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Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. Thank you for an opportunity to express my support for SB 147, AN ACT ASSISTING STUDENTS WITHOUT LEGAL IMMIGRATION STATUS WITH THE COST OF COLLEGE.

Connecticut is a state that welcomes diversity. Our universities are one of the prime examples of this great cultural and social commitments we extend to one another. As we are all aware, however, the financial costs that are imposed on many students who are attending our great institutions of higher learning FAR outstrip their ability to pay. Access to institutional financial aid is a game changer for many of our students and offers the opportunity to attend college that they would otherwise have to delay or give up on.

Like all high school students, a majority of undocumented Connecticut high school students – many of whom are residents of or attend High School in my district– hope to pursue higher education in our state. Unfortunately, most are unable to achieve this dream because they are ineligible for all federal and state need-based financial aid. Without access to financial aid, higher education remains out of reach for these Connecticut tuition paying residents.

Granting undocumented students eligibility to receive institutional aid from public Connecticut colleges and universities is the morally responsible thing to do. In fact, I contend that it is morally indefensible to exclude these students. Institutional aid, as you likely know, is money given out by colleges and universities to students as need or merit based grants. Institutional Aid is funded by tuition revenue; it is not taxpayer money. Our state colleges and universities are required by state statute to set aside at least 15% of tuition revenue for institutional aid to students. Undocumented students contribute their dollars to this pool and they should have access to it.

This immoral policy that is in effect now is preventing many young people who are currently in high school from applying to our universities. Many of them are straight A students who would,

without a question succeed in college if only given an opportunity to qualify for financial aid. We, as a state, made the right decision in 2011 when we enacted legislation that allows certain undocumented students to qualify for in-state tuition at our universities. This was a first step in a right direction. In 2015, we went a step further and allowed more Connecticut residents to qualify for in-state tuition. This year, we can take another step forward which would alleviate this extra financial burden when it comes time to pay for college.

SB 147 would create more of an equal playing field for students to apply and ultimately pay for their college education. Connecticut would benefit greatly if this measure is enacted. Many of our young people are leaving the state to attend universities and build their careers elsewhere. Also, as the overall cost for attending universities across the state is increasing, providing the ability to apply for financial aid by the undocumented students would encourage them to further their education and enrich our state.

As elected officials, we see firsthand the difference that an education can make in a student's life and the future of our State. We know that it is good public policy to expand higher education access for all Connecticut high school students, and we should recognize that the opportunity and public benefit is only increased when we do so for ALL of our promising students. Extending institutional financial aid to undocumented students is a smart and morally just investment in the future of Connecticut.

Thank you