



# State of Connecticut

## Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission

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Testimony of Werner Oyanadel, Executive Director of  
LPRAC before the Higher Education Committee

Tuesday, March 1, 2016

11:00 A.M. in Room 1E of the LOB

In Support of SB 147 “An Act Assisting Students without Legal Immigration Status with the  
Costs of College”

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis, and distinguished members of the Higher Education & Employment Advancement Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA); my name is Werner Oyanadel, Executive Director of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LPRAC). I am here to speak in support of Raised S.B. No. 147 “An Act Assisting Students without Legal Immigration Status with the Costs of College” – a bill which enables students without legal immigration status to be eligible for institutional aid.

Many undocumented Connecticut high school students – many of whom are of Latino descent – hope to pursue higher education in our state. Unfortunately, many are unable to achieve this dream because they are ineligible for all federal and state need-based financial aid. The 2011 legislation that granted in-state tuition rates to some undocumented students, and the 2015 legislation that enable more undocumented students to be able to qualify for instate tuition were important steps toward increasing access to higher education. Regrettably – again – many of these students and their families remain unable to afford the high cost of tuition without access to institutional aid – whether at in-state or out-of-state rates. Without access to financial aid higher education remain out of reach for these Connecticut tuition paying residents.

Institutional aid, for the record, 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. In Connecticut 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 to this pool of money and they should have access to it. We call on the CT Legislature to pass SB 147 which will require the Board of Regents for Higher Education and the Board of Trustees for The University of Connecticut to adopt the appropriate policies and regulations by which to open up this process to this student population seeking such aid.

We see firsthand the difference that an education can make in a student's life, and we, at LPRAC, consider it good public policy to expand higher education access for all Connecticut high school students regardless of immigration status. Extending institutional financial aid to undocumented students is an investment in the future of Connecticut. A realistic path to college for these students will result in improved high school graduation rates and increased college matriculation. Furthermore, expanding access to higher education will, without doubt, 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.

I am sure you will agree with me that all students deserve access to higher education, which is necessary in today's economy and for CT's fastest-growing jobs. Opening financial aid to undocumented students is one sure way to address the pressing need for educational equality in CT, which unfortunately is the state with the worst achievement gap in the country. Our legislature has adopted a goal of closing this achievement gap and of fostering progress among low-income and limited English-proficient students. Enabling access to higher education for undocumented students, who are often low-income and people of color, will help Connecticut

meet its statutory mandate and increase racial and socioeconomic diversity in the state's colleges and universities.

We cannot afford to sit idly by and do nothing about the lack of access to higher education for our students that lack immigration status. Each year, hundreds of talented undocumented students graduate from our high schools with hopes of college attendance thanks to the protections afforded to them by the Fourteenth Amendment Landmark case of *Plyler v. Doe* – which stipulated that all students regardless of immigration status have a right to an education. 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 that are already recipients of an education in Connecticut.

LPRAC is a nonpartisan policy agency within the legislative branch of government created in 1994 by an act of the Connecticut Legislature (i.e., P.A. 94-152, amended by P.A. 03-229 and amended by P.A. 09-07). Under Public Act 09-07, LPRAC consists of 21 appointed community leaders that are mandated to advise the Connecticut General Assembly and the Governor on policies that foster progress in the Latino communities residing in Connecticut.