

Dear Co-Chairs and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

My name is Stefan Keller and I am the College Access Program Coordinator with Connecticut Students for a Dream. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 147 AN ACT ASSISTING STUDENTS WITHOUT LEGAL IMMIGRATION STATUS WITH THE COST OF COLLEGE.

In my role as the College Access Program Coordinator I go around the state talking to students and educators about what is next in the life of an undocumented student after high school. This school year alone I have met with well over 150 educators and spoken to hundreds of students. When I meet with students and educators I explain that; fortunately, students can go to any college or university in Connecticut if that can afford it. I then go on to talk to students and educators about institutional aid, about how tuition dollars of undocumented students are going into a pool of money that they cannot access. The feeling is unanimous in every room I have been in, that this is unfair and unjust.

Just last night I met with a student and his parents from West Haven who is looking into going to Gateway. He and his parents were under the impression that he may be eligible for some aid due to commercials they had seen on TV but sadly I had to inform them that such aid is only available to citizen and permanent resident students. It was painful to see the energy change in the room viscerally change to one filled with more hopelessness and anxiety from when I had entered. Of course, I told him that we would work hard together to apply for private scholarships and use whatever resources we had but we all know that none of that is guaranteed.

This is the reality that I and many other educators I meet work in. Connecticut's in-state tuition policy has helped many undocumented students start their college journey but we have left out many of our poorest and most marginalized students by not opening up access to institutional aid. Even receiving a small amount of aid through this system would make college a reality for many more students.

The passage of SB 147 would be a move towards educational equality in our state, a move that I think all of us can agree is extremely important. We are all well aware that Connecticut has one of the largest opportunity gaps for low-income students, English language learners, and students of color. These are all categories that many undocumented students fall under and this legislation is one way to start to close that gap.

Attached to my testimony you will find an educator letter of support that we sent to high school and college level educators around the state. 55 educators have already signed on in support and more signatures are coming in every day.

In my role I am sometimes seen as the person who has solutions to all the challenges. However, this is one hurdle that these students and I cannot jump over alone. I do not want to have to be in any more rooms where I leave knowing that despite how hard undocumented students in our state have fought to open access for some, doors are still closed for others. I know that the educators that have signed this letter feel the same.

I urge you to support SB 147 because it is step towards opening more of those doors. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Stefan Keller  
Connecticut Students For a Dream, College Access Program Coordinator  
166 Beacon Street #2, Hartford, CT 06105  
Stefan@ct4adream.org

***Educator Letter of Support: SB 147, An Act Assisting Students Without Legal Immigration Status with the Cost of College***

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

We, educators across Connecticut at the middle school, high school, and college level, write to ask for your support in granting undocumented immigrant students access to institutional financial aid at Connecticut universities and colleges on the same terms and conditions as other Connecticut students. We understand that the General Assembly is currently working on addressing this issue and we urge you to consider legislation that will open up access to funding to as many students as possible and to be more inclusive of the diverse undocumented community. We support legislation that takes vital steps towards educational equality including opening access to institutional financial aid to undocumented immigrant students, and creation of a mechanism that allows undocumented students to get fair and equal access to this aid.

We work with these students on a daily basis and are frustrated and saddened to see our students lose hope in attending college because of their ineligibility for all forms of federal and state need-based aid. We know that many of our students have trouble paying for college, which is a huge problem, but our undocumented students find it especially difficult without grants and loans from the federal or state government.

As educators we support a proposal that would expand access to institutional financial aid to undocumented immigrant students in CT. As an educator, you are supposed to be the one to provide resources to your students and help them figure out a path once they graduate. However, for undocumented students without access to this aid, the path is much more unclear and we struggle along with students to try and figure out how to make college a reality. Unfortunately, sometime because of this lack of hope in changes that support them, many students wind up not enrolling in college or even worse, not finishing high school at all.

We see firsthand the difference that an education can make in a student's life, and we consider it our duty to expand higher education access for all Connecticut high school students. Extending institutional financial aid to undocumented students is an investment in the future of Connecticut. We know this because we have heard these students' big hopes and dreams for their future, a future that not only will benefit them but also our entire state. Further, expanding access to higher education will increase state revenue, in the short term through tuition from new students and in the long term as the higher incomes of these college graduates translate to increased taxes each year.

As educators we also share in the CT legislature's goal of closing the achievement gap for and of fostering progress among low-income students and English language learners. This cannot happen if undocumented students, who are more likely to be low-income students of color and in English language learner programs, do not have equal access to higher education.

We cannot afford to sit idly by and do nothing about the lack of access to higher education for our students. Each year, hundreds of talented undocumented students graduate from our high schools with hopes of college attendance. They cannot wait any longer; we must do what we can now to help them achieve their dreams. These changes will not only help ensure a more prosperous Connecticut economy, but also make a meaningful difference in the lives of many current and future students in Connecticut.

We hope that the Connecticut General Assembly will address this urgent problem.

Sincerely,

<b>First Name</b>	<b>Last Name</b>	<b>School or Organization Affiliation</b>	<b>Position/ Title</b>
Holly	Benedetti	West Haven High School	School Counselor
Elizabeth	Shoudy	Coginchaug Regional High School	Transition counselor
Tracy	Ganino	Bullard Havens THS	School Counselor
Janet	Bowes-Marek	Norwalk Community College	F/T Professor of ESL
Holly	Franquet	ECMC	Director, The College Place-CT
Paola	Ochoa	Westhill High School	counselor
Connor	Henderson	Career Beginnings	College Advisor
carla	hawkins	Academy of Nursing and health Sciences	School Counselor
Elba	Sims	Stamford Public Schools	Bilingual/ESL Teacher
Igdalia	Olivera	Bassick High School	School Counselor
Geno	Ayala	New Britain High School	School Counselor
Stacey Alba	Hawkins	WCSU	Professor
Fionnuala	Darby-Hudgens	Three Rivers Community College	Transitional Program Coordinator/Student Advisor
Mark	Overmyer-Velazquez	University of Connecticut	Director
Yolanda	Colon	Culinary Arts Academy@ Weaver High School	School Social Worker
Craig	Machado	Norwalk Community College	ESL Division Director
Nadia	Pearce	Bridgeport Public	School counselor
Patricia	Ivry	WCSU	Professor, Department Chair
R. Averell	Manes	Western Connecticut State Univ	Associate Department Chair
Mia	Hines	UConn	Academic Advisor
Cathy	Alfandre	Mercy Learning Center	Vocational Counselor
R. Averell	Manes	Western Connecticut State Univ	Associate Department Chair
Diane	Brown	CTHSS	TESOL Instructor
Maria	Gonzalez-Aldave	HBE	ELL District Coach
Stacy	Butkus	CTHSS	Principal
Michael	McGowan	Terryville High School	Counselor
Gilbert	Bonafe	Higher Edge	School Based Coordinator
RosaMaria	Lemus	New London High School	Interim Guidance Director
Joseph	Mitchell	New London High School	ESOL Teacher
Jennifer	Parzych	Southern CT State University	Assistant Professor

Elizabeth	Keenan	Southern Connecticut St University	Professor
heather	pizzanello	Southern Connecticut State University	Assistant Professor
Kassandra	Reyes	Southern Connecticut State University	BSW student
Ann-Marie	Bishop	Southern CT State University	Asst. Professor, Part-time
Joan	Meznar	Eastern Connecticut State University	Professor of History
Carina	Bandhauer	Western Connecticut State University	Professor of Sociology
Deneen	Harris	Western Connecticut State University	Assistant Professor
Robert	Whittemore	Western Connecticut State University	Professor of Anthropology
Betsy	Warner	Windham Middle School	Teacher
Karen	Poon	Pathways Academy of Technology and Design (Hartford Public Schools)	Mathematics Teacher
Stephen	Campos	Harding HS - Bridgeport	School Counselor
Kaitlin	Gillard	The Gilbert School	School Counselor
Deborah	Slocum	Staples High School	School Counselor
Ricardo	Pérez	Eastern Connecticut State University	Associate Professor
Wendy	Chin	UConn	Graduate student
Liz	Demsky	Wilbur Cross High School	School Counselor
Mark	Kohan	University of Connecticut	Faculty
Kendall	Alderman	New haven public schools	Teacher
Donna	Bednar	Wilbur Cross High School	Teacher
Patricia	Porrás	Wilbur Cross High School	Bilingual Clerk
Justo	Karell	Wilbur Cross High School	ESL Teacher-US History
Mary	Chillemi	Wilbur Cross High School	ESL/English teacher
David	Berrill	Southern CT State University	Adjunct Faculty
Gina	Goldstein	Vinal Technical High School	School Counselor
Mark	Marchesani	Westhill High School	School Counselor
Patricia	O'Neill	Western Connecticut State University	Associate Professor
Victor	Muratalla-Morales	University of Connecticut	Pre-Service School Counselor