Psychology and a longtime member of the Puerto Rican and Latin American Cultural Center at the University of Connecticut.

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.

Those of us who come from families, who have endured hardship to arrive to this country, know that our families came to seek a better life, including the pursuit of a quality education. So you'll find that many of us desperately want to make that arduous journey worth it - whether across land or across the ocean- and make our parents and grandparents proud.

Personally, I had the privilege of growing up knowing that if I worked hard I could apply to college and I could check off the citizen or permanent resident box. I was able to fill out a FAFSA every year and receive aid toward my ever-increasing fee bill. But that was still not enough. I went on to work over 20 hours a week throughout the four years of my undergraduate career at UCONN and even now as a graduate student. Working through school and ultimately institutional aid has allowed me to remain debt free.

Undocumented students do not have access to this aid.

The reality is college is not affordable. I consider something affordable if I can walk into a store, purchase something in full and walk out with it in hand. College has instead become synonymous with crippling long term debt and the best way students have tried to minimize it is with institutional aid money. However, undocumented students are currently expected to pay sticker price for higher education, while being barred from the pool of money they pay into with their tuition fees. Institutional Aid is funded by tuition revenue, not taxpayer money. In Connecticut state colleges and universities set aside at least 15% of tuition revenue for institutional aid to students. Connecticut statutes and regulations that do not prevent undocumented students from accessing this aid.

This is a matter of educational equality; all students regardless of socioeconomic status or immigration status get a equal access to higher education. Not only would SB 147 benefit current college age students but all those in K-12 education as well. I have witnessed how in my family and in my community, parents tell their kids early on that paying for college is not within their means and that they shouldn't consider that a realistic path. As a result, you have students in middle and who are disengaged, who are missing school and not graduating high school. With this bill students disillusioned by their status and lack of financial aid access, would be motivated to perform in high school in pursuit of higher education. A realistic path to college for these students will result in improved high school graduation rates and increased college enrollment which would in turn benefit the Connecticut economy without costing taxpayers a single dollar.

Thank you for your time and attention,

Mayra Reyes-Ruiz