

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

My name is Yhara Zelinka, I am from Middletown, CT. I am an Academic Advisor and Diversity Coordinator at Asnuntuck Community College in Enfield, CT. 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.

As an Academic Advisor in various community colleges in the State of Connecticut, I personally work with undocumented students who are affected in their daily lives with the struggles of navigating the system and getting funds to pay for college tuition. I had the opportunity to guide students and hear stories of how some of them need to work full time, help their families and still make the time to attend classes.

Undocumented students and DREAMERS have the right to education and to financial support. By not having access to financial aid, their career paths take much longer than an average student who gets economic support. Most of undocumented students are first generation in college and many hopes are put on their backs.

I have had the opportunity to advise High School students who with tears told me they could not afford to go to college. I remember a girl from the Dominican Republic who was very bright, but she just could not imagine how to save at least a thousand dollars to become a part time student.

Legislators in Connecticut should support financial aid for undocumented students. The United States is a country of immigrants, many of us are children of immigrants who struggled and made progress through education. Connecticut must pass legislation that equalizes access to institutional financial aid for all students regardless of immigration status. As you already know, Institutional Aid is funded by tuition revenue, not taxpayer money.

Undocumented Students pay into and contribute to the institutional aid pool of funds but do not have access to this aid. Undocumented students should be eligible for institutional aid as all other students who pay tuition. There is nothing in the Connecticut statutes and regulations that prevents undocumented students from accessing this aid.

SB 147: An Act Assisting Students Without Legal Immigration Status With The Cost Of College

SB 147 Increases education equality:

- *Low-income undocumented Connecticut students are barred from receiving the financial aid that they help to pay into that their classmates receive*
- *All students should have equal access to higher education regardless of socioeconomic or immigration status.*
- *Ensuring equality of access to higher education is a matter of justice that ensures everyone who works hard has a fair shot of success*

SB 147 will help the CT Economy:

- *Extending 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.*
- *Expanding access to higher education will 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*
- *Similar programs in other states have not displaced students or been a financial drain.*
- *Equalizing access to aid to undocumented students will cost taxpayers \$0.*

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

Thank you for taking into account our opinion.

Yhara Zelinka